A Class Act or Class Dismissed?: The 1930s and working-class culture & identity

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PhD English Literature

The University of Edinburgh

2021

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signed:

Date: 30th April 2021

Abstract

This thesis responds to the question of what it means in practice to bring the terms class, culture, and identity together; and is, in effect, a rejoinder that asks: '*Should* we bring them together?' In short, the answer it asserts is 'No' – it rebuts the idea that class should be considered in terms of a 'cultural identity' at all.

It draws on the works of a handful of now largely ignored working-class writers from the 1930s (to varying extents): Jim Phelan, John Sommerfield, George Garrett, Ellen Wilkinson, and Lionel Britton. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, given their obscurity, it is a reclamation project: all deserve renewed attention. Secondly, they all engage with the concept of class in different ways, and will be shown to address issues surrounding the working class that remain pertinent today.

The thesis lays claim to an approach inspired by F. R. Leavis, one that is necessarily syncretic and subjective. This is intended as its own oblique response to the issues addressed in the first chapter, in which the creation and maintenance of working-class identity is assessed utilising three interlocking frames of reference: namely, three disciplines beloved of the academic left which have traditionally shown very specific concern with thinking about (and on behalf of) the working class: Marxism, sociology, and pedagogy.

In chapter two, the works – and identities – of Jim Phelan and John Sommerfield will serve to draw out a number of issues crucial to the understanding of the term 'working-class literature' in general, and the rubrics, assumptions, and limitations entailed by it. In chapter three, the writings of George Garrett will illuminate the impact of material reality on working-class authorship. Chapter four will explore how Ellen Wilkinson dramatises the porous nature of the class divide. In the fifth chapter, an immersion in Lionel Britton's *Hunger and Love* will draw out issues relating to form and genre, towards ultimately combining and distilling the work of the thesis at large towards a conclusion.

In addition, the thesis is underpinned by certain key insights of Jacques Rancière, chief among these being the formulation: 'Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified'. This thesis ultimately argues that an equality practiced and verified requires a form of emancipation that necessarily transcends the crude circumscriptions of bogus 'cultural identities'.

Lay Summary

What does it mean to bring the terms class, culture, and identity together? This thesis asks: '*Should* we bring them together?' In short, the answer it asserts is 'No' – it rebuts the idea that class should be considered in terms of a 'cultural identity' at all.

It draws on the works of a handful of now largely ignored working-class writers from the 1930s (to varying extents): Jim Phelan, John Sommerfield, George Garrett, Ellen Wilkinson, and Lionel Britton. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, given their obscurity, it is a reclamation project: all deserve renewed attention. Secondly, they all engage with the concept of class in different ways, and will be shown to address issues surrounding the working class that remain pertinent today.

It assesses the creation and maintenance of working-class identity by the left (broadly understood) which has traditionally concerned itself with thinking about (and on behalf of) the working class.

It interrogates the genre of 'working-class literature' in general, the impact of material reality on working-class authorship, the porous nature of the class divide, and lastly, via an immersion in Lionel Britton's *Hunger and Love*, draws out issues relating to form and genre, towards ultimately combining and distilling the work of the thesis at large towards a conclusion.

In addition, the thesis is underpinned by Jacques Rancière's formulation: 'Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified'. This thesis ultimately argues that an equality practiced and verified requires a form of emancipation that necessarily transcends the crude circumscriptions of bogus 'cultural identities'.

Acknowledgements

As I wrote this, I stopped to think that ten years ago today I was knocking out kitchens for £50 a day, cash in hand, while doing my university access course. My daughter was nearly three years old, and we'd been on our own for a year. This journey began back then, not in 2016 – but more on that presently.

I must begin by saying that I am deeply grateful to the Wolfson Foundation for funding this PhD. I need only say that without their support, it could never have happened. Period. But it couldn't have happened without a great many people, too:

My supervisor, Dr Aaron Kelly, has been on my case since my undergrad dissertation. It's fair to say that if I hadn't pitched up in his cell-like office one day, I doubt I'd have got this far, and that's the truth. For one thing, without his particular interests, mine may never have been sparked; but more importantly, without his oblique stance towards university in general, I might not have been inspired to continue all the way to the end. That may sound counterintuitive and even cryptic, but there's no further exposition required: he'll know what I mean. *Go raibh maith agat*, Aaron.

As anyone who bothers to read this will discover, I have always been something of an acolyte of F. R. Leavis, whose paradigm of teaching maintains a particularly steady focus on the value of the teacher as mentor, supporter and critical friend. In this respect, I have been blessed by my second supervisor, Prof. Randall Stevenson, who has been all three. As both academic and as human, I've always felt both an admiration and also something kindred. (He even supports a tolerable football team.) Thank you, Randall.

There are too many peers to mention, but there are a few whom I cannot let pass without a word as friends:

The Budapesters: Chantal Bertalanffy, Erden Göktepe, and Dr Eszter Simor. A great example of the value of being simply thrown together, as we were, right at the start – ever since, we've been there for one another though all the trials PhDs can throw at you.

Mature Cheese: Robert Fell, Steven Forbes (especially for his proofreading in the final days), Erden Göktepe (again!), Valerie Goodman, Étienne Sharp, and Dr Anja Tröger. The whole enterprise, viewed holistically, would not have been anything like as rewarding without you lot, the smartest set of *bon vivants* I ever did meet. Youse helped me squeeze the juice out of this as a *life experience* – we've shared an era. Legends all.

Richard Elliott: a worthy squash partner, and a true independent thinker. We've had to whisper a lot.

Finally, my Wolfpack: Katie Hawthorne and Dr Aran Ward Sell, fellow Wolfson Scholars. Truly the support group that were there when things got right into the weeds. We all had our moments in Press Coffee, eh? But we held it together; and led by Aran we shall *all* finally emerge into the sunlit uplands of the Philosophic Doctors. I *really* couldn't have done it without you pair. Like *really* really.

There are also some particular people who have been there for me, both over these past ten years, and long before being a Doctor was even remotely a thing. They have really believed in me, their friendship has helped me through this more than some of them will know (until now), and their unambiguous happiness regarding my belated success in life both humbles me and gets me all emotional (in no particular order):

Spruce & Sonia Baillie (he'll like being first there anyway), Raeph & Torie Ballantyne, Iain 'Rents' Wilson, Nicky Smith & Andy Inglis, Jenny & Keith Stenton, Helen Rollo & Graeme Ramsay, Iain Ritchie & Gillian Taylor, Stuart Thomas, Kenza Marland, Karen Towler, Andy & Nerys Donaldson, Simon & James Preston, Gordon Walker, Owen Kelly, and Dr Rosalee Ross for redefining a lot of things in the final months (on verra…). All at Newbattle Abbey College, especially Gill Turner and Dave Carson. Last, but not least, my fellow Hibernians: Cris Thacker, Andy & Cammy Logan, Craig & James Duff, Steven & Kieran McMurdo – oh! – and Sir David Gray.

And of course, my family. My auntie Corinne and my uncle Mike, who is the purest reflection of my intellectual bent (and if you think *I'm* a relentless debater, I invite you to approach *him* on any topic). My auntie Magret and uncle Bob, who've proved many times over that you don't need to have children to be a parent and grandparent. My sister, Lorna, who I only *just* beat to the punch, but who will carry the Anderson torch into academia better than I could. My dad, who is not me, but whose signature is all over me. And of course my beloved mum, to whom both I and my daughter owe so, so much: I got there in the end, Ma – bask in it!

And lastly, of course, not just the reason I did this, but the person without whom I could never have summoned the courage to live up to myself: my cherished daughter, Christina.

"In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's."

Look what we did! I owe it to you, and so I dedicate it to you.

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Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.

– C. S. Lewis

Why, they made you carry the books that held the knowledge – how else could they pinch your life?

– Lionel Britton

Introduction: 'This is so, isn't it?'

'What does it mean to bring these three terms – class, culture, identity – together?' – so asks the sociologist (Lawler 797). In the concisest possible terms, this thesis is, in effect, a rejoinder that asks: '*Should* we bring them together?' Equally concisely, the answer I am asserting is 'No.' That is, my argument consists of a rebuttal of the idea that class should be considered in terms of a 'cultural identity', for a number of reasons.

***

One reason is that I consider class to be different not in degree but in kind from ascriptive identity categories such as those currently so voguish in academic circles; e.g., race, sex, gender, sexuality, etc. In intersectional circles one usually hears the word 'class' preceded by the word 'and'; that is, as the last entry in any given list of identity categories. That the phenomenon of class is so anxiously squinted at in this context is not surprising, because as John Guillory rightly observes

> giving class its due does not, it should be emphasized, reduce the phenomena of race and gender to aspects of class; the point of insisting upon the incommensurability of these categories is only that nothing explains class but class. (348)

Identity does not constitute class, and neither is class a product of identity. We have all filled out a job application, and been asked to tick the identity boxes – ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, religion, and so forth – has anyone ever been asked to tick a box marked 'class'? Viewed another way, why would a partner in an accountancy firm feel he could lay claim to a working-class identity because his grandfather 'was actually born in a workhouse' (Friedman et al. 8)?[1] Stephanie Lawler's article (quoted above at the outset) asserts that

> Class is one axis around which identities and cultures are formed. It does not exist apart from other axes – gender, race, nation, sexuality and so on – but then it never did. (804)

[1] See Friedman, O'Brien and McDonald "Deflecting Privilege: Class Identity and the Intergenerational Self" for a more detailed exposition of this curious phenomenon.

True: it does not exist 'apart' from those axes, but neither does it *constitute* one of those axes on the same terms; hence neither can it be co-opted by theories which derive from and rely on those ascriptive categories. An insistence on conflating other identity categories with class only serves to diminish what class expresses: a material and economic position in the world. To posit class as an ascriptive identity to be felt and/or respected is both incoherent and retrogressive.

It is worth caveating 'nation' from Lawler's pantheon of identity categories. It is not an intrinsic trait in the same way as race etc. are; rather it is an imaginary, constructed abstract like class. But it is not as perpetually fluid and porous as class: most people will maintain one nationality for life, whereas their class position may shift numerous times. Nation also, obviously, cannot cross borders in the same way as class. But nevertheless, it is capacious in a similar way to class: nation can simultaneously comprise the bearers of multiple races, genders, sexualities, etc. Strange then that nation's invocation politically is viewed with such suspicion and antipathy on the left (notwithstanding often rightly), whereas the invocation of any other category is accepted uncritically as an unalloyed good.

There are aspects of the 'lived experience' (to use the fashionable nomenclature) of a class position that are of course very real, and that might be difficult to replicate imaginatively without direct experience. But correspondingly, *every* lived experience is ultimately unique, which is a fact that should remain sovereign. The privileging of group identity tends towards the obscuring and elision of this reality, and in this respect a 'class identity' is no different.

Of course, terms like 'lived experience' in themselves raise the spectre of modern-day 'identity politics' – I will say more on that in the conclusion, after I have taken 'lived experience' and indeed the concept of identity itself to task. For now, suffice to say that in many ways, it seems that nowadays identity (or identi*fication*) has become almost synonymous with solidarity, as if the latter is predicated on the former. This is misguided, not least when it comes to class politics and the values that underpin them.

Moreover, it is true that class is often asserted as a cultural identity by that class's own members. This nevertheless does not make it right to do so. Working-class people are no different in this respect – neither, specifically, are working-class authors. Assertions of 'working-class authenticity' or 'working-class values', and the averring of 'working-class culture' and its supposed bourgeois counterpart (or more accurately antagonist), all

abound within the corpus of working-class writing, as we will see. But claiming that an observable and discrete culture underpins this so-called identity ultimately only encloses, essentialises, and diminishes those considered to represent it (both working class and bourgeois alike).

I intend to interrogate the deployment of concepts like 'authenticity' and 'values' in the construction of 'class identities', along with its concomitant (and pernicious) tendency to attach cultural and political values to individuals *a priori*; and moreover, to show that when working-class identities are invoked by actors external to the working class itself, we should consider their motives, so to speak. However, this does not mean that I intend to spend time refuting negative working-class caricatures perpetrated by right-wing conservative bogeymen – quite the contrary. Rather, I intend to interrogate the deployment of an honorific identity by righteously magnanimous left-wing champions of an idealised working class. Various expressions of a working-class cultural identity retooled and posited as something to be respected and valorised have emanated from left-wing writing across the century, as we will see. This is clearly an altogether murkier issue than straightforward snobbish disdain; it is also just as aristocratic in nature, creating an 'identity' that not so much describes a class, as creates and maintains a *caste*.

***

Before setting out the contents of this thesis, a word on my 'approach'. I am in fact reluctant to declare one as such, but if pressed I would most likely avow myself a 'Leavisite'. I say this inasmuch as I unequivocally align with a stance the late F. R. Leavis, literary critic and erstwhile editor of *Scrutiny*, has often been admonished for, but actually very much constitutes a strength: i.e., his consistent unwillingness to define a clear-cut theoretical basis for his work. Leavis's understanding of 'critical standards' is in fact incommensurable with any 'critical theory'. The 'Leavisite' critic must be free and elastic, his standards deriving simply from setting this work beside that. One can only bring one's autonomous intelligence to bear on the texts and issues at hand, and place one's judgments in dialogue – or indeed argument – with others, allowing them to '[find] their bearing with regard to one another, and not a theoretical system' (*The Critic* 213). Put simply:

> A critical judgment has the form, "This is so, isn't it?" … [T]hough my judgment asks to be confirmed and appeals for agreement that the thing is so;

> the response I expect at best will be of the form, "Yes, but–". (*English Literature in Our Time* 47)

As we will see, this simple formulation has profound implications regarding what we consider to be education: truly free – we might say emancipated – education rarely occurs, especially not in modern-day literary studies.

Leavis is now neglected; he was once hugely influential: Terry Eagleton, while certainly not a fan, nevertheless considers his impact on literary criticism and what it means to *be* a critic as being analogous to that of Copernicus's on astronomy (*Literary Theory* 31). However, he has now 'to all intents and purposes, vanished from contemporary debate' (Cranfield 1) alongside – perhaps because of? – the inexorable rise of critical theory in literary studies. On that point, I would say that I remain steadfastly sceptical about nailing one's colours to a theoretical mast: as Leavis recognised, 'I do not see what would be gained by the kind of explicitness [this] demands (though I see what is lost by it)' (*The Common Pursuit* 215). I am of course also aware that Leavis has been critiqued extensively on numerous grounds. On the specific point regarding rejection of theory probably most notably by Perry Anderson in "Components of the National Culture"; broadly, Anderson argues that Leavis' ideal of critical exchange disintegrates without a presupposed moral and cultural unity between the interlocutors. This is a good point, and furthermore also hints at the possibility that the denial of an overt position simply occludes a covert one, even if that simply relates to private preferences. Raymond Williams, who encountered Leavis's teaching at Cambridge, was discomfited by Leavis's nostalgic sense of a great English culture declining in the face of the popular vulgarity, and his related conviction that an elite cultural/educational bastion must be maintained to keep the flame alive, as it were. However, Williams was as impressed by Leavis as he was by Marxism, and retained an enduring respect for him because he knew 'more than any Marxist I have met about the real relations between art and experience' ("Culture is Ordinary" 95-7).

My reason for invoking Leavis is perhaps most accurately encapsulated in Williams' remark: I am trying to capture a real relation between art and experience. But critical judgments, especially those relating to the primary concerns of literature, i.e., human life, human nature, perception of such, etc., are inherently imprecise, and cannot be ratified by any theory or 'science', and just as Williams never provided a solution to the puzzle of culture despite much thought and writing. Sometimes it seems to me that literary criticism in the modern academy must now always be authorised by the ostensible security of

theory, despite its faddish and often dogmatic nature, at the expense of provocation, idiosyncrasy, stridence, even irascibility. This is not, though, a subterfuge via which I seek to conveniently dispense with considered, evidenced argument in favour of baseless assertion – the Leavisite critical exchange may be necessarily provisional, but it is never arbitrary. With this thesis, I can only claim that 'this is so, isn't it?' when it comes to literature and the experience of class, and the reader must judge my success for themselves. However, I make that claim with a complete conviction borne both of my reading and of my own unique perspective, and seek consciously to invite (even incite) a 'yes, but–?' from anyone.

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A word on terms. Leavis asserts that in the world of literature "'Life" *is* a necessary word' (*Nor Shall My Sword* 11, his emphasis), a term we 'cannot do without' (*Valuation in Criticism* 116), but that 'to try and define it would be futile' (ibid. 281). Quite so. 'Life', for Leavis, was a 'focal word', alongside others like 'responsibility' and 'creativity'. However,

> A focal word, for Leavis, is not a pre-applied definition but a form of criterion implicit in and generated by one's engagement with the object which acquires a more precise meaning in each new context. Hence Leavis's use of 'creativity' was as much about his attempt to discover and articulate afresh what he really meant by this word. (Cranfield 16)

In this thesis, the term 'equality' is very much a 'focal word' in this sense and plays a central role. As such, rather than attempt to 'define the term' at the outset, this thesis as a whole should in itself be considered in part an attempt to tease out and articulate the elusive meaning of the term 'equality' (I will elaborate a little further on that term's centrality presently).

I consider the concept of class itself in much the same way. To respond definitively to questions like 'what *is* the working class?', 'is there a meaningful difference between proletariat and working class?', or even 'what is social class?' could sustain innumerable theses in their entirety. To begin with, definitions and theories regarding class have mutated over time, especially in the social sciences. Savage et al. (221-3) provide a usefully succinct overview of their development over the last century or so, in particular the marked turn from a wealth and income focus towards social and cultural indicators via

sociological models principally derived from Marx and Weber, and latterly Pierre Bourdieu. These developments clearly influenced a significant recent landmark in a British context, 2011's Great British Class Survey, in which 'people's leisure interests, musical tastes, use of the media, and food preferences' (ibid. 224) were considered to be significant factors in social class. It also presented a model which superseded the old triumvirate of upper-, middle-, and working-class, presenting a set of seven categories instead: elite, established middle class, technical middle class, new affluent workers, traditional working class, emergent service workers, and the precariat (ibid. 230), all of which employ criteria such as 'social contacts' and 'highbrow cultural capital'. In short, as Gary Day maintains in *Class*, class has become 'increasingly perceived in cultural rather than economic terms' (188).

In light of these developments, to draw comparisons between the working class of the 30s and that of today is not to compare apples with apples; but it is also true that to attempt a definition that is faithful to either era invites debate in itself: as Claire Ainsley argues in *The New Working Class* (2018), 'if there ever was a "typical" working-class person previously, there certainly isn't now' (25). Her attempt to define the term 'working-class' (10-30) reckons with both the statistical – i.e., that we are talking about roughly half the population, variously segmented based on all manner of material criteria – and issues of 'self-identification' (noting explicitly that this admits the possibility of those who by rights should be considered middle-class or even elite claiming that identity based on family backgrounds, as I've alluded to earlier), and everything in between. Ultimately, that Ainsley eventually settles on a definition that is 'based more on material factors than self-identity' (27) is I think telling: that is, her conclusion tacitly acknowledges that in the final analysis these are the factors that really count when thinking about what makes the working class what it is.

However, even thinking in strictly material terms, it is a fundamental error to delineate a rigid conception of class as a set of fixed relations. One cannot understand the working class as a materially perceptible bloc in opposition to a similarly circumscribable bourgeois class, especially not ones from which can be disclosed discrete, antagonistic consciousnesses. Class in fact consists of multiplicities of relationships from which rough formations can be extrapolated. Moreover, while a 'rough extrapolation' may amount to much the same thing as a 'bloc' in pragmatic terms, I offer the distinction as a means of illuminating the approach the two ways of thinking about class encourage: i.e., that

considering it a rough extrapolation tends to foreground uncertainty and heterogeneity, while a bloc tends to imply inevitability and homogeneity. E. P. Thompson saw the latter as characteristic of much Marxist writing, arguing in *The Making of the English Working* Class that we cannot have 'a pure specimen of class' (9); ironic, given that Marx and Engels themselves in fact understood class as fluid and mutable in line with the contingent system that mediates them (capitalism). Raymond Williams argues a similar point in *Culture and Society*, suggesting Marxists are too ready to interpret bourgeois men like George Orwell 'in terms of some original sin of class' (282); relatedly, referring to Orwell he argues: 'he assumed too readily that observation of particular working-class people was an observation of all working-class behaviour' (283). As such, for Thompson, the consequent ease with which holes can be poked in the binary Marxist conception invites an easy rebuttal of its terms: i.e., class-consciousness is pernicious and 'invented by displaced intellectuals' (9). I would venture that Thompson's argument is even more accurate with a little rearrangement, so to speak: the homogeneous working-class is *invented* and then *displaced by* intellectuals, so that the intellectuals may possess and disseminate class-consciousness. This displacement in itself enables the status of 'intellectual' to be set apart from either class (as Gramsci so effectively described; more of which later), so that the intellectuals may then bring their unique perception to bear in superb isolation.

So, I do not intend to spend any time arguing the toss regarding where the dividing lines between classes occur, comparing model against model in a futile attempt to mark my own boundaries. Rather the opposite: my aim is to show, via literature's unparalleled ability to express the imprecise nuances social sciences vainly attempt to codify, that in many ways the insistence on defining boundaries is itself part of the problem. That is to say, rather than urging us towards the amelioration of the material disparities class boundaries attempt to denote, the insistent turn towards the cultural in the act of defining class in fact serves only to obscure such disparities; by which I mean as the fixation on cultural indices becomes ever greater, 'the more invisible becomes the difference that a truly left politics would want to eliminate' (Michaels 200): i.e., the disparity of wealth as expressed by class difference. It is *dynamics* like this I am interested in, not the establishing of unchallengeable *definitions*. I am not a social scientist, nor do I claim to be; and so as far as my use of the terms 'working class' or 'proletariat' goes (and indeed its counterparts 'bourgeois', 'middle class', 'dominant class', etc.), I employ them as imprecisely as anyone else might, but nevertheless maintain that I consider them 'focal words' *à la* Leavis: this

thesis is in itself an attempt to articulate and capture afresh their meanings and references, however evanescent those may be.

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This thesis, then, will examine a handful of working-class authors from the 1930s. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, and simply, they have all slipped into relative degrees of obscurity – some are out of print completely, and so this is in a way a reclamation project: all deserve renewed attention, as all have important and still relevant things to say. Secondly, and relatedly, all engage with class in myriad and interesting ways, and moreover the phrase *plus ça change* springs to mind: every author still speaks to issues surrounding the putative working class that pertain to this day.

In chapter one, I will analyse the idea of working-class identity in a broader sense than the specifically literary, assessing the creation and maintenance of working-class identity utilising three interlocking frames of reference; namely, three disciplines – one might say 'sciences' – which have traditionally shown very specific concern with thinking about (and on behalf of) the working class: Marxism, sociology, and pedagogy. I claim no exhaustive expertise in any of these fields of study; rather I approach them with an 'as broadly understood' attitude, but while paying particular attention to their engagements with the idea of the working class as an entity. In chapter two, the works – and identities – of Jim Phelan and John Sommerfield will serve to draw out a number of issues crucial to the understanding of the term 'working-class literature' in general, and the rubrics, assumptions, and limitations entailed by it. In chapter three, the writings of George Garrett will illuminate the impact of material reality on working-class authorship. In chapter four, we will see how Ellen Wilkinson's novel *Clash* literally dramatises the porous nature of the class divide. In the fifth and (fittingly) longest chapter, an immersion in Lionel Britton's astonishing, idiosyncratic epic *Hunger and Love* will first draw out issues relating to form and genre, but ultimately seek to combine and distil the work of the thesis at large towards a conclusion in which some major strands of this thesis are pulled more firmly into the present day.

Throughout, I draw heavily on one particular thinker: Jacques Rancière. The reason for this is simple: in his large and esoteric corpus (he is, after all, a French philosopher), certain key insights resonated strongly with my own incipient, inchoate convictions during

the early stages of my research. Chief among these is this simple formulation from *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (*IS*): 'Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified' (137).

The significance – and veracity – of this simple statement will be hammered home throughout. In a nutshell, though, my conviction is that for members of the working class, an equality given – i.e., via the imposition and curation of a working-class identity to be respected and valorised – or an equality claimed – which presupposes that the claimant was not already equal to begin with – is no kind of equality at all, but rather an ersatz that is the surest route to the poverty of low expectations. An equality practiced and verified, though, requires the kind of intellectual emancipation that necessarily transcends the crude formulations and circumscriptions of any bogus cultural identity.

Working-class Identity: The blind bloc

Rancière and the Mute Truth of the Popular Body

In *Proletarian Nights* (*PN*), Jacques Rancière argues for the inalienable intellectual equality of proletarian voices. This argument is embedded in the very form of the book: by way of quoting, paraphrasing, and summarising the myriad and miscellaneous writings of nineteenth-century French workers, selected from extensive archival research, an insistent bass line plays throughout: this is a history from below, where as much as possible these workers' voices are allowed to speak for themselves. The rough chronology provided at the end begins in 1830 with the July Revolution, which in itself lends additional weight to Ian Haywood's thesis positing the 'birth' year of the British working class as 1832 (1) – both identify a similar point in history as the germination of a modern proletarian consciousness and a major point in the emergence of socialist thought.

However, Rancière takes a unique slant on these developments, focusing as he does on workers' desires to be artists, writers and thinkers: in a sense, he inverts the 'chicken and egg' scenario, and in effect makes the claim that intellectual emancipation must *precede* political consciousness (and indeed revolution), as opposed to being enabled *by* it:

> For the workers of the 1830s, the question was not to demand the impossible, but to realise it themselves, to take back the time that was refused them by educating their perceptions and their thought in order to free themselves in the very exercise of everyday work, or by winning from nightly rest the time to discuss, write, compose verses, or develop philosophies. These gains in time and freedom were not marginal phenomena or diversions in relation to the construction of the workers' movement and its great objectives. They were the revolution, both discreet and radical, that made these possible, the work by which men and women wrenched themselves out of an identity formed by domination and asserted themselves as inhabitants with full rights of a common world, capable of all the refinement or all the asceticism that had previously been reserved for those classes relieved of the daily cares of work and bread. (ix)

This discreet revolution is underpinned by a conviction that the capacity for thought and action is common to all, and as such that these writings were not mere 'evidence or symptoms of a social reality' which the social scientist alone can explain or interpret, but rather actual participation in 'the construction of a different social world' (xi). That being

so, such so-called sciences – be they sociology, Marxism, pedagogy, etc. – and their exponents are rendered redundant in the business of emancipation. That is why, according to Rancière, these

> reveries of the proletarian night [are] so hard for superior minds to tolerate, today just as yesterday. The equality of intelligences remains the most untimely thought it is possible to nourish about the social order. (xi-xii)

Omnipotent moral busybodies, after all, must always have their unemancipated masses at which to direct their worthiness and virtue.

Rancière conducted his research

> not in the name of some fetishist passion for lived experience. That would itself be the alibi for a distribution of roles that gives the people speech in order to verify that they are indeed speaking the language of the people, and grants the poor the experience of reality and the flavour of daily life so as better to reserve for itself the privilege of the creative imagination and the explanatory word. But it is precisely this distribution of roles between the language of the people and literary language, reality and fiction, document and argument, that these "popular" texts challenge. (x)

In referring to an 'alibi' – 'some fetishist passion for lived experience' – Rancière stresses that eulogising the voice of 'the people' has more to do with fulfilling the bourgeois desire to be titillated by 'real life' than a magnanimous acknowledgement and enabling of some manifest, discrete working-class voice – as if such a voice is, or indeed *should be* possible, in the sense of existing in hermetic isolation from an incommensurable bourgeois voice:

> Isn't there some sort of dodge in this fascination with the mute truth of the popular body, in these evocations of a different culture that the workers – the masses, the people, the plebs – practice with enough contentment to leave to others the lacerations of conscience and the mirages of representation? (11)

In many ways, Rancière's arguments are reflected in the tenor of the comment, criticism, and debates I uncovered within the pages of *The Plebs* journal from 1930-40. The self-proclaimed 'organ of the National Council of Labour Colleges [N.C.L.C.]' and originating from the Marxist educational and political organisation the Plebs' League (itself eventually absorbed by the N.C.L.C.) and first published in 1909, *The Plebs* is among other things a kind of 'real-time thinking-through' of what an independent working-class education and indeed school of thought might actually be. Accordingly, I will draw heavily

on material from *The Plebs* throughout this thesis as a kind of synecdoche for leftist thought and attitudes pertaining specifically to the working class and their relation to these issues during the 1930s. J. F. Horrabin, socialist and sometimes Communist writer and cartoonist, reviews a novel concerning working-class life[2] in *The Plebs* in 1930. He remarks that

> the bourgeoisie is sentimental; so he wants to be Tough. And he doesn't pause to remember – or does he? – that this sort of stuff sells nowadays, not because it appeals to workers, but because it tickles the jaded palates of bourgeois readers anxious for new sensations; so fulfilling the same social function as gladiatorial exhibitions in old Rome (257)

and furthermore that, in the final analysis, 'I fancy [that the author] was aiming at Bloomsbury rather than at Northumberland or Durham' (ibid.). In other words, when workers are seemingly granted a voice in order that they may participate in the enterprise of universal human thought and expression, this beneficence is duplicitous. It is the confirmation of a literary niche concerned with 'the flavour of daily life' that supposedly allows working-class authors to express themselves, but in fact tacitly limits that expression to what the bourgeois want to hear from them.

However, the sources and buttressing of such a prescription do not necessarily conform to a blunt, adversarial conception of class division, which is to say that this prescription is often reproduced in locations wherein one might expect to find it opposed and resisted. This most obviously means from within the sympathetic wing of the bourgeois, usually a politically and/or artistically minded intelligentsia, but indeed can also often mean from within the working class itself.

D. H. Lawrence, via *Sons and Lovers*' Paul Morel, observes with acuity the working class's own proclivity towards reproducing the same essentialist assumptions: Paul attempts to explain to his mother that 'the difference between people isn't in their class, but in themselves. Only from the middle classes one gets ideas, and from the common people – life itself, warmth' (256), to which his mother acidly responds: 'whom do you mix with now – among the common people? Those that exchange ideas, like the middle classes. The rest don't interest you' (ibid.).

Both benevolent bourgeois and aspirational proletarian accept, reproduce, and vindicate a kind of 'original sin of class' (to borrow Raymond Williams' term) which

[2] J. C. Grant's *The Back-to-Backs* (1930).

instates the worker-as-thinker as at worst almost an inherent impossibility, or at best as an anomaly who must necessarily take flight from their class, and be co-opted into the intellectual ranks of those who reserve for themselves the privilege of the creative imagination and the explanatory word. As for the rest, they can be venerated for their 'flavour of daily life', for the 'language of the people', for their 'warmth', etc. – in short, for the pernicious 'identity' that only further excludes them, embodying as it does a foundational but entirely erroneous inequality. In the following chapter, using Rancière's work as a touchstone, I will explore the subtle ways in which this identity is constructed by supposedly emancipatory 'sciences', creating the working class as a kind of 'blind bloc' upon which even their so-called champions can project their own virtue while simultaneously cementing their own positions.

Marxism

Throughout his work, Rancière finds exclusionary logics embedded within 'sciences' like Marxism or sociology that purport to be vehicles of working-class emancipation. For example, Rancière argues that during the civil unrest in France in May 1968 various socialist cadres who were ostensibly aligned with workers' interests were in fact complicit in the stifling of proletarian voices; such as (in fact especially) those promulgating the 'science' of Marxism, whom he saw as arrogating the authority to explain the people to themselves, an authority underpinned by an assumption of an apparently unique and concomitant capacity to lead them to their salvation.

At this point, Rancière (a former student of Louis Althusser) to an extent disavowed Marxism. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière reflects on a key root of this disavowal. In a nutshell, he saw that the use of Marxist ideology entailed two contradictory injunctions: firstly, that those who 'possessed an understanding of the social system' (18) must teach it to the hapless people suffering under it, in order to 'arm them for struggle' (ibid.); secondly, that (ironically) the possessors of said understanding were in fact themselves ignorant with regard to the realities of exploitation and struggle, and must therefore go among the workers 'whom they treated as ignoramuses' (ibid.) to educate themselves. Rancière's scepticism regarding the efficacy or rectitude of either endeavour led him to search for reasons for the repeated failure to square this circle between intellectuals and workers, to attempt to 'rediscover the truth of Marxism' (ibid.), an endeavour which became the archival research comprised in *Proletarian Nights*. In doing so, he happened upon a fundamental realisation:

> These workers, who should have supplied me with information on working conditions and forms of consciousness, provided me with something altogether different: a sense of similarity, a demonstration of equality. … They disrupted the distribution of the sensible which would have it that those who work do not have time to let their step and gazes roam at random; and that the members of a collective body do not have time to spend on the forms and insignia of individuality. (19)

What does this amount to? Rancière's simple conclusion – 'there was no gap to be filled between intellectuals and workers' (20); that is, of course, that the two are not mutually

exclusive – confronts the Marxist left with its own class prejudice, one that tacitly asserts intellectual inequality in the name of equality.

On one obvious level, to my mind Rancière is reacting to Marxism's lack of praxis (to borrow their own term) as an over-academicised field of discourse, detached from what struggle actually means. In this I am inclined to agree, at least since the period when for instance Gramsci and Lukács were active, efficacious revolutionaries.[3] However, one can hear echoes of its increasingly professorial character even during their period: Winifred Horrabin, reviewing *Proletarian Literature in the United States* in *The Plebs* in 1936, remarks acidly: 'Now that Marxism is becoming a fashionable fad of the youthful upper classes, and even universities have got to hear about it, [this book], and other books like it, should have an excellent sale' (144). Of course, that this refers to something of a literary, university-based (and indeed probably Western) microcosm must be acknowledged, but one should be able to nevertheless perceive a warning for a larger context. A. M., reviewing *Ten Years of Tyranny in Italy* for *The Plebs* in 1932, wrote that the author (Pietro Nenni)

> whilst complaining bitterly that Fascism is maintained by force instead of by democratic franchise, makes evident that the inclination of the post-war Italian Socialists for academic discussions gave a man of action, such as Mussolini, his opportunity. This becomes so apparent that its lesson goes straight home. (237)

Recent years have drawn much comparison to the 1930s, and this point seems particularly apposite in this respect. As conservative newspapers like *The Washington Times* carry headlines crowing that 'Donald Trump, man of action, has press, Democrats and Hollywood in a dither' (Harper), and similar headlines in left-leaning publications like *The Washington Post* highlight and emphasise when 'Trump signals to his base that he is a man of action' (Hohmann), one hopes that Nenni's lesson continues to go straight home in 'learned' communities. In the final analysis, on this point one might do well to refer back to Marx himself: 'Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it' ("Theses" XI).

[3] For example, Stuart Jeffries describes how a lecture series by Theodor Adorno at Goethe University Frankfurt in 1969 was cut short by student protestors who claimed that 'If Adorno is left in peace, capitalism will never cease'.

Popular v Literary

Notwithstanding its localised epicentre in the ivory towers, this academicisation had specifically literary ramifications, which Winifred Horrabin's husband, the aforementioned J. F. Horrabin, puts bluntly in a 1934 article entitled "Marxism and Literature":

> [Marxist criticism's] only fault, from the Plebeian's point of view, is that it concentrates almost exclusively on writers with a predominantly "highbrow" appeal – T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster. (62)

This recalls Frank Kermode's piquant 1988 assessment of Marxist critics who 'rarely exercise themselves on works that the bourgeoisie would dismiss as trash. The structuralists used to do their stuff on James Bond, but Jameson prefers Balzac and Conrad, Stendhal and Wyndham Lewis' (103). Kermode's sassy reference to James Bond indeed reflects back again on J. F. Horrabin's assessment, in which he ventures that 'well, one would have been grateful for the inclusion of one or two popular names' (62). In both comments, we can hear echoing down the years exactly the tacit division Rancière refutes, i.e., the 'distribution of roles between the language of the people and literary language', enacted and reinforced in the very practice of supposedly emancipatory criticism. Marxists, amalgamating with and retreating into the academy, find themselves tacitly reasserting the old division of highbrow and vulgar.

However, it is doubly important to recognise that a simple ennoblement of the 'popular' amounts to largely the same thing. In doing so, one tacitly substantiates John Carey's argument in *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, which holds that the movement of modernism was calculated to prevent the masses from reading literature with a capital 'L' by 'making it too difficult for them to understand' (16). This thesis of course conveniently affords Carey, champion of the masses, the role of unmasking this dastardly ruse by virtue of his apparently rare ability to speak both the language of the people *and* literary language – a similar charge to that levelled at Pierre Bourdieu by Rancière, more on which later in this chapter. While snobbery undoubtedly exists, so undoubtedly does faux-humble crudeness, the latter being often as much a burlesque as the former. What *is* certain is that the existence of either/both does not amount to a proof of Carey's thesis. This is the crux – whether we are Marxists or Careys or anything else, rather than championing the 'popular' as accessible or condemning the 'literary' as impenetrable, we should be

repudiating the division altogether as based on a false premise of mutual unintelligibility. Important to note here that questions of 'value' still remain; however, the *a priori* division of popular/literary is entirely specious in such assessments, e.g., 'this is a good popular book, but would be bad if assessed as a piece of literary fiction'. Most divisions in literature are inventions; most obviously genre, for instance, but genre nevertheless has a useful 'instrumental' value, as it were.

The popular/literary division, though, speaks not so much directly to the properties of any given text, as covertly to the intellectual capacities of its author and readership. This tacit distinction runs deep into the seams of society and our broader understanding of intellect and its division into categories in similar fashion:

> He who makes a distinction between the manual work of the worker or the common man and clouds of rhetoric remains stultified. The fabrication of clouds is a human work of art that demands as much – neither more nor less – labour and intellectual attention as the fabrication of shoes or locks. (Rancière, *IS*, 37)

Such a distinction, though, has its origins in a more ambiguous discourse. In *Shadow Work* (1981), Ivan Illich traces the use of the term *mēchanē* from late antiquity, along with related terms like *fabrica, artes mechanicae*, and *scientiae mechanicae*. His point is that 'making' pursuits were not always distinct from art and philosophy. The various terms relating to the manual have carried senses like 'human activities through which artful imitations of nature were created', '[the representation of] formulas describing the intricate movements of all the heavenly spheres', while 'around the year 1000 *mechanica* was an élite term to designate a baffling power beyond that proper to priest or knight', and 'for the Greeks, the term had meant the outwitting of nature: for Hellenism something alike to competence, for the dark Middle Ages it meant a complement to astrology' (89-90). Illich explains that the Saxon theologian Hugh of Saint Victor

> wanted to establish the contribution which research about weaving or trading or medicine or acting would make to the scientist's wisdom, to his ability to remedy the weakness of his own being. In the practical arts, Hugh seeks a mirror of truth, as elsewhere he describes creation and the human soul as the other two great mirrors. And by the practice of the art, guided by science, he hopes to polish his mirror. (90)

In short, the 'practical arts' were previously strongly related to concepts of wisdom, representation, and truth.

Illich notes that around the tenth century 'stone masons were said to use mechanical art to link the visible and the invisible world by the arrangements of apostles and dragons and flowers on the capitals of romanesque columns' (89), which epitomises such an indivisible relationship. Fast-forward to the nineteenth century, and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895):

> The numberless architectural pages around him he read, naturally, less as an artist-critic of their forms than as an artizan [*sic*] and comrade of the dead handicraftsmen whose muscles had actually executed those forms. He examined the mouldings, stroked them as one who knew their beginning, said they were difficult or easy in the working, had taken little or much time, were trying to the arm, or convenient to the tool. (84)

Here we can see the modern division reified: Jude 'reads' the buildings not as 'artist-critic' but as 'artizan', not with reference to their beauty but to their *production*, exemplifying Rancière's identification of the 'distribution of roles between the language of the people and literary language, reality and fiction, document and argument'. In this, Jude is a kind of progenitor of the modern understanding of 'working-class' which is to this day still rooted in the paradigm of the urban industrial proletariat, to whom were assigned an identity predicated upon the link between the intellectual and the manual being severed.

The Blind Bloc Created

In a theorised world, the bearers of such an identity – proletarians, workers, working-class folk, whatever – are, as Marxists would have it, trapped within the dominant ideology, unable to perceive their own oppression. Rancière saw that any emancipatory efforts of their *own* are posited as necessarily blind and in vain without the aid of 'scientists able to perceive the logic of this circle [who] could lead them out of their subjection' (*PN* ix): in short, proletarians were 'dominated because they did not understand, and they did not understand because they were dominated' (viii). This is the tautology Rancière accused Pierre Bourdieu of providing (and by extension sociology and social 'sciences' in general), as summed up no less succinctly by Kristin Ross: 'they are excluded because they don't know why they are excluded; and they don't know why they are excluded because they are excluded' (xi). Hence, a subscription package as follows is offered: sign up to our simulacrum of representation, rubber-stamp the ideology, and we will do the thinking for

you in order that you may emerge upon the sunny uplands of equality.

This helpless working class is presumably what the Scottish Labour politician and President of the National Council of Labour Colleges from 1937-1965, Arthur Woodburn, had in mind when advocating for a Marxist agenda in schools in *The Plebs* in 1930:

> [The] new consciousness spreads only slowly among the people, and until they have a mental revolution, and are, so to speak, "born again," they live and move, one might say, in a state of trance. In other words their minds are controlled by their rulers, and they are therefore to that extent irresponsible and quite unconscious that they act or think wrongly. (202)

A paradox, then: as Rancière proposed in *The Philosopher and His Poor* (*PP*), one cannot be *led* towards equality in intellectual or philosophical terms (a 'mental revolution') by direction alone, because if one possesses the capacity to understand the terms of such direction in the first place '[the inferior] must already be the equal of the superior' (223). This is because ultimately, equality cannot be a *goal*, so to speak, but rather 'Equality is a presupposition, an initial axiom – or it is nothing' (ibid.). With this formulation, Rancière expresses an insight fundamental to this thesis: equality itself is an *a priori* status that requires only simple acknowledgement; in intellectual and philosophical terms it can and does already pertain, irrespective of *material* inequality. As such, to imply bovine masses who are unable to perceive the forms and terms of their dispossession, in need of intellectual emancipation courtesy of intellectuals with a capital 'I', is in fact tantamount to a refusal of equality: 'to pose equality as a goal is to hand it over to the pedagogues of progress, who widen endlessly the distance they promise that they will abolish' (ibid.). In the name of the great goal of equality, sciences like Marxism impose a false unity of thought upon the proletariat under which dissensus and independent thought is submerged, subordinated to doctrinal consensus and prescribed lines of thought or expression; as Raymond Williams puts it:

> The Marxist interpretation of culture can never be accepted while it retains, as it need not retain, this directive element, this insistence that if you honestly want socialism you must write, think, learn in certain prescribed ways. ("Culture is Ordinary" 96)

Thus, society can be directed in abstraction, and the business of sealing up emancipatory possibilities in hermeneutic tautologies like that identified by Kristin Ross above can be conducted by its ordained intellectual directors.

In the 30s, the road to what R. W. Postgate bluntly called 'false as opposed to genuine Marxism' was started down inexorably. In a 1932 review entitled "Marxism & the Wish-thought", he criticised Marxism as being

> full of what psychologists call the wish-thought – the habit of taking as a fact what we would like to be a fact, which has wrecked so much Communist propaganda and so many Communist parties outside Russia. First of all these errors is to assume that the bourgeois class is always wicked, cowardly and cunning; the working class invariably oppressed, courageous, and betrayed. Things don't work in that simple way outside the cinemas. (138)

In doing all of the above, Marxism rejects intellectual equality as a fundamental condition, because deep down what it really rejects is that truly equal people tend towards inequality – I will unpack that statement in more detail later, but for now suffice to note that what underpins it is the reality that human motivations, desires, moralities, etc. are too motley, mosaic, and incommensurate to ever be fully disclosed by or submit to the codifying ambitions of Marxism, or indeed any other social science. Ironically, such codifying ambitions ensure that equality in its fundamental philosophical sense (as opposed to its material sense) is ever further mystified, made into a complicated struggle as opposed to a simple fact, and a reconciliation which would take us beyond class grows ever more remote.

Enter the Intelligentsia

Any sense of a fundamental and immanent ability within the working class to, for example, develop philosophies independently, perceive ideology, or have aspirations or desires outwith workplace emancipation, without having those possibilities first revealed *for* them, seems to run contra to the claims of major Marxist political thinkers of the early twentieth century.

For instance, Vladimir Lenin in 1902's *What Is To Be Done?* castigates Russian social democratic movements as opportunism embodied, finding that they seek only position within the existing bourgeois government. Ekaterina Kuskova's *Credo*, an infamous 1899 article propounding such social democracy, is to Lenin worthy of notoriety precisely because of the openness with which it

> blurted out the fundamental political tendency of "Economism," viz., let the workers carry on the economic struggle … and let the Marxist intelligentsia merge with the liberals for the political "struggle." Thus, trade-unionist work "among the people" meant fulfilling the first part of this task, while legal criticism meant fulfilling the second. This statement was such an excellent weapon against Economism that, had there been no *Credo*, it would have been worth inventing. (21)

Here, Lenin evokes a separation of worlds, the concrete and the ideological, work and thought, and indeed identifies what he saw as a crude expression of the bourgeois tendency to reserve the latter. However, he himself goes on to state: 'Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*; that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers' (98, Lenin's emphasis). This is because, for example, striking workers possess only 'consciousness in an *embryonic form*' (36, Lenin's emphasis) and are characterised more by 'outbursts of desperation and vengeance than [those] of struggle' (ibid.). Lenin goes on to argue:

> The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of Socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. According to their social status, the founders of modern scientific Socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. (37)

According to Lenin, the working class is so obfuscated by bourgeois ideology that, beyond its own narrow purview, it is unable to free itself from the preconceived understanding of the world imposed upon it.[4]

To truly liberate itself, then, the working class requires the sympathetic wing of the bourgeois, the 'revolutionary socialist intelligentsia', to provide it with, well, simply a different preconceived understanding, it appears. J. P. M. Millar (son of an accountant, educated at a fee-paying school, and *The Plebs* former editor) virtually admits as much in a 1931 article, equally revealingly entitled '"'Trained Mind' & its Two Votes":

> There seems to be some misapprehension regarding the new *Plebs* pamphlet, *Why, How and What to Read.* … The purpose of the new pamphlet is to try to

[4] Important to note, as Tamás Krausz does, that 'Later, in 1907, in the aftermath of revolutionary experience, [Lenin] gave up this thesis. In fact he admitted that under the changed circumstances, the proletarian masses might enter the party alongside the "professional revolutionaries"' (115).

> develop the "serious" reading habit in the working-class movement – the reading of books and pamphlets of real importance. The average worker, unfortunately, confines his reading to newspapers. … Too long has Labour been "strong in the arm and thick in the head." Too ready has it been to send out its thinking to be done for it. … After all, what organisation in the working-class movement has placed upon it more responsibility than the N.C.L.C. for getting workers to read? It is, surely, our job more than that of any other organisation. At the moment workers are in danger of developing large cinema eyes and equally large "talkie" ears and a small cinema brain! (99-100)

It is firstly not hard to detect the note of 'otherness' in the language Millar uses: his *object* is 'the average worker'; the only use of 'our' or other first person plurals is with reference to his own organisation. The factional nature of academic theories is reflected in his privileging of the N.C.L.C. over others in the 'working-class movement'; indeed, it has been noted that Millar 'became locked into conflicts with the W.E.A [Workers' Educational Association] and anyone else [he] believed was threatening the success of the NCLC as the sole provider of workers' education' (Bellamy et al. 278). When he writes that Labour (here understood as the working class in general) has been too ready 'to send out its thinking to be done for it', he is at once castigating them for failing to think for themselves whilst simultaneously arrogating to himself and the NCLC the right to provide other (more correct) thoughts to imbibe and digest. Because, as Millar tells us in another editorial, there exists a 'more socially intelligent type of worker', and 'He wants to know. He wants to understand', and that this 'simply serves to call for more effort on the part of *those who realise* that the workers can be economically free only when a sufficient number are intellectually free' ("Something for Nothing" 97, my emphasis). The ostensible intention is that workers will divert their attentions from their newspapers and movies towards an enlightenment that Millar and the NCLC will provide for them, because presumably workers will not, and indeed cannot realise it for themselves.

However, I am moved to wonder whether Millar may well have been perfectly happy with an intellectually impaired 'average worker', if only they would sign up to his own particular agendas. Given his documented tendency to clash with any other educationalists who would threaten the NCLC's monopolistic aspirations, one could argue that the entitlement to provide the 'right kind' of education may be the most rousing struggle at hand. On a similar note, Tamás Krausz observes of *What Is To Be Done?* that it provoked much debate among Marxists of the era, including a perception of Lenin as 'nothing but an elitist and a megalomaniacal intellectual' (113). Krausz though also notes other more recent arguments which see such a perception as misplaced; he notes for

instance Lars T. Lih's proposal that Lenin's premise of a party of professional revolutionaries in fact belies a hard-nosed realism that is 'quite specific and historical', whose goal is to catalyse 'a movement already in existence, [to be] the embodiment of a trend shaping the Russian revolutionary workers' movement' (ibid.). However, even this interpretation of Lenin's argument must still concede that Lenin takes for granted a starting point based on an *a priori* assumption: that the bourgeois intelligentsia is nevertheless still required to helpfully ventriloquize even the pre-existing sentiments of an inchoate working class unable to articulate its desires for itself, or indeed even understand clearly enough what its desires actually are. Arthur Woodburn states it plainly in *The Plebs*: 'Relief for the blind ought not to be confined to the physically blind! We must educate the mentally blind to see the bias of capitalism and imperialism' (204).

These kinds of assertion invite rebuttal on two levels, one perhaps more prosaic than the other. Firstly, most obviously, whether the 'truths' or 'freedoms' Lenin, Millar, or anyone else might presume to benevolently reveal to the working class are ever really possible to objectively identify anyway; a kind of Nietzschean rebuttal, if you will, summed up by the apocryphal but largely accurate quote (in terms of Nietzsche's position) 'All things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth'. While the idea that Nietzsche rejects any and all idea of truth or fact is now more or less discredited (Leiter Sec.3), the fact remains that he does effectively reject all metaphysics, teleology, etc, or anything that purports to explain to us how to 'understand how the world works', in favour of developing an analysis or understanding that works for us as individuals. Thus, indeed, spake Zarathustra: 'This– is just *my* way:– where is yours?' (169). This analysis of the act of interpretation in many ways reflects the idea of equality that underpins Rancière's work in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: ideally, 'each one of us describes our parabola around the truth. No two orbits are alike' (59), but this ideal is predicated on an honest relation to one's own intellectual will as ineluctably autonomous, and which need not – must not – submit to surrogate thought masquerading as explanation.

This leads us towards the rebuttal on another level, a point where Rancière's argument is truly radical: 'One can say, if one likes, that truth brings together. But what brings *people* together, what unites them, is nonaggregation' (ibid. 58, his emphasis). We are all circling truth's foyer, necessarily distant from it, and the very act of having to communicate one's own relation to truth through language places us in a myriad

'community of intelligence' (ibid.). The very voicing of any Zarathustrian 'my way' immediately instates it as valid and political, and simultaneously reveals as false proxies those that base their representations on truths supposedly only available to them. The only struggle is to be heard and acknowledged as equal in the first place. Slavoj Žižek contextualises this well:

> As Rancière emphasizes against Habermas, the political struggle proper is therefore not a rational debate between multiple interests, but, simultaneously, the struggle for one's voice to be heard and recognized as the voice of a legitimate partner: when the 'excluded', from the Greek demos to Polish workers, protested against the ruling elite (aristocracy or nomenklatura), the true stakes were not only their explicit demands (for higher wages, work conditions, etc.), but their very right to be heard and recognised as an equal partner in the debate – in Poland, the nomenklatura lost the moment it had to accept Solidarity as an equal partner. (64)

Similarly, what Rancière drew from the French proletarians' writings was a conviction 'that workers had never needed the secrets of domination explained to them, as their problem was quite a different one' (*PN* ix). Rather than being simply (or indeed only) engaged in a historical and material struggle against exploitation and poverty, Rancière found artisans, tailors, joiners and the like engaged in a battle to wrench away from time allocated to nightly rest the leisure required to 'discuss, write, compose verse, or develop philosophies' (ibid.).

Such endeavours are in themselves an active refutation of assertions like Lenin's which caricature a working class with a kind of 'child mind' (or in Millar's case a 'small cinema brain'), and simultaneously enacts a rejection of an imposed homogeneous identity – i.e. people who only work, sleep, fight for higher wages, and so on – in favour of the 'full rights of a common world, capable of all the refinement or all the asceticism that had previously been reserved for those classes relieved of the daily cares of work and bread' (ibid.). Equal partners – be that the Greek demos, Plebs, Solidarity, or anyone else – whose 'truths' must be encountered as equal. Hegemony, or Marxist/sociological 'false consciousness', may well be productive abstracts with which to approach and interpret the world, but one must be ever-vigilant. Hegemony has at its heart the refusal to listen to, or indeed accept at all, voices which create a dissensus with respect to one preferred interpretation of the world – but this is also so for hegemonies-in-waiting, as it were. And false consciousness really amounts to little more than another name for the human condition of subjectivity – no social science can expertly reveal your 'blindness', because

its own proponents are equally blind.

Everything is Bourgeois

Given, then, that the execution and/or mastery of material issues, e.g., industrial advancement, technical skills, etc., are not the only aspirations or desires for members of the working class, then it is understandably frustrating when it is implied that they are, or should be – even by so-called progressive allies.

Rancière describes Jean Marchand, a nineteenth-century woodworker who valued above all 'those things that exercise and enlarge the mind' (*PN* 27), by which he quite explicitly did *not* mean the 'realm of invention and technical intelligence which the progressive bourgeoisie envisioned as effecting the intellectual and material emancipation of the proletariat' (ibid.). The progressive bourgeoisie's envisioning of this designated realm of activity as the proper site of emancipatory efforts by proletarians themselves, is an adjunct to another assumption. That is, the related promise that efficaciousness within this realm could effect the ultimate liberation, i.e., the achievement of bourgeois status: Rancière notes that 'There was scarcely any worker among the most revolutionary ones who did not dream, at some point or another, of becoming a master' (32). But of course, we must note well here that he is noting a *workers'* dream.

This invites further consideration of the ontology of class, which Rancière approaches via the prism of egoism among both the bourgeoisie *and* workers. For example, a too rigid approach to class can simply identify 'underlying bourgeois ingratitude' (101) as underpinning their philanthropic or altruistic urges, where such endeavours are calculated with the expectation of seeing a return in terms of an amelioration in working-class attitudes towards the bourgeois. In the novel that forms the basis of chapter four, Ellen Wilkinson's *Clash* (1929), this kind of transactional class dynamic is a strong thread:

> But it's these kindly wealthy people who play the devil with people like you, Joan. They are so reasonable and they can be so kind. It seems a shame to fight them, and after a while you'd find yourself not wanting to put things so strongly – it might hurt your new friends' feelings. (179)

But kindly wealthy people conferring status to receive obeisance and conformity is only

one facet of this class issue.

Put simply, working-class ambition is the other. For example, Rancière discovers that within the nineteenth-century French unions was a similar egoism of interest amongst their own: imprisoned revolutionaries from the Society of the Rights of Man 'had also seen their brothers forget [their] solidarity with regards to them and even take advantage of their absence' (103). This prompts a hosiery worker to reflect on a founding premise of their Society which draws a distinction between egoists and social human beings: respectively, those who lived only for themselves or those who sacrificed personal interest to that of society: 'To which of these two classes of human beings do you belong?' (ibid.). This is rarely an uncomplicated question: who among us could claim to be always the latter? Equally, confident assertions that class oppression always makes the bourgeois happy and the proletariat miserable rarely stand up to the litmus test of reality – invariably, the picture of class solidarity is murky. For those among the working classes who have 'much more to lose than their chains: a business, a workshop, a house, a family' (104), assent to the logic of class oppression is in fact often much more likely to make one happy than the disappointed promises of the militant's self-sacrificing dedication. In this, one finds a distinct echo of what Antonio Gramsci dubbed a 'compromise equilibrium':

> Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed – in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. (Gramsci 161)

In this way, according to Gramsci, the enterprising and/or intelligent proletarian can be neutered and placed in service of the bourgeois *Weltanschaaung*: nary will they infringe upon that ossified world of thought and culture if they can be successfully preoccupied and satisfied with making and saving money. To this day, the preservation and cultivation of the mythic 'American Dream'-style equation, one which holds that diligent application on the part of self-starting go-getters among the working class will inevitably equal wealth and status, remains strong among all strata of society – notwithstanding, as the great George Carlin once memorably quipped, that 'it's called the "American Dream" because you have to be asleep to believe it' (Hitchens Razor).

Though the compromise equilibrium is in essence a political and economic theory, John Storey argues that it has today been largely appropriated by post-Marxist cultural

studies (215)[5] usually as a kind of 'crucible' analogy, wherein classes or ideologies negotiate their dominance/subordination in the arena of public life and culture. What this allows for, in simple terms, is the granting of passage across the class frontier to Gramscian working-class 'organic intellectuals', to be rewarded with the status of (ostensibly) declassed 'traditional intellectuals'. These distinct statuses are critical for Gramsci. According to him, everyone is to an extent an intellectual by virtue of living and thinking within society: in doing so, everyone constantly 'modifies [their] environment, understanding by environment the *ensemble* of relations which each of us enters to take part in' (Gramsci 352, his emphasis). Some, though, assume the *function* of intellectuals, i.e., those generally held to be 'thinkers' who direct and shape culture in societies: these are traditional intellectuals. Importantly (especially for themselves), traditional intellectuals perceive themselves as autonomous from society, a quasi-monastic 'caste, or a priesthood' (418), assuming a similar role to the one Rancière saw Plato's philosopher-kings as arrogating to themselves: 'God preserve the philosophers from these too skillful artisans!' (*PP* 22). The cost of a passport to such a status for intellectuals produced by the working class – organic intellectuals – is acceptance, digestion, reproduction, and propagation of hegemonic cultural norms and values sanctioned by the dominant class.

Possession, then, of 'culture', but one that from a Marxist standpoint is covertly circumscribed, imposed, directed by the bourgeois class. In other words, as Karl Marx wrote to Frederick Engels in 1858, it seems that 'Alles bürgerlich'; literally: everything is bourgeois ("Karl Marx to Frederick Engels"). This assertion crystallises what was to become one of the great literary orthodoxies/conundrums of the twentieth century: as George Orwell (although certainly no Marxist himself) unequivocally but incorrectly remarked: 'so long as the bourgeoisie are the dominant class, literature must be bourgeois' ("The Proletarian Writer" 58).

The Bourgeois Medium

This is a point where Rancière's and Gramsci's insights are reflective of each other,

[5] For instance, see Stuart Hall (in Storey pp. 220-1) on globalisation's compromise equilibrium with respect to mobilising particular identities or ethnicities; or Tony Bennett on how popular culture 'is structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony [as an] area of negotiation' (96).

and indeed penetrating: formulations like Orwell's fail to acknowledge intellectual equality as an axiomatic foundation, preceding whatever forms of cultural 'contamination' people, or indeed intellectual media themselves (e.g., literature), may accrete. Gramsci argues that: 'All men are intellectuals … but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (Gramsci 9); and, as discussed above, the distinction of function is an important one for Gramsci. But such a function is claimed or bestowed – it is not inherent, even if it appears to be, any more than literature is an inherently bourgeois medium.

Nevertheless, according to Orwell's assertion, culture in general and literature as a medium are inescapably bourgeois. Raymond Williams notes that this is 'a mistake that everyone, from Conservatives to Marxists, seems to make' ("Culture is Ordinary" 96), but for Marxism particularly this means that the working class must seek its own distinct class-based forms and rubrics. Terry Eagleton sums up the quandary presented:

> The contradiction is evident: it was necessary on the one hand to get on cultural terms with the ruling class, to demonstrate that you could do what they did, and better; on the other hand, an appropriation of that class's literary forms meant, inevitably, a partial absorption into and complicity with their ideological modes. ("Proletarian Literature" 10)

Ideology can of course be *present* in a text, as I discuss in more detail later with regards to Lionel Britton. But searching for an antagonistic literary form is futile – ideology does not *inhere* in the medium, which is in fact alien in the strictest sense of the word, i.e., of a completely different nature.

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière argues that

> between the ignorant schoolmaster and the emancipated novice there is always a third thing – a book or some other piece of writing – [which is] alien to both … It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one. (14-5)

Paul Valéry argues a similar point, that the effects of art would be 'impossible without the interposition, between the author and his audience, of a new and impenetrable element capable of acting upon other men's being' (qtd. in Berthoff 12). In light of the above, then, consider the following diatribe from *The Plebs* in 1931:

> …it follows that to accept civilization is to accept capitalism. In the future this pitfall must be avoided by the Marxists. They originally fell into it because they accepted the bourgeois definition of civilization, which identifies it with all that

> is best for man and for his evolution into a more perfect being. Engels, however, was not deceived. In his eyes civilization was the society of exploitation par excellence. … The confusion of an historical category, like civilization, with a term such as culture, which is common to all societies and is therefore non-categorical, is a grievous error. … Socialists must prepare the minds of the workers to detest civilization, as a prelude to its destruction. (Kanter, 103-7)

This error occurs, according to Mr. Kanter, as 'a consequence of our inability to completely emancipate ourselves from the tyranny of orthodox ideas' (ibid.) which in this example, according to him, inhere in the word 'civilisation'. However, in a response in the following issue, one Herbert Mace singles out an important point:

> But what does his amazing discovery amount to, except that in his extreme class-consciousness, he has declared war on the current value of a word instead of against the institutions which masquerade in its name? Nor is that all. It is apparent that he has a war-scare mind to such an extent that he sees "the probability that in the next war the slogan of the capitalists of the world will be "Save Civilisation," or "Communism versus Civilisation." *But since when did this word "Civilisation" become the special preserve, the private property of the capitalist class?* Admitting that a re-valuation of words is a desirable thing, why should any working-class movement antagonise the masses by hair-splitting definitions? If the masses can be induced to see a difference between "Capitalism" and "Civilisation" – surely a much easier proposition than getting them to cry, "Away with Civilisation" – may we not use *our* slogan and say "Civilisation versus Capitalism"? (142, my emphasis)

One writer, then, approaches a word from the standpoint of rejecting it based on an ideological content he perceives to be immanent, but the other from the standpoint that one may shift or alter the ideological *sense* of that word. Leaving aside the rights or wrongs of whichever ideology may or may not be invested in a word, what Mace makes clear is the sense of the word itself as a medium, as a vessel for meaning available to all – as Rancière argued 'whose meaning is owned by no one' – and always to a degree subject to alteration by broad consensus, as anyone with even a passing familiarity with etymology knows.[6]

But what of Orwell's qualifier? Namely, that it is the bourgeoisie's status as the dominant class that is the determining factor in the inescapably bourgeois nature of literature as an edifice. *The Philosopher and his Poor* provides a good example of how cultural

[6] For a present-day example, see linguist John McWhorter on the evolutions of the word 'racism' as informed by competing ideologies ("The Dictionary Definition"); as for antagonising the masses with hair-splitting definitions, one might point to the 'folks' versus 'folx' debate as an apposite example.

or aesthetic objects can be emancipated from the ostensibly inevitable proletarian/bourgeois antagonism which hinges on ownership: Rancière describes Gabriel Gauny, a joiner, laying a floor in an upmarket apartment:

> Thinking himself at home, as long as he has not finished the room in which he nails down the boards, he likes the layout of the place; if the window opens onto a garden or over a picturesque horizon, he stops moving his hands for an instant and shifts his thoughts towards that spacious view in order to enjoy it better than the owners of the neighbouring homes. (*PP* 199)

'*Thinking* himself to be at home': in a transgressive leap which mixes intellectual identities, Gauny reappropriates both a perspective and an aesthetic object apparently made for and owned by the bourgeois – 'the gaze of an aesthete on the décor of his servitude' (ibid.) – while simultaneously imposing upon it, and thus qualifying it with, what could by much the same logic be seen as a working-class viewpoint *and content* – the unfinished floor is a unique and fleeting part of the picture. Seeing this as a unique mode of perception might seem self-evident, even obvious – 'joiner appreciates expensive view while working alone in posh apartment' – but it is nevertheless an important act, in that it renders ownership of the room, of the floor, of the view, if not irrelevant, then at least not the inescapable determining factor governing the terms of its appreciation.

Ian Haywood elucidates a similar point in literary terms. Discussing Patrick MacGill, author of 1914's *Children of the Dead End: The Autobiography of a Navvy*, he identifies how such refusals of static identities bleeds into the very form of the novel. The novel mixes elements of genre and identity – 'working-class autobiography, tramp fiction, the Romantic outsider and the *Künstler-Bildungsroman*' (34) – and creates a protagonist in the itinerant autodidact Dermod Flynn who is

> decentred, marginalised, fluctuating … an unfixed, floating social signifier. He has neither the resources nor the inclination to become a bohemian. He is sometimes a worker and sometimes a writer. He is unplaceable, economically and aesthetically. (35)

Haywood situates this characterisation as rejecting the assumed norms of classic realism – the imputed mode of working-class fiction – in favour of a disaffiliated, mutable protagonist, resulting in a narrative form with 'no linear plot development, and no closure' (34-5) more aligned with modernism – the supposedly bourgeois mode. I touch on the relationship between genre and class identity in more detail later.

For now, suffice to note that there is an important parallel to be drawn here with Flynn and Jim Phelan. As an author and a man, and in terms of his similar liberated use of literary form, Phelan is equally difficult to straightforwardly identify as working-class. To this point, the figure of the tramp is a significant one, in that its inherent incongruity with class signifiers, even those which seek to distinguish the term at its most basic material and situational level in the service of identity-creation – i.e., relationship to labour and capital – are starkly highlighted for their essentially prescribed nature: that relationship is never immanent in an individual, and the tramp rejects the significance of that relationship entirely. I have previously alluded to the significance and influence of the industrial proletariat paradigm in terms of class identity. Relatedly (but in the original context referring to caring versus productive labour), David Graeber has argued that 'had the paradigmatic example of "worker" in the popular imagination been a cook, a gardener, or a masseuse' then it would have been much harder for 'the factory owner to insist that, no, actually, workers are really no different from the machines they operate' (237-8). Quite so, this exposes the arbitrary absurdity of class identity: at best it is an accident of history, at worst an instrument in the ghettoisation of culture.

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière points towards the radical equality these kinds of truths reveal and simultaneously incarnate: 'there are only ever individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront or surround them' (16). That is to say that whether in a theatre, museum, school, street, or unfinished apartment, we are always *perceiving* as a routine part of human activity and this inevitably entails constant individual acts of creation as part of our intellectual adventures, making us 'similar to all the rest in as much as [our own] adventure is not like any other' (16-7). In short, we are alike in nothing more so than our unalikeness. When in *The Philosopher and His Poor* Rancière asserts that 'fields of symbolic relations take shape at the limit of classes' (200), he is identifying how working-class intellectuals (or authors) form heretical discourses by borrowing words and mixing intellectual identities, bourgeois or otherwise – 'poets, knights, priests or dandies' (ibid.) – creating equivocal misinterpretations, as opposed to 'proper' interpretations, of cultural modes, identities, or objects.

Equality thus conceived is not defined and achieved by transforming ignoramuses into scholars, but rather is an acknowledgement of our natural human condition as infinitely capacious subjectivities. Thus, proposing the task of dividing literature, or any other forms of culture, into mutually exclusive, discrete class forms amounts to little more

than a mean trick designed to repress this verity. We have already addressed the argument that this trick *is* in fact perpetrated by the bourgeois under a banner that is at least unrepentantly elitist: 'keep the plebs out of capital-'L' Literachoor', *à la* John Carey's contention. My concern, though, is that it is more perfidiously perpetrated under another banner: righteous but mercenary proxies, armed with the esoteric weaponry of social science on an apparently invisible battlefield only they can fully perceive, promise to fight on behalf of the people to make equal what was *already* equal – by making it unequal.

Sociology

The burden of making it unequal is also taken on by those who would allocate culture according to what is deemed appropriate to fixed class fractions; the enterprise of turning 'proper interpretations' into inescapable reified reality. Enter the sociologists, Rancière's particular target being Pierre Bourdieu, who connect the attribution of relative intellectual pedigrees to established but arbitrary criteria crafted to reflect norms and ideals which conveniently dovetail with those of the dominant class: in short, the acquisition and performance of taste. In *The Philosopher and his Poor*, Rancière quotes Sartre's "The Artist and His Conscience" (1965) by way of encapsulating Bourdieu's thesis in *Distinction* (1979):

> The productions of the elite are, for the majority of people, rejection, want and boundaries. The taste of our 'art lovers' forcibly defines the bad taste or lack of taste of the working classes, and as soon as refined minds consecrate a work, there is one more treasure in the world which the worker will never possess, one more thing of beauty he is unable to appreciate or understand. (165-6)

This is the kind of distinction that Bourdieu claims to unmask and demystify via the science of sociology. Rancière, though, argues that Sartre's explanation of a proletarian 'strategy' that would 'refuse aesthetic pleasures that would be reserved, by their very nature, for the bureaucratic élite and would cut them off still further from the masses' (ibid.) is simply a disguising of other 'right opinions' (166): i.e., any such rejections are in fact founded upon the privileging of the refuser's *own* taste.

Consider, for instance, D. W. T. reviewing *An Introduction to the Social Sciences* in a 1930 issue of *The Plebs*. The reviewer begins by lamenting that 'the student will look in vain for the master-key of the materialist conception of history' (213), because the author privileges psychological and humanitarian explanations of social change within his work – 'one wonders if the author knows of the existence of Marxism' (ibid.) bemoans the reviewer. The review is concluded by stating simply that 'the book has value to the I.W.C.E. [independent working class education] movement as an example of how not to do it. *Socialism for Students* is a much better introduction' (ibid.). Here, obviously, we are outside the strictly aesthetic realm; nevertheless, the privileging or circumscription of certain types of writing or aesthetic forms as a 'proletarian strategy' quite obviously derives

from the privileging of one or other political ideology – it is, essentially, the political enacted via the aesthetic. This review bluntly demonstrates the tendency to conclude that other perspectives are, by default, to be considered not worth contemplating at all; an attitude that, in turn, all too easily translates to the literary field.

For example, we have previously encountered J. F. Horrabin's review of J. C. Grant's *The Back-to-Backs*, a novel he saw as aiming to 'tickle the jaded palates' of bourgeois readers. Andy Croft discusses in *Red Letter Days* the fact that Grant, a young civil-servant novelist 'of revolt', was indeed unashamedly aiming at a bourgeois audience, and further notes at length the backlash the novel received for the apparent novelistic license the author took with authenticity and 'truth', leading to Croft's conclusion that 'the subtler ways in which a novel could be influential had not yet been understood by the Left' (80). Here, Croft is primarily referring to the pragmatic sense in which the license Grant took with authenticity – the author himself insisted that 'Of course, I exaggerated' (qtd. in Croft, 80) – was to an extent deliberately designed to upset the consciences of bourgeois readers. However, the adverse reaction to the perceived infidelity to reality elided any consideration of Grant's Expressionist technique, for instance, or as Croft notes 'his use of melodrama and over-writing' (78). Indeed, Horrabin in *The Plebs* two years later in 1932 draws an unfavourable contrast with F. C. Boden's *Miner*, recalling Grant's novel as 'the ludicrous melodrama of *The Back-to-Backs*' (161), whereas Boden's book takes its place on 'that quite small shelf of books which are at once literature and genuine revelations of working-class life' (ibid.). So, it would appear at least that some, then, are able to reconcile the incommensurable demands of literature and working-class veracity. Boden has achieved this feat, we are told, by presenting 'a picture of the life of whole masses of the workers in capitalist Britain to-day' (ibid.), presumably a picture in keeping with Horrabin's own. He concludes by confidently stating: 'If you want to feel what the Labour Exchange means to an intelligent man – read Boden' (ibid.) – one risks appearing petty by wondering whence Horrabin derives his certainty of how it feels to be unemployed, given his apparent concern with perfect verisimilitude. So, while *The Spectator* is unsurprisingly happy to straightforwardly dismiss Grant's novel on the grounds of it mistaking 'filth for force and ugliness for sincerity' ("The Back-to-Backs" 60), Horrabin embodies the literary left that Croft describes: 'the Left felt it had an absolute right to "know" miners and mining communities' based on 'an *a priori* notion of who and what the working-class and miners were', manifesting in a 'prescriptive approach to literary technique' (80). Ultimately, any

literary interventions or attendant critical considerations which fail to advance or centre the Left's own narrowly factional political agendas, or indeed uphold their presuppositions regarding the working class, are elided or dismissed.

The Blind Bloc Utilised

Rancière's analysis also finds that sociology deploys investigative practices that *by design* invite its interlocutors to reveal the iniquity and unintelligibility of the tastes apparently reserved by the dominant. That is to say, it invariably finds what it sets out to look for, and indeed produces it: that is, an irreducible separation:

> Questions about music without music, fictitious questions of aesthetics about objects that are not perceived to be aesthetic, all these produce inevitably what is required by the sociologist: the suppression of intermediaries, of points of meeting and exchange between the people of reproduction and the élite of distinction. Everything happens as if the science of the sociologist-king had the same requirement as the city of the philosopher-king. There must be no mixing, no imitation. (*PP* 189)

To posit my own crude imaginary exemplar, there is a difference between asking 'have you heard of Beethoven's fifth?' and actually playing the piece and asking 'do you like it?' For Rancière, these enquiries test not taste, but knowledge of the enquiry's terms: the respondents are in fact inveigled into attempting to ascertain 'the meaning of the inquiry' (187) and are thus encouraged to recognise and confirm their place in Bourdieu's presupposed intellectual landscape, as opposed to unintentionally revealing their true, independent 'taste' (or lack of).

Bourdieu's presupposition is that the existence of universally accessible or negotiable standards of taste is impossible: taste itself is an instrument of bourgeois domination. In other words, that the very concept of a 'class agnostic' taste, as it were, is simply a disguise worn to maintain the all-pervasive, 'industry standard' status of bourgeois taste and the ideology for which it is a proxy (echoing Orwell and the 'everything is bourgeois' argument). Sociology's enquiries are then in themselves designed to buttress this presupposition. But why? Well, according to Rancière, in finding its hypotheses to be so, sociology can ensure 'that its object will never teach itself' (178). Thus, the sociologist

can take

> the place of the philosopher as the author of the tale about the arbitrariness of the social game. But this arbitrariness will soon turn itself into necessity as the "complementary class" becomes the motor that gives the puppet show its rigor as a scientific object. (194)

The science self-perpetuates through its very application. Bourgeois society's preservation of a socially engineered intellectual iniquity can only be revealed by the sociologist's practice. However, sociology needs unwitting objects to confirm its presuppositions and justify its existence, and this rests precisely on the preservation of a class of people who are eternally obviated from possessing intellectuality *at all* (that is, outside of the 'realm of invention and technical intelligence' that Jean Marchand so pointedly rejected). So, this very class is maintained in perpetuity because sociology, ostensibly objectively, claims that such intellectuality is inherently 'inapplicable on the grounds of the inequality of competences and social capacities – the gulf separating working class brutality from bourgeois civility' (198): the gulf that only the sociologist's practice can reveal.

Intensely ironic then to see Bourdieu quote Bertrand Russell by way of introduction to *The Social Structures of the Economy*: 'While economics is about how people make choice [*sic*], sociology is about how they don't have any choice to make' ("Epigraph"). The vicious circle thus enacted ensures that sociologists like Bourdieu can affect the appearance of a righteous struggle on behalf of the dispossessed against the dominant. But the only struggle going on is in reality between 'the pretentious challengers against the distinguished possessors … basically only a family affair, a quarrel between generations' (*PP* 193): adolescent rebellions performed on cultural terrain by parvenus or petty bourgeois, the frustrated heirs to economic capital – the 'rites of bourgeois maturation' (ibid.). For instance, Stuart Jeffries has described the German philosophical succession from Theodor Adorno to Jürgen Habermas as one where Habermas effected 'a kind of Oedipal rebellion against his intellectual father figure' – and furthermore it is difficult not to sense a parallel here with Rancière's own break with his mentor Althusser. Habermas claimed not to share

> the basic premise of critical theory, the premise that instrumental reason has gained such dominance that there is really no way out of a total system of delusion, in which insight is achieved only in flashes by isolated individuals (qtd. in Jeffries)

a position he saw as limiting, elitist, and hopeless – which it undoubtedly is.

Back in 1930, José Ortega y Gasset prefigures this notion that only those in possession of a kind of intellectual master-key are able to effectively interpret the world, be that in terms of culture, politics, history, or anything else. Ortega y Gasset was a Spanish philosopher who was himself a member of the 1930s educated bourgeoisie, and as an educator and cultural critic was 'a reformist who opposed revolutionary action and both right- and left-wing authoritarianism' (Cranfield 10), much as Leavis did during the 30s. In *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), Ortega y Gasset traces the origins of what he sees as the barbarism of the 'mass-man'. Ortega y Gasset, an unashamed elitist and supporter of an aristocracy in the literal sense of the Greek – as the *OED* defines it, 'the government of a state by its best citizens' ("Aristocracy") – he believes in the idea of superior leaders of men whose austere cleaving to true European liberal philosophy places them above mass-men, because 'nobility is defined by the demands it makes on us – by obligations, not by rights' (63). 'These are the ascetics' (66) he asserts, echoing Rancière's interpretation of Plato's self-denying guardians of the republic: 'the *Askēsis* of philosophy's elect' (Rancière, *PP* 41). Ortega y Gasset describes the ability to interpret the

> "phenomena of historical camouflage." Of its nature, camouflage is a reality which is not what it seems. Its appearance, instead of declaring, conceals its substance. Hence the majority of people are deceived. The deception can only be avoided by one who knows beforehand, and in general, that there is such a thing as camouflage. (137)

However, Ortega y Gasset does not elaborate on how this knowledge is *actually acquired*, content, it seems, to simply consider it exclusively within the gift of the excellent or noble man. Or, perhaps more accurately, he later loosely links it to a kind of salvatory mien, where 'the man who is capable of steering a clear course through [reality]' (156) is the man who 'looks life in the face, realises that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost' (157), and thus, instinctively but ruthlessly, will grasp 'the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce' (ibid.).

This to my mind has a ring of truth in its acknowledgment of the untameably kaleidoscopic nature of life, and in its rejection of the efficacy of 'ideas' or theories in the sense of 'received notions … prescriptions, proverbs, mere words' (ibid.). Instead he argues (cogently) that the discovery of new knowledge entails (for the clear-headed man) 'smash[ing] to atoms almost everything he had learnt, and arriv[ing] at the new truth with

hands bloodstained from the slaughter of a thousand platitudes' (ibid.). For all this bleak, quasi-religious existentialism, however, the possibility of grasping at some form of truth in the darkness nevertheless remains, if one is prepared to finally accept that the world remains fundamentally unexplainable. In a sense, if a camouflage exists it is theory itself, and its deceit in purporting some special objective capacity for the revelation of truth, of order amidst chaos.

The Academic and his Poor

Habermas' work, in a shift perhaps best described as 'pessimism to optimism', culminated in 1981's *The Theory of Communicative Action*, in which he envisioned a world where 'people, through discourse and argument, would learn from one another as well as from themselves and question beliefs typically taken for granted' (Jeffries). This manifesto carries a distinct echo of Rancière's thesis in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* which denies the authority of explication from on high (more of which forthwith) and contains within it something of an alternative answer to the question of acquiring the clear sight that Ortega y Gasset attributed to staring chaos in the face. It may well be true that history is camouflaged (or consciousness false, or the system deluding, or the cosmos indifferent), but nevertheless the ability to perceive this is not fully possessed by a few and wholly impenetrable to the rest; rather, exchange, dialogue, discourse amongst everyone might (or might not) deliver insight in varying degrees, *without the need for direction or explication*. A limited, imperfect, even simple conclusion, perhaps, but all the more powerful in that very simplicity.

However, even such apparently egalitarian developments still tacitly posit a supposedly determining factor, i.e., the terms and locations on/in which these exchanges are conducted. That is to say that such philosophical or cultural exchanges are considered inaccessible in the first place to those who are (deemed) incapable of understanding its terms, those whom Bourdieu claims are unjustly classed as 'non-beings' by this very exclusion. Rancière, though, makes the point that they only appear to be non-beings to those who are enclosed within the ritual of distinction, like Bourdieu, or Habermas. Within such a ritual, what is considered 'being' – i.e., participation, or in its fullest expression the maintenance of a position in society as an accredited 'thinker' – in fact depends upon the

very idea that there *are* 'non-beings' who do not participate in the practice and negotiation of philosophy and culture, i.e., everyone else. Even the optimistic Habermas 'envisions a world … where people would learn from one another' etc, *as if this does not already happen*.

The very positions of 'philosopher', 'academic', 'intellectual', rest on an ineluctable hierarchisation of thought itself into reified strata; the higher of which being the plane on which some are privileged to think for a living based (ostensibly meritocratically) on their superior capacities, a plane on which the likes of Pierre and Jürgen (and of course, to be fair, Jacques and myself) may position themselves as proxy champions of the people. Even when the sociologist proclaims with righteous indignance that such a distinction between being and non-being – intellectuals and non-intellectuals – is nefariously maintained, it amounts to little more than virtue-signalling, because it nevertheless upholds that the distinction exists in the first place. To then use this apparent injustice to justify an exceptional, supra-class position as an individual with an exceptional, supra-class ability to perceive, monitor, and explain that injustice to everybody else, is simply a reclaiming of an age-old status, defined by its supposedly self-sacrificing nature: call it what you will – philosopher-king if you are Plato, the 'caste' or 'priesthood' of Gramsci's traditional intellectuals, or José Ortega y Gasset's justified aristocracy: 'These are the ascetics' (66).

The situation viewed from this perspective becomes a matter of vested interests: if intellectual equality is accepted as axiomatic, then the thinking-through of oneself, one's place in the world, society, etc, is the *fundamental condition of humanity* and requires no specialist proponents. Ortega y Gasset, a philosopher considered to lie somewhere on a spectrum ranging from (classical) liberal to conservative and even anti-democratic, concedes the following when specifically referring to the practice of philosophy:

> Philosophy needs neither protection, attention nor sympathy from the masses. It maintains its character of complete inutility, and thereby frees itself from all subservience to the average man. It recognises itself as essentially problematic, and joyously accepts its free destiny as a bird of the air, without asking anybody to take it into account, without recommending or defending itself. If it does really turn out to the advantage of anyone, it rejoices from simple human sympathy; but does not live on the profit it brings to others, neither anticipating it nor hoping for it. (86)

In noting its 'complete inutility', Ortega y Gasset refers to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* – 'all the other sciences are more instrumental than this, but none is better' ("Book 1") – and Aristotle's thoughts on its 'inutility' are an apt avenue to pursue in this context:

> For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g., about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant … therefore since they philosophized order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end. (ibid.)

So it would appear that even among those who actively endorse a philosophical elite, an *intrinsic* link between the practice and the position of philosopher/thinker/intellectual is difficult to uphold. This, put simply (and obviously), is because there isn't one. As Gramsci observed:

> When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals, that is, one has in mind the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether towards intellectual elaboration or towards muscular-nervous effort. This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist … There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*. (Gramsci 9)

'Man the maker' (or tool-bearer) cannot be separated from 'Man the thinker'; or, as Rancière formulated, the philosopher from the shoemaker. In short: 'There [is] no gap to be filled between intellectuals and workers' (*Emancipated Spectator* 20) in any inherent sense.

Pedagogy

That no such gap exists may seem self-evident, especially in this more (supposedly) enlightened day and age: there are no philosopher-kings in modern Britain. Or are there? When Gramsci spoke of traditional intellectuals, he was naming the function we now often describe with terms like 'public intellectual', or the role fulfilled by so many academic talking heads on current affairs programmes. Nevertheless, we are not apt to speak of these individuals as having intrinsically superior, mutually exclusive capacities relative to the masses; rather, when being generous, we might speak of their application and dedication, and when less generous, of the opportunities afforded them by dint of the socioeconomic circumstances of their birth – the latter being the cornerstone of the debate surrounding equality of opportunity. In a world in which one would imagine that for progressive people axiomatic equality is indeed ostensibly presupposed, the received wisdom would surely concur that 'there [is] no gap to be filled between intellectuals and workers'.

Curious then that the language surrounding education seems so preoccupied with 'closing the gap' at all levels. For example, at school level, we have Education Policy Institute papers like "Closing the Gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage" (Andrews et al.); while Universities UK and the National Union of Students produce "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #closingthegap", and so on and so forth. The gap, in this way of thinking, is centred around 'attainment': in the former, for cohorts of school pupils considered 'disadvantaged' in a class-based sense (eligible for free school meals, etc.), in the latter for cohorts of university students considered 'disadvantaged' on identity grounds, and in both cases efforts are focused on 'closing the gap' understood in terms of differentiated outcomes and measured in a data-driven, qualification form (GCSEs, first- and second-class degree prevalence, etc.) ("Closing" 1-7; "Black" 1-9). I would like to explore briefly here the tacit implications of this outcome-based understanding of pursuing equality in order to illuminate what the term equality actually *means* in intellectual terms, and to reassert that in this context there is no gap to be filled: closing the gap understood in terms of pursuing a goal is a fiction that emancipates no-one.

The Schoolmaster and his Poor

The revelation that underpins Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* stands the sociologist's position on its head. In 1818, Joseph Jacotot was employed to teach French to Flemish students – whilst he himself didn't speak Flemish. Using a dual-language copy of Fénelon's *Télémaque* (1699) he found that his students not only comprehended the text but learned French grammar, *without the benefit of his usual teaching commentaries and explanations*. He was deeply affected by the realisation of what he termed 'explication': teaching as the promotion of preferred readings and normative mind-sets, mere training in the modes of academia, the drilling of intellectual acolytes; ultimately what Jacotot termed 'stultification': the enactment of an inequality continually rendered by the assertion of the necessity of instruction. This is a deeply radical vision, and one which invites a flurry of 'whataboutery' – not least because it questions the entire education system built on a millennia of humanist thought.

Nevertheless, were the titular Jacotot around today, he would surely assert that the divinations of sociologists, or indeed pedagogues or anyone else who claimed to hold the key to unmasking iniquity in education, are irrelevant. He would tell us that in fact those 'sciences' in themselves lie at the heart of the illusion that intellectual *in*equality exists to be corrected via their insights:

> The revelation that came to Joseph Jacotot amounts to this: the logic of the explicative system had to be overturned. Explication is not necessary to remedy an incapacity to understand. On the contrary, that very incapacity provides the structuring fiction of the explicative conception of the world. It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way round; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such. (6)

Rather than engaging the intellectuality of the student, it is the act of teaching itself that first promotes 'proper interpretations' and 'right opinions'. The sociologist claims to reveal that these opinions and interpretations – the enactments of distinction and cultural capital – are incommensurable between class fractions, making the education for which they are the communicative vehicle all but inaccessible to some, and therein lies the locus of inequality: the incapacity to understand. But for members of a subordinated class fraction to have intellectual lives, this incapacity is not a fact that needs revealed nor remedied: it is the incapacity that is itself a fiction. One can only be intellectually 'incapable' if one believes oneself to be so; a person would only believe themselves to be so in the first place

if they first accepted assertions like the sociologist's that their class or identity renders them so *a priori*.

Jacotot's method 'was above all a method of the will' (12), in which the role of teaching if anything is only to 'oblige' the student to fulfil their intellectual capability in a mutual relationship of equality relative to their fellow man. This is redolent of Leavis's conception of critical judgment, which asks and appeals as opposed to proscribes: it is 'not the voice of the leader but of the petitioner' (Cranfield 38). Jacotot was not concerned with explication, which he thought 'smelled of the bridle', he was concerned with emancipation: 'That every common person might conceive his human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity, and decide how to use it' (*IS* 17). This is a radical vision indeed. For one, there is no indispensable curricula:

> Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies. And whoever emancipates doesn't have to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will learn what he wants, nothing maybe.' (18)

This subverts virtually every tenet of modern education. Rancière outlines that since around the 1830s, education was no longer to be treated as a privilege. But two things (among many) occurred: firstly, a lack of the proper response to instruction – e.g., learning times tables, attaining grades – was considered evidence of incapacity, rendering the 'uneducated' or 'illiterate' a disreputable great unwashed; secondly, the social hierarchy protected itself against working-class self-education by creating an explicative education with examinations and recognised national qualifications (125). But the former is *not* evidence of incapacity – correlation does not imply causation. Equally, exam results have no causal relationship with intelligence, as anyone who has taught in a modern university will know. Leavis also knew this half a century and more ago, criticising exams as a kind of game-playing that 'the examiner and the supervisor know as well as the candidate. For the examiner the knowledge is depressing' (*Education and the University* 50) – well quite. Nevertheless, instruction and examination are still seen as the vehicles for and evidence of intellectual emancipation, and the ultimate enablers of social mobility. Poet Tom Leonard has written mordantly in a similar vein:

> It's *essential* to the ethic of the university system that a rite be created whereby an act of acquisition is witnessed; in a sense, the examination is a spiritual "burning of the books", the "muse" saying the Lord's Prayer backwards, a Black Mass of anti-creativity. … if they succeed – if they smash Milton and

> Shakespeare back into the ground with a magnificent Double First – then they will have proved they need never open another book, ever again … given hard work and discipline, even the humblest sweeper-up can rise one day to be a foreman in The Great Educational Factory itself. ("Mince Pie" 66-7, his emphasis)

Is this a desirable form of social mobility? Does the acquisition of prescribed logics, rubrics and modes of thought produce emancipated thinkers? If people can be convinced that the acquisition of certain breeds of thought, or the display of their signifiers, is the equivalent of equality, then they are certainly more likely to submit to those who would condescend to explain these customs of thought.

At this point, more so than anywhere else, we might actually say that 'everything becomes bourgeois'. Literary form itself is not inherently bourgeois. Opinions formed independently through discourse and exchange, founded on the conviction of the equal validity of one's own thought, are not inherently bourgeois. If anything *is* inherently bourgeois, it is the belief that people are unequal *a priori*. Nowhere is this belief more obvious than in the psychologies that permeate the left (now, as then), pithily summed up by author Ephesian (pseudonym of Carl Eric Bechhofer Roberts), who was quoted thus in a *Plebs* review in 1930:

> There are Shelleys on the one hand; on the other, ambitious charlatans, desperate of success in existing society, unscrupulously climbing into prominence through a rebel movement. [A third section comprises] congenital busybodies, anxious to regulate congenital underdogs. (qtd. in F. S. 213)

We have 'Shelleys': well-meaning, upper-class 'fellow travellers', like perhaps Lenin's 'revolutionary socialist intelligentsia', or the Bloomsbury Group of whom Leavis's *Scrutiny* was an outspoken critic during the 1930s (Cranfield 7). There are 'ambitious charlatans': opportunistic impostors using leftist movements to further their own personal political ambitions rather than to effect radical change (and whose ambitions indeed rely on no change occurring), the exact crime for which Lenin castigated the Russian social democrats. Lastly, there are 'congenital busybodies': those who feel entitled to benevolently oversee, explain, and (apparently) ameliorate the fate of the helpless working class – a bovine mass inherently destined to be dispossessed by virtue of their inescapable native blindness – like those within academia endlessly asserting the emancipatory magic bullet embodied by whichsoever theoretical 'ism' they favour.

Threads running through this thesis are illuminated in this philosophical crucible of

how we think about education: philosophies and schools of thought that apparently require autonomous explicative agents in order that the working class may grasp them; the desire for discrete working-class forms and modes, placed in explicit antagonism to apparently inescapably incommensurable bourgeois counterparts; explanations of inequality that create distinction rather than reveal it. All of these refuse the premise that we encountered at the beginning of this thesis, and that underpins much of Rancière's work and Jacotot's observations: 'Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified'. It is this fundamental affirmation that is the foundation of intellectual equality, in the simplest and yet most powerful and significant way. Believing oneself to have capacity, to be capable, *this* is emancipation, *this* is what intellectual equality means.

Class Identity

Plus ça change, though: Ephesian's 1930 characterisations feel distinctly redolent of modern-day discourse surrounding the left. Disgruntled working-class MPs have frequently invoked what has become a trite modern-day cliché, the dreaded 'metropolitan elite'; nevertheless, there remains a grain of truth in such complaints. Former Labour MP Simon Danczuk has complained that 'the party's been hijacked by a metropolitan elite that have a particular view of the world and they are insistent upon imposing that view on others' (qtd. in Chakelian), and who have 'an idealised view of what working people like or think is important' (qtd. in Williams, "Metropolitan"). Current Labour MP David Lammy complained that the party 'can't just be the party of Primrose Hill', noting that its members' orthodoxies and vocabularies 'feel rehearsed' in the sense of expressing sentiments or grievances which are in fact acquired by rote and then superimposed onto the working classes (qtd. in Williams, "Metropolitan"). Andy Burnham, current Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester bluntly echoes Lammy: 'Too much Hampstead, not enough Hull' (qtd. in Lascelles).

Moreover, those we might think of as ambitious charlatans can play the same game, too. Arguably the archetypal 'champagne socialist', Peter Mandelson was at the heart of New Labour's appropriation and then rebranding of the language and traditions of the Labour movement to create an (albeit successful) ersatz which purported to pragmatically embrace the ideology of economic liberalism. This entailed a repudiation of traditional

Marxist thought which invokes similar terms to Rancière's repudiation: Mandelson derides Marxism as being 'quasi-scientific' and a worldview 'propounded by those who claim to speak for the working class' (29) – this from a former member of the Young Communist League. Of course, the inference that Marxist thought is in fact an ideology weaponised by false proxies is also gleefully embraced by ambitious charlatans outwith leftist movements, too: former UKIP leader Nigel Farage, notorious for laying claim to be the voice of the working class on the pretext of little more than a pint of brown ale and a cigarette, recently surveyed the Glastonbury crowd's consecration of Jeremy Corbyn and mused: 'Have this lot had a look at what they're actually supporting? Google "Marxism"' (@Nigel_Farage). However, Glastonbury's gullible masses are undoubtedly more of the champagne variety than the brown ale, hence here 'voice of the common man' Farage is imputing the *middle* class as Marxism's useful idiots.

However, this raises important questions when thinking about 'class identity'. Danczuk, Lammy, and Burnham might be more accurately considered *natal* working-class: after all, the basic annual salary of an MP is £81,932, plus expenses (as at 1st April 2020). Are they still inherently more qualified to know 'what working people like or think is important'? Furthermore, does one's postcode express and/or legitimise one's political sentiments? Should Mandelson's repudiation be dismissed in leftist circles as the predictable, even natural opinion of a bourgeois shill by dint of his (socioeconomic) birth, while the equally well-born Fidel Castro – a man whom socialist journal *La Parola del Popolo* claimed in 1961 'has attached himself to the people from the top and who essentially looks at them from the mountain peak of his intellectual contempt and Spanish pride as a rabble without great brains or historic initiative' (Weisbord) – can continue to be venerated by students in 2016 as a personification of the working class: 'the people are Fidel' (ibid.)? Should we on one hand deride, mock, or even condemn Farage's 'man of the people' schtick, or make a 'global hate figure' of Rachel Dolezal as a 'race fak[ing]' white woman who self-identified as black (McGreal), while simultaneously advocating self-identification in terms of sex, and yes, sometimes even class in certain (non-UKIP) circumstances (as we will see later)? These points are all emblematic facets of the rabbit holes of identitarianism; in the final analysis, all turn on the concept of authenticity. Each facet of authenticity upon which the concept of class identity is purported to rest – birth identity, political identity, self-identity – will be addressed in the coming chapters.

The Blind Bloc Redux

Furthermore, nothing delivered a more seismic shock to the 'metropolitan elite' in recent times than the verdict delivered by the British hinterlands in 2016's Brexit vote; a verdict often lazily characterised as simple xenophobia, but in fact, as John Harris rightly observed, was as much 'about class, and inequality, and a politics now so professionalised that it has left most people staring at the rituals of Westminster with a mixture of anger and bafflement' ("If You've Got Money"). I would venture that the rituals of academia are viewed with a similar mixture, and the similar levels of shock emanating from its firmaments are evidence of a pained realisation of this.

A. C. Grayling is a prominent academic and Master of New College of the Humanities, which published on its website Grayling's open letter to Parliament urging them not to support the motion to trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. In it, Grayling bemoans government by 'crowd acclamation: not democracy but ochlocracy' (Grayling et al.) – in other words, mob rule. A key element of the vote, according to Grayling, is that 'people did not vote with their eyes open. They were subjected to years of distortion about and hostility to the EU' (ibid.). The latter may indeed be true, but its relation to the former is revealing. A response from then MP for Wolverhampton West, Rob Marris, noted exactly why:

> You risk being patronising when saying that "people did not vote with their eyes open", implying that you could spot a lie when they could not. I myself spotted disinformation bordering on lies in the Remain campaign but nevertheless voted thus. Who am I to presume that the mirror image did not likewise occur? (ibid.)

It is probably important to note at this juncture, especially as I am explicitly arguing against working-class essentialism, that although Marris is a privately educated son of a doctor and a Justice of the Peace, he also worked in a lock factory and as a bus and truck driver after leaving school at 16 (Dodd). The relative significance of this I will leave to the reader's ultimate evaluation; however, while I expressly do not consider these facts to constitute any kind of working-class identity, I must concede a more uncertain stance on whether a broad experience in life has a positive attitudinal effect – perhaps even typified by uncertainty, as opposed to imperious certitude. To which point, in any case Grayling's confident assessment hinges on the conviction that he, and not 'the crowd' or 'the people',

is able to see through hegemonic narratives (or indeed counter-narratives), anxious as he is to regulate the congenital underdogs. That his letter is prefaced by an editorial qualification from NCH which avers that the institution 'teaches people how to think, but not what to think' (Grayling et al.) in this context is somewhat ironic.

Other academics, though, have understood that such attitudes have a potentially awkward foundation. For instance, in "Post-truth and the 'metropolitan elite' feminist: lessons from Brexit", Ruth Cain notes how the voting analysis showed that the 'majority of poorer (and older) women' voted Leave (2), which presented feminist academics with an uncomfortable reckoning:

> It seems that 'we' – and in this 'we' I obviously include feminist academics – … perhaps need to understand more clearly that the powerful symbol of the oppressed working-class woman may have misled us into incorrect characterisations of certain female populations, who do not see us as allies or representatives, but as irritatingly cosmopolitan, wet PC liberals … Perhaps we have overestimated the level at which our concerns for oppressed British women … actually mirror *theirs*. My other point is perhaps more controversial; perhaps we should not focus so much on excusing harmful decisions on the part of 'oppressed' populations, and thus continue to configure them as vulnerable yet somehow saintly representatives of untouchably subaltern 'truths'. (5-6)[7]

This is an incisive comment. Cain acknowledges the academic compulsion to aggregate the working-class into a homogeneous, idealised psychology that suits their own agenda. But she also admits that academia must have the courage of its own convictions: if it believes Brexit to be a monstrous act of national self-harm then it should simply say so and defend its own position, without seeking to qualify that assertion by either professing to enlighten an infantilised mob, or otherwise acquitting a working-class-as-Scheduled-Caste with the implication that 'they know not what they do'.

Cain's identification of a certain tendency to see the working class as powerfully symbolic and somehow saintly reflects an almost romantic fascination, one that evokes

[7] The American iteration of this tendency to create untouchable subalterns seems to be defined in terms of race, rather than class: Jim Sleeper, author of *Liberal Racism* argued in an interview with *The Atlantic* that this was epitomised by 'the "radical chic" period of the late 1960s – a term immortalized by Tom Wolfe's eponymous satire – when many white liberals, justly angered by the Vietnam War and by the shallow "materialism" of the affluent society, treated blacks, especially, but also Native Americans and Hispanics, as bearers not only of rage but also of a kind of redemptive social wisdom. There was and is truth in this, but nowhere nearly as much as many of us yearned to believe. If the idea of "oppression" is oppressive, then it damages and limits people more often than it ennobles them. True liberation begins with candor about this, not with romantic projections. The left has foundered on this, I believe'.

Rancière's fetishist passion for lived experience and J. F. Horrabin's jaded bourgeois palate. Stephanie Lawler admits that the bringing together of class and identity in academia 'has tended to focus, perhaps understandably, on working-class identities, so that there is still relatively little written which directly addresses how class produces *middle-class* identities' (802, her emphasis) – understandably indeed: much more titillating to imagine the mute but noble masses. Charles Lumley, protagonist of John Wain's 1953 novel *Hurry On Down*, expressed a similar point:

> [He thought] of all the expensive young men of the Thirties … turning their backs on the setting that had pampered them; and how they had all failed from the start because their rejection was moved by the desire to enter, and be at one with, a vaguely conceived People, whose minds and lives they could not even begin to imagine. (37-8)

Whether in the 30s, the 50s, or today, whether Shelleys, ambitious charlatans, or congenital busybodys, all rely on an assumption of a homogenised working-class identity as a kind of blank slate onto which either favourable opinion can be grafted, or as an empty vessel into which convenient sentiment can be decanted.[8]

Rancière argued in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* that we can 'learn how to be equal men in an unequal society. That is what *being emancipated* means' (133, his emphasis), and that proletarians could begin to practice that equality by 'recognising the equality of their champions and their adversaries' (137) in that *neither*'s pronouncements carry more or less force – especially not, I would argue, in the creation of bestowed 'identities'. As we will see, the proletarian authors of the 1930s that this thesis addresses verify their equality by refusing – or rather ignoring – the compulsions of both their adversaries *and* their champions to tacitly limit, subsume, or direct their manifold, copious voices.

[8] I myself must acknowledge that my use of an aggregating term like 'academia' in itself leaves me open to accusations of just the kind of stereotyping I condemn. I can only here specify that I am attempting to address the suffocatingly righteous and disquietingly doctrinaire 'left' I have personally (and admittedly anecdotally) encountered in humanities departments reverentially but assuredly expounding on a saintly working class. As to that 'left' dominance, see also Daniel B. Klein and Charlotta Stern, "Groupthink in Academia: Majoritarian Departmental Politics and the Professional Pyramid", for a discussion and argument relating to 'the relative absence of classical-liberal views among humanities and social sciences professors' (586).

Working-class Writing: Whose rubrics are they anyway?

A Working-class Fiction?

In *Working-class Fiction*, Ian Haywood asserts that 'it is hard to imagine how, in a class society, the experience of the working class can ever be fully assimilated into a literary tradition which still continues to be unrepresentative' (3). He argues that 'class factors will always be a material influence on a working-class text's production and reception, and therefore, ultimately, on its aesthetic dimensions' (ibid.). In terms of a generally held conception (at least within the field of literary studies) of what might identify a distinct working-class literature, these two claims constitute a concise synopsis of two key traits. Firstly, its status relative to its antagonist in class terms: i.e. that it must necessarily stand apart from – or more accurately, outside of – what is understood to be an inherently bourgeois literary tradition. Secondly, its possibilities and/or limitations: i.e. that its relationship to the twin senses of the word representation, namely the political and the aesthetic, will always be constitutive and constrictive in literary terms. Politics, and specifically class issues, will usually be abundantly evident in a working-class text; and furthermore its aesthetics will be borrowed from that inherently bourgeois medium, and therefore doomed to the Sisyphean task of seeking its own distinct forms and rubrics in that long shadow. In this chapter I explore some of the ramifications of the attendant assumptions attached to working-class writing, via the work of authors Jim Phelan and John Sommerfield. I further show how the basis of Haywood's synopsis has been extant for as long as working-class writing has been acknowledged as a genre: a review of the contemporary criticism surrounding Phelan (and others) will reveal a buttressing of the orthodox views detailed above, and others besides, from *both* sides of the class divide.

Jim Phelan

A Vagabond Prodigy

James Leo (Jim) Phelan (1895-1966) was an Irish tramp who, among many other pursuits and incidents in an idiosyncratic life, served a thirteen-year prison sentence as a scapegoat for a murder, a sentence commuted from death by hanging. He was both a prodigy and wanderer from an early age. Phelan was an

> infant prodigy who was already at school by the age of twenty-one months (with a photo and school certificate to prove it), reading better than most adults by the age of three, and in Sixth Form by the age of ten. Stuck in the Sixth because the law did not enable him to progress further, Phelan learned Latin and consumed classical works by the ancient Greeks, Shakespeare, Irish, English and French poetry, plus anything else he could get his hands on from magnetism to practical welding. (Cutler)

This brand of autodidact eclecticism is a persistent feature of working-class writing, both in terms of the authors themselves and their characters. An early and frequent runaway (and attempted stowaway), he was at times prisoner, sailor, political activist, writer, and intermittently and ultimately a tramp. Itinerancy characterised his life more broadly, in the sense of intellectually as well as literally. Joseph Pridmore has noted of Phelan and George Garrett (along with James Hanley and Jack Hilton) that the strength and uniqueness of their work lies in their ability 'to resist the siren calls of political orthodoxies and allegiance, to provide a sense of uniquely working-class voices that stand apart from prescribed ideologies and agendas' (Pridmore). This reflects another important note that this thesis insists on throughout; and is indeed related to the aforementioned autodidact eclecticism. That is, the paramount importance of independent thought to working-class emancipation – both material and figurative.

Phelan's literary work was both prolific and similarly eclectic, comprising fiction, non-fiction, autobiography, political tracts, and various journal contributions. However, detailed treatment of his work is largely confined to short reviews in 1930s periodicals; current scholarship is all but non-existent outwith biographical articles and passing mentions in scholarly surveys/general studies[9].

[9] For further largely biographical content, see David Cowell in *Books Ireland*; Paul Lester in *London Magazine*; Ian Cutler's blog *Cynical Reflections: thoughts from a tub*, and Andrew Lees in *The Dublin Review of Books*. For

A Writer's Capital

His first three novels, *Lifer*, *Ten-a-Penny People*, and *Green Volcano* were all released in 1938 (something of an *annus mirabilis* in terms of Phelan's literary output) and all were reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement,* displaying mixed opinion.[10] All three novels were also reviewed in *The Spectator* by Forrest Reid, providing us with an illuminating insight into the opinion of a single critic across the three works. Reid praises *Lifer*, calling it 'the most impressive novel I have read for a considerable time' (34). However, he goes on to outline that in saying this, he is not thinking primarily of *Lifer*'s 'literary quality' (ibid.), but rather a perceived fidelity to real life that Reid insists upon even in the face of an explicit disavowal of any autobiographical content by Phelan himself:[11]

> And this, in the literal sense [Phelan] means, may easily be true, though in another sense every person in the book is a real character, the whole material is taken directly from life, the fusing and shaping not being a matter of imaginative invention, but the fusing and shaping of deep personal impressions. (ibid.)

This is revealing of contemporary orthodoxies regarding working-class writing in general: as Christopher Hilliard has noted in *To Exercise Our Talents*, 'the relationship between writing and personal experience … was central to the meanings that literary creativity held for ordinary writers' (2-3). However, it is important to note that this was not an impression solely held by bourgeois critics, but also to an extent by working-class writers themselves. For example, in his essay "Below the Tower", B. L. Coombes – miner, author, and contemporary of Phelan's – termed such personal experience 'a writer's capital' (34), which was chiefly drawn from 'living amongst the people of our kind' (ibid.).[12]

It is doubly important to further note, though, a more subtle underlying assumption

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academic contributions, see Valentine Cunningham's *British Writers of the Thirties* (306, 315); Ken Worpole's *Dockers and Detectives* (117-21); and *Lifer* is summarised briefly in Haywood's *Working Class Fiction* (79).

[10] See Simon Smith, R. D. Charques, and Austin Clarke.

[11] Reid quotes his (presumably original) edition: "'There is no autobiographical material in this novel," the author tells us in a foreword; "no person in the book represents a real character'" (34). However, interestingly, the author's preface to the 1966 edition seems to backtrack from this unequivocal assertion: 'I was able to tell the *Lifer* story my way. I told it as I had lived it. … A documentary-book of mine, *Jail Journey*, is the fact-book of which *Lifer* is the fictional form' (5-6).

[12] Perhaps apposite to note here, especially as Coombes' essay is a response to Woolf's "The Leaning Tower", that many *bourgeois* writers also saw verisimilitude as important; cf. Woolf's defence of the 'moderns' on similar grounds: 'let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind' (Woolf). However, this psychological verisimilitude was not so specifically bound to a 'class experience', so to speak.

revealed by both Coombes' and Reid's comments. Coombes expanded the source of this writer's capital to encompass 'all his experiences; his environment; his knowledge of *human life* and how *people* live and aspire, love and desire, hate and die' (ibid., my emphasis). In other words, while founded on the bedrock of his own lived experience, this does not preclude developing this experience imaginatively to comment on or illuminate more universal concerns. Reid, on the other hand, holds *Lifer*'s literary value as completely subordinate to its testimonial qualities, asserting that those qualities constitute 'the *whole* material', judging that rather than a primarily literary imagination being at work, Phelan is more-or-less simply transcribing the impressions that certain events provoked in him – a reductive assumption often brought *a priori* to assessments of working-class writing.

This assumption deems such works useful social documents, at best representative of common aspects of life in a narrow class fraction, but likely to contain minimal value with respect to the human condition at large. Furthermore, Reid concludes finally that *Lifer* 'differs from the ordinary run of fiction in that one feels it to be inevitable, that the author's mind was so saturated with his subject that he had to write it. It has the genuineness of a cry, of something that rises unbidden out of the depths' (34). While this may *in part* be reasonable, it elides completely any complimentary sense of a governing artistic sensibility controlling, arranging, and ultimately crafting the material – Phelan is reduced to a kind of unconscious midwife to 'unbidden' material that demands to be born.

A Partial Art

Forrest Reid's subsequent reviews of *Ten-a-Penny People* and *Green Volcano* are considerably shorter and less in-depth, but also revealing. Reviewing *Ten-a-Penny People*, Reid bemoans that in *Lifer* 'a marked feature … was the impartiality with which the subject was treated' (32), whereas now, 'presenting the case for labour, [Phelan] writes more like an advocate than an artist' (ibid.). The former point – Phelan's 'impartiality' – is a common thread that runs through assessments of Phelan's work. For instance, Simon Smith, in his *TLS* review of *Lifer*, also praises the way that the psychology of the protagonist Mansell 'is dispassionately built up without overstatement or understatement' (171). Tracking forward to 1953, Raglan Somerset, reviewing *The Underworld* (1953), commends Phelan's 'remarkable objectivity … he observes what is almost a benevolent neutrality' (251).

Reid's pointed distinction between advocate and artist is perhaps once again indicative of bourgeois attitudes to working-class writing, and one further wonders whether it is related to the appreciation of 'impartiality'. That is to say, that conservative critics are more likely to endorse neutral reports on the 'condition of England', so to speak, than politicised material. For example, Leonora Eyles, reviewing Walter Brierley's *Means Test Man* (1935) for the *TLS* in 1935, complains that working-class literature is 'marred by propaganda', but allows that Brierley's novel might take its place among 'the records of the conditions' of the contemporary working classes (242). The closing line of Reid's review of *Green Volcano* makes this distaste for political content plain: 'Luckily, too, it breaks off before Mr. Phelan has time to spoil it: the hydra of propaganda is just beginning to raise its head when the curtain is rung down' (30).

Quite the opposite is the case for reviews in leftist political publications like, for instance, *The New Statesman*, *Left Review*, or more overtly *The Plebs,* whose motto was 'I can promise to be candid but not impartial'. Walter Greenwood, reviewing Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908) for *The Plebs*, claims that 'For every worker who can be approached by means of a serious book on Economics and social problems, there are at least a dozen or so who can be approached through the medium of the novel,' in which capacity London's work is 'one of the greatest and most effective of Socialist novels' (43). Reviewing Greenwood's own *His Worship the Mayor* (1934), a *Plebs* reviewer lauds it as 'worth 1000 socialist propaganda speeches' (S. W. 261); and so on. The implications of endorsing political content even here, though, are somewhat Janus-faced: for instance, a *Plebs* review of a Dos Passos novel confidently concludes: 'Most *Plebs* don't read many novels. When they do, they like 'em to have some real social message and to deal with the world that matters' ("A Bookworm's Prayer", 310). This is almost comically reductive of working-class reading habits, and all the more corrosive given its source and its tacit directive.

So, working-class writers of the 30s were faced with two competing literary injunctions: one, to document while remaining politically neutral; and two, to place political partisanship before all other considerations. Conspicuously, aesthetic considerations – e.g. fluency and beauty of prose, prowess with form and technique – seem all but absent from either discussions. However, Jim Phelan is a good example of a working-class writer conveying political content in an allegorical, almost fabular form that is profoundly literary. Some of his best work was published in John Lehmann's *New Writing* as short stories – he was in fact a gifted exponent of the form – and in light of the issues

outlined above, an apposite example is "Amongst Those Present" (1939).

"Amongst Those Present" begins with 'Five men sat on a low stone wall. … Their backs were turned to the road, and they looked out over an enormous pasture' (163), all silently considering 'five long straight lines show[ing] faintly in the thick grass' (ibid.), overgrown and apparently old. All fitting the description of farm labourers, they are soon joined by another man, whom they hail as Tom, who joins them in contemplation of the mysterious markings. Phelan's diction, however, immediately begins to hint at another dimension to the men: their dress 'made them appear almost uniform' (ibid.), and the lines they regard were 'nearly obliterated, and the land was one large pasture again' (164). As Tom approaches, the tune he whistles is 'a march' and his footsteps belie 'the springy tread of a highland soldier' (ibid.) – a martial tone begins to emerge. Phelan then begins to flesh them out further:

> 'I s'pose it's strange like, Tom,' [an older man] questioned, while the others shuffled a little closer, 'to be working on the land again, after all them years.'
>
> Tom grinned. 'Begor, yes,' he said slowly. '"Tis that. But o' course,' he added, 'we had farm work over there – of a kind.'
>
> 'Did you know,' asked another labourer eagerly. '"Twas breaking stones we were, all the time.' (165)

All are evidently both former combatants in an as yet unspecified conflict, and also former prisoners.

As they then continue their contemplation, the youngest man remarks that "'sixteen year them lines is there." "Begor, a man could see 'em yet – if there was need, like," remarked the old man' (ibid.), an exchange that economically, adroitly, and simultaneously, invests the lines with larger significance, alluding to a connection with and chronological dating of the unnamed conflict, and insinuating a potential revival both literal and metaphorical. The old man, Denny, then inquires of Tom whether he will be staying around; when he replies affirmatively, Denny nods to the marks and states simply "'Then there should be six'" (ibid.). The remainder of part I of the story, as the men debate the most effective method of achieving this, makes it clear that these marks are divisions of the field into equal subdivisions over which the men appear proprietary, before it is brought to a close abruptly: "'Get to hell off my land," interrupted a voice. "Get off that wall," it went on, "you pack of dirty skulking good-for-nothing robbers'" (166).

Part II then opens with a deeply symbolic image:

> Three men had approached, along the edge of the field, while the division was in progress. A tall man in evening dress came first; immediately behind him a short, stout priest with a chubby good-humoured face panted a little as he walked. Last in the line, but pushing his way past the other two, was a powerful big-shouldered man in tweeds. (166)

Symbolically separated from the labourers by the dividing line of a narrow brook, they are gradually revealed to be Prendergast, Father Malone, and Barton, an English 'major of polis' (167); i.e., respectively, the Irish landowning class, the clergy, and an emissary of the British government – the unperturbed labourers, explicitly and pointedly, touch their hats to the first two only. Part I's tone of pastoral calm is immediately broken by a heated exchange, in which Prendergast exhorts Barton to "'get them murdering robbers off my land'" (167). Barton seems surprised and embarrassed by Prendergast's vitriol, but he continues unabated:

> "I tell ye, Barton," said Prendergast again, "they're looking at my land. If ye weren't a fool ye'd know what that means. *You* know, Father Malone," he added, turning to the priest.
>
> "Oh, well, you know, Timothy," the priest began deprecatingly … [Prendergast] laid one hand on the priest's arm, as if to claim his support. (167)

This is a significant exchange in two ways: firstly, these are the only words the priest ever utters, and while Prendergast seems keen to invoke his authority (or perhaps mere prestige) Malone, and by extension the church, is presented as an utterly impotent presence in any practical sense. Secondly, the significance of the field and its divisions is confirmed; this significance, and the previous chronological dating, is then subsequently reiterated and intensified:

> "Them six men," he said, slowly and carefully, "is dividing up my land. *My* land," he repeated. "They're dividing it up *now*. And them six men is murderers, every one."
>
> "Oh, rubbish," interrupted the policeman, brusquely. "You go too far, Timothy. Come on home."
>
> "In them hills," said Prendergast pityingly, waving a hand to the nearby mountains. "There's hundreds of fools like you, buried. Fools that didn't know a murderer when they saw one," he added viciously.
>
> Barton turned swiftly, nettled. "These are your own labourers, I think," he said coldly. "They look—to my unpractised eye—like any other decent peasant."
>
> "Peasant!" The farmer sneered, nodding his head contemptuously. "Peasant. Them's not peasants—they're farm-labourers, *my* labourers. But they have ideas, oh yes. They're all going to be gentlemen, oh yes. I tell you Barton––Polis-major Barton," he added ironically, "they tried it before, sixteen years

> ago. And I tell you again, they're murderers all." (167-8)

Phelan will eventually, a few lines from the close of the story, name the conflict (or at least situate it more exactly): "'Sixteen years ago," said Prendergast in a choking voice, "them rats called themselves the Irish Republic. Them and their kind'" (168).

But the more interesting *concept* rendered here is elucidated in the previous quote, again subtly and economically: "'Them's not peasants—they're farm-labourers, *my* labourers. But they have ideas, oh yes. They're all going to be gentlemen, oh yes.'" Presented here is a perceived problematic relationship – or, more accurately, problematic for the Prendergasts of the world – between proletariat and ideas, one which is immediately redolent of the at once both simple and complex questions tackled by Jacques Rancière in *The Philosopher and His Poor*:

> How are we to conceive of the relation between the order of thought and the social order – as harmony or rupture? How do individuals get some idea in their heads that makes them either satisfied with their position or indignant about it? (xxv)

The *ideas* the five labourers have had are what has ultimately made them dangerous, a dynamic analogous to the potential of literature: Rancière further argues that during the flowering of utopian socialism in the nineteenth century 'proletarians, in granting themselves permission to think, invaded the territory of the literati, [who] answered evasively by celebrating work as the true culture of the poor' (xxvi). A place for everything, and everything in its place. For the likes of Forrest Reid, such an invasion results in a 'partial art … born of bitterness and not of beauty', where politics necessarily compromises literary quality. This of course often happens; even Phelan himself, in his autobiography *The Name's Phelan*, speaks of an early work which attracted 'the most devastating eight-word criticism I have ever heard, "That's not a play; it's a bloody lecture"', admitting that at the time he had 'only explanations of things, not utterances of people' (249). However, he also avers that 'I have never forgotten that criticism either' (ibid.). Evidently he did not, as his subsequent body of work repudiates Reid's claim.

A Plain and Straightforward Style

Much has also been written about the supposed antagonism between, on the one hand, working-class writers of the 30s writing in a more 'classical', accessible style, as opposed to, on the other, the impenetrability of the high modernists epitomised by the Bloomsbury set. In *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, John Carey, as previously mentioned, has argued that the impenetrability of modernist literature was practically deliberate, essentially 'a hostile reaction' ("Preface") which sought to preserve the intellectual mystique of the intelligentsia in the face of a newly literate public encroaching on their literary territory. While Carey constructs his argument with brio and eloquence, this central premise is profoundly patronising, blithely assuming *a priori* that only Oxford chaps like himself are able to read modernism.

Jonathan Rose, in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, concurs to an extent, and further suggests that when, over time, even modernism became mass culture, the reactionary dynamic was repeated by the arrival of postmodernism which 'strove to recapture the opacity and difficulty that once cloaked modernism' (438). This repeats the same glib assumption; however, the frequent presence of postmodernist fiction – Fowles, Pynchon, Auster *et al* – on bestseller lists would seem to at least encourage a degree of scepticism on this front. Rose suggests that working-class writers met the implied elitism of modernism by cleaving to more traditional styles; a claim Christopher Hilliard disputes, suggesting that working-class writers of the 30s were 'more eclectic in their literary judgments' (8). I support Hilliard's assertion, and will demonstrate it via Phelan, who is proof that many strikingly *non*-Oxford chaps were plenty smart enough to *write* modernism, let alone read it. In more general terms, this is evidence of a common issue that this thesis engages with throughout: the seemingly unquenchable need of self-appointed allies to speak to and for working class people, enabled in no small part by the conflation of a class with a monolithic 'cultural identity' replete with such assumptions.

Perhaps more surprisingly though, as I've alluded to earlier, many contemporary leftist critics in *The Plebs* are also guilty of reinforcing such stereotypes. J. P. M. Millar, reviewing William Corcoran's *This Man Murray* (1937) in *The Plebs* in 1938, lauds its simplicity:

> The author has an extraordinary mastery of the short sentence and does not waste a word. If for no other reason than that, the book should be studied by every person in the Labour Movement who wants successfully to convey his ideas to ordinary people. (42)

This apparently implies that writers should eschew esoteric styles if political ideas are to be absorbed by the common man. S. Walker, reviewing the anthology *Seven Shifts*, also in 1938, is gratified that 'Thanks to the aid of the editor, Jack Common, the essays are written in a plain and straightforward style' (125) – one wonders how the essays were written before the intervention of Common's judicious editing? Having said that, Winifred Horrabin, for my money *The Plebs*' most incisive and indeed generous critic, reviewing *Proletarian Literature in the United States* in 1936 does assert that 'class sentiments can be clothed in fine writing and so can get across, and this is fine writing and class-conscious writing of a very high type' (144). Phelan is a good example of just such fine, eclectic writing, where political or class sentiments, while evident, are never obvious or didactic, but subordinate to and embedded in the highly stylised aesthetic of his prose.

Lifer describes the experiences of Arthur Mansell, prisoner 1073, sentenced to penal servitude for life in Rockville prison; or as the strapline on the cover of the 1966 Panther edition puts it: 'The savage testament of a man condemned to a life behind bars', further emphasising the tension between fiction and testimony (or 'lived experience'). Forrest Reid rightly identifies of *Lifer* that 'the method is impressionistic' (34); Paul Lester that it 'owes some debt to expressionist techniques' (45). Lester attributes this in part to Phelan's reading of Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), a novel itself often stylistically compared to Joyce, and this is a well-founded observation: *Lifer*'s prose often employs a distinctly Joycean stream of consciousness. For example:

> Prisonprisonprisonprisonprison. For life for ever for years for life cold prison cold fear for life no girl no life cold girl prisonprison for life girl Jean Jean Jean for life. (53)

> Mansell was five years old and his father smelt of cigar smoke lovely while he produced a bunch of grapes don't worry people fall off bikes every day do it myself nothin in that get better quickly son cigar smoke lovely smiling eyes the doctor's eyes the bed was soft and– (39)

The latter quote's childlike voice immediately brings to mind chapter one of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916):

> Nice mother! The first day in the hall of the castle when she had said goodbye she had put up her veil double to her nose to kiss him: and her nose and eyes were red. But he had pretended not to see that she was going to cry. She was a nice mother but she was not so nice when she cried. (9)

This comparison is even more strongly evoked by Phelan's short story "Naughty Mans", published under the pseudonym 'Seamus Boy Phelan' (his son) in *Horizon* in 1943. Phelan writes:

> The best love-smell is when your Jill [Seamus' mother and Phelan's wife] takes you in bed. This is the best love-smell. Or when you find Jill's clothes, upastairs in the Oddy Hill house. Then it is Jill again, and Seumas Boy laughs and laughs. Then you say where's Jill. But you know, don't you Seumas Boy? Broked, and the naughty doctor won't let her come home. Hospital stinks. That is not love. (38)

"Naughty Mans" is rendered throughout in this voice; while in *Lifer* this form is employed intermittently, although sometimes for entire chapters (203-7).

In *Lifer*, the technique is also often adjusted to render what one might call 'prison syntax' (as opposed to stream of consciousness), mixing free indirect discourse and third-person narration. For example: 'Funny things and people in jail. Was this one of the things – his thinking like this? Never did anything like it before. Before. Never saw anyone before like – oh, buck off, see? He walked up and down the cell' (46). That this prose is informed by prison dialect is made clear by its register being reflected in the actual dialogue. One declamation in particular is also very self-reflexive about the nature of writing itself:

> "Listen, son. You write a letter. That's technique. Het up bad, can't write. Self runs away with the pen. Yes? Write lots, writing comes natural. Sometimes *slosh* a word. Sometimes *tear* a phrase. Self does it. Pen does it, too. That's transference. Mugs call it expression." (103)

What is clear is that not only is *Lifer* neither straightforward nor plain, but that in fact it is very distinctly modernist.

And what of political or class sentiments? Again, nothing straightforward, and certainly not didactic. When politics is referred to specifically, it is at best in passing and via a single character, Cobb, of whom another lag insists:

> "[He has] only one fault that I know. Bloody fool about one subject. Socialist. Wants to wipe out all rich people." Mansell stayed silent. He knew nothing about socialism except, vaguely, that it meant preaching in Hyde Park. (48)

However, the real villain of the piece has oblique political/class connotations: state bureaucracy, as embodied by forms. The societal ramifications this prefigures are more straightforwardly explained in Phelan's autobiography *The Name's Phelan* (1948). Quoting

the vital statistics listed by Phelan's very real one-time abode, Parkhurst ('Name: Phelan, James Leo. Age: 28. Height: 5–11' (283), etc.), he writes: 'The printed form, that talisman of modern civilisation, is really only a very empty myth, an infantile substitute for knowledge … They were getting the record right, putting Jim Phelan on paper' (ibid.). Which is not so very different from inferring, approaching, and categorising people principally and firstly via the prism of ascriptive identities, and certainly as empty and infantile.

In *Lifer*, the actual reproduction of forms on the page is used as a narrative tool. Chapter twenty consists in its entirety of a succession of forms: beginning with a parole request, there follows a variety of previous forms – a medical history, punishment reports, and conduct reports, filling in Mansell as a person for those who hold the power to grant him liberty. The last reproduction in the chapter is a parole refusal (177-181; see appendix I). Similarly, chapter twenty-nine consists of three similar refusals, dated '96, '97, and '99 (244; see appendix II), a graphic representation of the passage of time. These forms are used to represent the prison – and by extension society at large – as a carceral machine: Mansell realises that 'he was not in a place but a machine' (21), a machine where 'you insert a petition at one end, and if you wait long enough, there comes out at the other end a little printed slip about "no grounds". Justice, my friend, has been done' (183). Phelan also pointedly includes a reproduction of a graffiti-scrawled wall (84; see appendix III) – the words, the records, of the prisoners themselves – implying the limits of literary representation that he expands upon later:

> A man wrote something about you. Right or wrong, fair or unfair, he wrote it. Then he died or went away. But later people read what he had written, and accepted it. Later people read what he had written, and accepted it as true. (182)

Writing in itself can only ever represent an incomplete ersatz of Jim Phelan, or indeed of anyone – *Lifer*'s very form pre-empts fundamental questions: whose truth do such forms represent?; and by extension, whose truth does any writing represent?

A Sordidness Sanitised

By the release of Phelan's *Jail Journey* in 1940, at least one literary heavyweight was

aware of, and appreciative of, Phelan's work: George Orwell. However, in a review for *Horizon*, outwith his fixation with *Jail Journey*'s representation of homosexual activity, Orwell limits general criticism more-or-less to noting that the book is 'lively and readable' (458), avoids the 'whining note' otherwise common to prison literature (459), and – more pointedly, and perhaps most perceptively – that 'this is the book of an individualist, with a streak of rather childish vanity; but a more modest man would never have remained sane enough to write it' (460).[13] This seems to chime with both Dudley Carew's observation in a 1949 *TLS* review of Phelan's *We Follow the Roads* (1949): 'Mr. Phelan is not an ideal writer – he is a shade too self-satisfied, too self-conscious, for that' (284); and also Paul Lester's 1996 appraisal of the general style of his narratives: 'Despite protestations to the contrary, even in his frequently absorbing accounts of tramping, there is a sense of sordidness sanitized, of a pleasant diversion made by one supremely conscious of a literary spin-off' (49). What emerges here is that various reviewers seem to notice a literary consciousness at work, they perceive an authorial presence with a definite sense of itself, and deem this a flaw of vanity.

Varying degrees of authorial presence were and are nothing new in writing, fiction or otherwise (and to the *n*th degree in Lionel Britton's *Hunger and Love*, as we will see). This is especially true of a writer like Phelan who quite openly merges genres, as Carew also noted: 'Mr. Phelan tells his story in a mingling of the forms of essay, anecdote and autobiography' (284) – one of course will hardly be surprised to discern an authorial presence in such writing. No – the charge is vanity, self-satisfaction. Lester's observation regarding sanitized sordidness and a literary spin-off is fascinating in this respect. The inference appears to me twofold. Firstly, that Phelan has profanely glossed what should by rights be pristinely sordid, eschewing his duty to chronicle unrelenting misery in favour of rendering his lived experience as something more whimsical, or perhaps even simply – ye gods! – Literary. And secondly, that this transgression has occurred with one eye on the possible product, i.e. a book.

To the former charge, I would reply: is Mr. Lester disappointed not to find the squalor he presupposed? Who, if not Phelan, has the right to judge how sordid his experience is, and represent it as such? Jim Phelan *was* a convict, *was* a tramp, not a

[13] Amusingly, while Orwell saw *Jail Journey*'s most distinguishing feature as being the depiction of the sex lives of convicts, one of the few other contemporary reviews I could find was by one Harry Golombek in *British Chess Magazine*, who unsurprisingly asserted that 'much of the brighter colour' (192) of the book derived from its depiction of the noble board game.

sociologist or a tourist; as David Cowell has argued: 'It is a generally held belief that [Phelan's] stories were better than those produced by other "tramp" writers such as Jack London mainly because, at this time, tramping was his chosen way of life rather than the occasional source of material for a book' (246). Which brings us neatly to the latter charge: that Phelan seemed self-aware of the literary – or perhaps even financial? – potential of his experiences. I am moved to conjecture whether Lester would so confidently impugn the author of *Down and Out in Paris in London* or *The Road to Wigan Pier* on the same grounds. I am conscious that arguing this point may seem a surly overreaction to throwaway comments, but I would underline that the veiled assumptions, however unconscious, point to profound issues regarding the who, how, and why of literary representation. It is apparent that the further into the humus of class one sinks, the more paramount the notion of authenticity becomes.

'A slip? Faith, it's thirteen quid.'

Let us expand a little on the 'why' of literary representation for working-class authors. Forrest Reid's reviews of Phelan are marked by their confusion regarding the timeline of his novels, i.e. whether they were released in the same order as they were written: *Ten-a-Penny People* is 'in every respect weaker than its predecessor [*Lifer*]' (32); *Green Volcano* is 'much better than his second' (30), prompting Reid to ask 'How is one to tell where Mr. Phelan stands, whether he is progressing or retrogressing?' (ibid.). In my own opinion, neither of the two later (or at least later-released) novels are on a par with *Lifer*. This may give us pause to question whether Phelan's literary talents did indeed extend only as far as (near-unconsciously) mediating his most intense experience into novel form. Indeed, Phelan himself later wrote of *Lifer*: 'here it is, unexpurgated, unaltered, as it came straight from Parkhurst Convict Station' ("Preface", 5). On the contrary, I am tempted to suggest that form itself was part of the problem.

In a nutshell: *Lifer* succeeds stylistically in ways arguably more suited to the short story form – its account of young Arthur Mansell's experiences in the fictional Rockville Prison is episodic, fragmented, a loosely-linked series of moments and feelings. Paul Lester notes the following:

> Phelan complained that publishers expected him to write to a formula. He claimed that some of his best work had been in *Penguin New Writing* and *Life and Letters*, where there hadn't been such constraints imposed. When so many working-class writers of the 1930s virtually stopped publishing books after the war, for instance the likes of Coombes, Halward, and Brierley, Phelan, while continuing to publish regularly, gave the impression he was being condemned to selling his talents short. As he put it in *Tramping the Toby*, using language drawn from life on the road, the writer had the choice of "leaving the mark sweet or betaking himself to the nearest workhouse." (48)

This was a common issue for working-class writers of the 30s – getting paid was crucial.[14] Commercial pressures meant publishers increasingly demanded novels (and scripts) from Phelan in more orthodox, boilerplate styles; fiscal pressures meant that Phelan was bound to write them, as opposed to the relative stylistic freedom short stories afforded in journals like *New Writing*.

This fiscal pressure is underlined in a letter sent to George Orwell in 1941 after Phelan's wife Jill was hospitalised. Phelan writes: 'The doctors and transport folks and the Urban Councils took most of Jail Journey, all of the Churchill book, most of a lucrative ghosting-job I did to keep afloat' ("Letter to George Orwell"), and his needs are spelt out bluntly: 'Are you solvent or like most writers? If you have any money, let me have some' (ibid.). Interestingly, it is Orwell's well-known experience of life at the bottom of the social spectrum that is appealed to: 'you, being Orwell, will be able to imagine what happens to a tramp with a baby and without one cent in the world' (ibid.). This again raises larger, deeply significant questions surrounding the who, how, and why of representation mentioned above – if Orwell's experience *enables* him to imagine, is imagination, then, predicated on experience? And must that experience be lived permanently, or can it be gleaned? Phelan's appeal is also revealing of the era's vogue for nurturing working-class writing:

> …if you know anyone who's sufficiently sentimental and sufficiently wealthy to be annoyed that a "great peasant genius cum François Villon" is being squeezed, you have more than permission to tell. IF IN TIME. (ibid.).[15]

To a large extent, though, this vogue was concomitant with a cash-nexus informed by

[14] Exemplified by, for instance, Leslie Halward, who wrote to the editor John Lehmann apologising for submitting work to a more lucrative publication: 'I wish I didn't have to concern myself about how much I can get for the things I produce' (qtd. in Hilliard, 140).

[15] Not only Orwell received a letter direct from Phelan, either; Andrew Lees notes that Phelan 'wrote scrounging letters to sympathisers like Compton Mackenzie, Reginald Reynolds and L. A. G. Strong' ("The Rolling English Road").

expectation on one hand, and need on the other.

However, as noted above, there were publishers who represented exceptions. Christopher Hilliard recounts extensively the influence of John Lehmann, editor of *New Writing*, on many working-class authors of the era, not only in terms of making publishing short fiction possible, but also his editorial and aesthetic judgment and constructive encouragement. Hilliard notes (as Lester does above) that 'it was getting working-class men to *continue* writing that was so difficult' (130, his emphasis), and that this was Lehmann's great strength. Furthermore, 'Lehmann's aesthetic sense made him unwilling to accept a piece simply because it was by a worker' (138), and his judicious editing 'worked to elevate gifted working-class writers without lowering the standards of entry to the literary public' (142).

So, unlike critics such as Forrest Reid, he steadfastly asserted that issues like fidelity to working-class experience were and should always be concerns subordinate to literary quality. However, again, for the literati-at-large of the day those standards of entry would still seem to hinge on work shorn of political content, notwithstanding literary quality: the *TLS*, reviewing the third volume of *New Writing* in 1937, granted a 'general high level of writing' ("Other New Books") but bemoans the antipathy towards 'the man across the dividing line, the Fascist, the policeman, the employer, the ruling powers' (ibid.) displayed in the writing. This, according to them as we have previously seen, cannot but result in 'at best a partial art … born of bitterness and not of beauty' (ibid.).

However, in Phelan's short story "The Slip" (1939) a number of the issues we have discussed thus far converge, not least that of getting paid. Phelan utilises his own working-class experience – his writer's capital – but neither to document nor politicise. Rather, he uses it to self-reflexively play with literary form (specifically the nature of what it means to build and control a narrative), constructing a complex piece which feels all the more authentic for its distinctly postmodern oddity. That is to say that it reminds us that authenticity – if it is to mean anything at all – does not depend on the reader's (or critic's) expectations of working-class experience as derived from an established-yet-bogus monolithic cultural identity, but rather on an author's marshalling of the relationship between broadly common milieus and practices, and their own unique experience, perspective, and literary priorities. And ultimately, the hero – or enabler – of "The Slip" is shown to be the same hero and enabler of working-class writers in general (more's the pity).

"The Slip"'s opening lines foreshadow the story's self-reflexiveness: 'The place had no name. It was neither a street nor a lane, since it led nowhere but back to itself' (266). In an open 'coort' behind a row of Dublin tenements and a row of ancient cottages, we encounter a drunken man. Hearing a 'curious medley of sound' emanating from a cottage, the man announces himself and the story – to himself: "'Every story," he said loudly, to himself, "every friggin story has–"' (ibid.). He continues to listen, 'apparently trying to piece the conflicting scraps of dialogue into a pattern' (ibid.), echoing authorial construction of narrative. When another drunken man emerges from the cottage and sprawls on the ground, the following exchange ensues:

> As the [second] drunken man raised himself from the cobbles, the man by the lamp-post advanced and stood over him gravely.
>
> "You," he said precisely, as the other commenced to make for the door, "you're *not*."
>
> The man who had been thrown out interrupted himself in the middle of a rush towards the cottage.
>
> "Ain't I, bejays," he asserted truculently. "*I'll* show ye whether I—" He interrupted himself in drunken bewilderment. "What am'nt I?" he demanded cautiously, lurching on the rough paving.
>
> "*Every* story—'s a hero. Must—law'v nature," explained the other. "You're not hero this shtory," he went on didactically, waving a hand to the door from which the drunken man had been thrown.
>
> "Show ye," asserted the first man. (267)

There is real virtuosity at work here. Their drunkenness, and their consequent broken, stilted dialogue, enables Phelan to create fascinating ambiguities in the prose. The first man asserts his own authority over events, stating confidently that 'Every story—'s a hero' – but does this mean every story *is* a hero, or every story *has* a hero? This is perhaps a stretch, but nonetheless the following phrase's similar us of the em dash supports the ambiguity: 'Must—law'v nature' – must *be*, or must *have*? Furthermore, the invocation of a 'law of nature' suggests that inviolable principles or facts of existence must be evident in a story, ones that the first man assumes the right to interpret and explain: "'You're not hero this shtory," he went on didactically'.

However, in an audacious moment, Phelan transgresses those supposedly inviolable rules, inverting control of both the narrative and the didactic role: "'Show ye," asserted the first man'. The point being that *this is not the first man speaking* – it's the second man. 'Show ye', he says, and through him Phelan shows us how easily those inviolable literary rules can be broken – all that is required is the will for the second man to become the first,

and assume the position of controlling didactic voice. There is a form of democratisation of narrative authority at play here, something I will discuss in considerably more depth later via Lionel Britton. Britton achieves this with the use of second person, though, whereas Phelan here is using an almost postmodern, metafictional tactic. And lest we suspect a mere mistake, typo, or even a continuation of the original man's speech, Phelan has already established earlier in the story that the first man 'wore a black slouch hat' (266), whereas here the lines continue: "'Show ye," asserted the first man. He removed a flat cap with a hard peak…' (267). To my mind, this appears to be an immediate anticipation of the reader's confusion, reinforcing that it is indeed the second man to whom he is attributing both the dialogue and new classification as 'first'. Or perhaps the drunkenness has bled out of the story and into the authorial presence of Phelan? Either way, the reader is suddenly pitched into an uncertain narrative world.

Immediately, the new 'first man' takes control of the direction of the narrative in a comically exaggerated manner: 'Then he led the way to the door, taking very long strides, like a boy playing at pirates, and swinging his thin arms violently' (ibid.). Upon entering the cottage, though, not only is the 'first and second' reversal confirmed, but the (now) second man reasserts control based on what appears to be a telling criterion:

> "Gimme a glass o' porther," [the now-first man] demanded, and a red-haired slatternly girl passed him a full tumbler immediately. Without being asked, she handed another to the *second man* [my emphasis], who took it in surprise, engulfed it immediately, and turned to shake his head over the little man on the floor.
>
> "No," he said decisively. "*You're* not."
>
> "What's that, sor?" asked the red-haired girl civilly. The newcomer was much better dressed than anyone else in the room, most of those present being in rags, and she evidently considered him somebody of some importance. She filled his glass while she waited for him to speak. Again he drained the glass at a gulp, while a voice from the end of the room commented loudly, "Proper beer-shark, bejays."
>
> "Every story," explained the new arrival, "has a hero. *This's* a story." He waved a hand round the crowded room, then pointed to the man on the floor. "*Not* the hero," he concluded, handing his glass. (268)

The second man is evidently of a higher social class than the others in the room, and this is insinuated to be a decisive factor in his reassertion of the right to control and classify the narrative. Furthermore, '*This's* a story' states the man, quite naturally assuming the right to immediately appropriate the scene for his own purposes.

This relates to an important point which I will touch on at various points throughout

this thesis: the bourgeois appropriation of what Rancière called 'the mirages of representation' (*PN* 11), and what Franco Moretti has called 'the right to dream' (x). That is, bluntly, the annexing by decree of imaginative work, the setting of the terms by which writing may transcend the boundaries of social documentation, authenticity, etc. This might on the face of it seem to support John Carey's 'deliberate mystification' thesis, but this is not in fact the story. Rather, it is the simple conflation of particular modes of expression (e.g. prose written in Received Pronunciation) with an overarching notion of a 'correct' mode of expression – however, this in truth is mere empty assertion hiding in plain sight. Lionel Britton puts it well in *Hunger and Love*:

> All the difficulty in writing comes from the inability of the human mind to grasp the literary man's demand that you should not be allowed to say what you think as you think it; that if you put anything down on paper it should be not exactly what you think and not exactly as you think it. We poor Arthurs of the earth can't see the need; and simply can't conceive what the difference ought to be. Of course, while that is so, *if we respect the demand*, it serves the purpose of keeping us from ever writing anything at all. (143-4, his emphasis)

The assertion tacitly and insidiously undermines the confidence of those who would not conform to arbitrary linguistic imperatives.

Returning to "The Slip", as it transpires, the 'story' of the gathering is a wake, and Phelan briefly punctuates the literary gymnastics with its bald fact: 'A dead child lay on the bed, a thin starved-looking little girl of about seven' (ibid.). Shortly afterwards, however, a new character takes the stage, a 'giant man in navvy clothes' (ibid.). On enquiring of the red-haired girl as to the navvy's identity, the second man also reveals his own:

> "I'm no one, m'dear," he reassured her. "Nobody. Just harmlesh newspaperman–harmless. Who's he?" he repeated, pointing to the big navvy. "Hero of th' story?" (269)

The navvy is Bartle Coogan, who prevents people leaving the wake (or indeed the story?) by the physical force that underwrites his words, as the journalist discovers when he himself attempts to leave: "'Aisy," [Coogan] ordered. "We're not *goin*' are ye? An' it a slip!" There was menace in his tone and the stranger hastily sat down' (270). From this point on, the reporter's asserted control of events breaks down, and he is simply carried along with the slip's course of events:

> "*Every* friggin story—" the newspaperman said loudly, in the middle of the prayers. Someone shouted "Shut up," and he sat back muttering. "The hero?" he demanded, and buried his face in a glass of porter. (ibid.)

But what, in the end, *is* 'a slip'? 'A slip? Faith, it's thirteen quid' (ibid.) a man tells the reporter. Rather than spend the thirteen pounds death insurance on a funeral, the dead child's community chooses to spend it on 'grub, booze, bacca' (271), and then, silently and under cover of night, take turns to carry the coffin to the cemetery and bury her clandestinely; hence Coogan's forcible prevention of people drinking their fill and leaving – enough men are required to share the burden. Upon learning this, the reporter finally has the answer to the enigma of the hero:

> "Told ya," ejaculated the newsman triumphantly. "Told ya. *Every* story has a—" He broke off and halted. "Who's the hero," he demanded in drunken solemnity. "Who's hero this story?"
>
> "Bartle Coogan," guessed his companion, without conviction.
>
> "Wrong," said the other promptly, as he led the way along the towpath. "Wrong. 'S the thirteen pounds." (ibid.)

Phelan's point in closing the story thus is ambiguous, but I suspect that it is the efficacy and potency of money: without its enabling effect, the bourgeois journalist would have had no story to stumble across and subsequently marshal to completion (albeit erratically). This returns us, in a way, to the point regarding the cash nexus facing working-class writers in the 1930s: no cash, no story.

An Uncertain Identity

The novel *May Day* (1936) is set in London and follows a range of characters over three days as revolutionary anger spills over across the city. One of the more experimental novels to come out of the British left of the 1930s, *Left Review* described it (on my edition's back cover) as 'the best collective novel that we have yet produced in England; the real protagonist is the London working class'. Its author John Sommerfield (1908-1991) is an interesting figure in light of what we have discussed thus far.

Firstly, *May Day* appeared against the contemporary literary backdrop of the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, in which 'great criticism had been made of technical and formal experiment' (in opposition to the perceived priority of 'socialist realism'); yet *May Day* 'remains a rare example of an earlier political aesthetic, in revolt against narrative unity [and] naturalistic plot' (Croft, "Introduction" xv-xvi). Sommerfield would never countenance the subordination of literary merits and concerns to political priorities; which is not to say that political priorities were not nevertheless hugely important to him – they unequivocally were.

Further to that, this tension between politics and aesthetics is aptly embodied in Sommerfield's response to a review of a novel from 1937 (Ludwig Renn's *Death Without Battle*) in the *Daily Worker*. Sommerfield objected to the review's assertion that Renn's participation in the fighting in Spain *in itself* elevated the novel 'on to an entirely different level' (qtd. in Croft, *Red Letter* 130-1), and responded that

> This seems to me to be the most absolute sentimental cant, and represents a tendency in left-wing literary criticism that if carried to its logical conclusion leads to the worth of a book being estimated on the grounds of its author's political life …' (ibid.)

Plus ça change indeed – Sommerfield's words here in many ways anticipate the curious (and spurious) phenomenon of identity politics as applied to literature, which has its progenitor in issues of 'authenticity', and which has reached its apotheosis in modern terms in the notion of 'cultural appropriation'.

Secondly, Sommerfield was the son of a newspaper editor and went to public school in Hampstead, where he was a contemporary of the poet, novelist and essayist Stephen

Spender (Hinton 23, Croft xi). It is also a fact that he 'left school at 16 and worked as, among other things, a carpenter's labourer, a stage hand, and a dishwasher on transatlantic steamers' (Hinton 23) and suffered 'long periods of unemployment' (Croft xi). Furthermore, he was a long-standing member of the British Communist Party who fought in Spain with the XIth International Brigade (ibid. xi-xii). Subsequently, as a participant in the Mass-Observation social research project which aimed to document everyday life in Britain from 1937 onwards, he 'deeply impressed the younger middle-class investigators who worked alongside him', and was the most trusted recruit of one the project's creators, anthropologist Tom Harrisson, by virtue of his 'aura of toughness' and 'their shared experience as upper middle-class men prepared to rough it in working-class conditions' (Hinton 23). So, given all of the above, the 'authenticity' of any class identity attributed to Sommerfield must necessarily be less than straightforward. This ambiguity is an issue I will return to throughout this thesis; for now suffice to note that perhaps Sommerfield's inhabiting of the 'tough' persona described above in a sense anticipates the equally curious modern phenomenon of 'class *self*-identification' that I will interrogate more fully in the conclusion to this thesis.

Of course, the kind of inchoate obeisance Sommerfield inspired speaks to a deep sublimated tension that has run through many affluent left-wing activists like the letters in a stick of rock since affluent left-wing activists were a thing: that is, the wish that they too were the bearers of an 'authentic' working-class identity, the attendant angst over their lack thereof, itself consequently expressed as sanctimonious militance. For example, take the Russian political and literary historian Dmitri Mirsky. Mirsky was very much an aristocrat: born Prince Dimitry Petrovich Svytopolk-Mirsky, scion of the Svyatopolk-Mirsky family, son of *knyaz* Pyotr Dmitrievich Svyatopolk-Mirsky, Imperial Russian Minister of Interior, Mirsky however relinquished his princely title at an early age and was later converted to Communism (G. S. Smith). Mirsky is briefly mentioned in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), wherein Orwell notes for example his denunciation of D. H. Lawrence as having 'succeeded in erasing all clues to his proletarian origin' (168). Orwell continues:

> Here you have a literary man of aristocratic extraction, a man who had probably never in his life spoken to a working man on anything approaching equal terms, uttering venomous screams of libel against his "bourgeois" colleagues. (ibid.)

Throughout chapter eleven of *Wigan Pier*, Orwell persuasively outlines the discrepancy in the vehemence with which actual members of the working class and their bourgeois 'allies' (to invoke the modern parlance) both cleave to their political ideologies. Furthermore, he notes the discrepancy between the ideologies themselves: '[the former's] conception of Socialism is quite different from that of the book-trained Socialist higher up' (163), arguing (rightly, in my opinion) that the former generally has a distinctly less dogmatic and radical attitude to politics than the latter, for whom ideological eclecticism is tantamount to heresy. In a pithy encapsulation, Orwell quips that 'it is only the "educated" man, especially the literary man, who knows how to be a bigot' (165-6), alluding to the righteous arrogance and intolerance of the theorising left.

Given that one cannot conceal from oneself the circumstances of one's birth and/or subsequent life, this tension can nevertheless be mitigated by the tacit conflation of differing sets of cultural norms and political values with one or other class position and holding them to be synonymous; i.e. establishing 'working class' as a cultural identity that can both be respected and valorised, and also (self-)identified with and/or assumed. Of course, for any good class warrior this also entails the indictment of the equal and opposite bourgeois identity and its adverse values. Mirsky, writing in *The Plebs* in 1936, attacked what he saw as the bourgeoisie's method of culturally neutralising the working-class and its intellectuals: the placing of culture itself above and beyond the class struggle. In other words, by advancing the ideal of a universal culture and set of values, the bourgeoisie ensure that interests of the working-class intelligentsia are guided into harmless, non-revolutionary channels: 'The criteria [of artistic value] worked out by the most parasitic section of the bourgeoisie were put forward as the criteria of values for any individual' (21-2). This enables the perpetuation of what Winifred Horrabin sardonically calls 'the good old days, when literature was kept strictly separate from propaganda, and art and politics were two different things' ("Art and Propaganda" 144). It is true to say that there *are* methods by which culture is annexed by dominant interests – for instance, the elevation of certain linguistic modes above others, a point I will return to later in this thesis. However, I believe that the ideal of universality in literature, culture, art can only be a tool of domination if one allows it to be so, indeed *wants* it to be so. The ideal of universality should be upheld, and to promote the idea that the bearers of ascriptive group identities also bear forms of knowledge that are at least in part discrete from and impermeable to others is a retrogressive endeavour.

A Working-class Outlook?

The false dichotomy of discrete 'knowledges' when applied to literature is encapsulated by J. P. M. Millar in *The Plebs* in 1938 when he bemoans the fact that

> most novels [about the working-class] are written by middle-class people who have very little knowledge of working-class life, and by a few working-class people who have as rapidly as possible dropped their working-class outlook and acclimatized themselves to middle-class ideas and middle-class conceptions. (42)

It is obviously true that verisimilitude in depictions of milieu will be enhanced by direct experience. The emotional and material experience of poverty, for instance, cannot be easily replicated in the imagination while reposing in a drawing room. But acknowledging this is not the same as considering it impossible to do so, perhaps even taboo, due to incommensurable ideas and conceptions.

As we have seen in Phelan's "The Slip", literature is often indirectly segregated from the working class via the perception that literary values, techniques, or concerns are the sole preserve of the bourgeois – is 'working-class literature' to be enacted as little more than an antagonistic quid pro quo? Because in any case, *becoming a preserve* of a class is not identical with *being native* to a class, especially in the case of abstracts like values. What is a 'working-class outlook'? Are there opinions or convictions that are hereditary, intrinsic, and shared by all members of that class? Are there ideas and conceptions that are congenitally middle-class? Outlooks, ideas, conceptions are not material possessions or ascriptive characteristics, and should not be understood as being so. Asking these rhetorical questions is not merely churlish hair-splitting; this thesis argues throughout that the ramifications of the politics of identity, in literature and in life, are deeply negative and the opposite of emancipatory.

Culture, values, etc. being a preserve of the bourgeois (or at least perceived as being so) is not because they are a constituent element in that class, but in fact simply the result of an arbitrary assertion of assumed pre-eminence. The journalist in "The Slip", a bourgeois dilettante and documenter, approaches working-class life with an innate sense of his *right* to represent it in literary form, and this is informed by his conviction that it indeed only *becomes* literature when certain principles and rules are applied. This concern regarding class and literature is reproduced in many other texts, Sommerfield's *May Day*

not least among them. Again, here, a journalist is the 'medium': on the 'dank and prison-gloomy stairs' (51) leading to Holborn Viaduct, a reporter comes across an unkempt man with a penny inkbottle, writing: 'And there he sat, not composing possible masterpieces, certainly mute and inglorious, but no undiscovered Milton' (52). The journalist (Pat) regards the man with his detached but literary eye:

> "*He wrote on a pad, sitting on the steps leading up to Holborn*," Pat said to himself, seeing the words in italics, significant, the heading for a poem, the title of a drama. … Pat longed most passionately to know his life, and what he had been so absorbedly writing in those fluent block letters. This was a human being, accurately observed, utterly remote and unknown … Pat was a journalist, a very good one: he saw, noted, wondered, but could not make the imaginative synthesis that goes beyond the facts and discovers the truth. (ibid.)

The apposite invocation of Gray's "Elegy" leads to a consideration of how he might make the mere fact of the man's appearance 'significant' by rendering it in literary form, a form (to Pat) certainly more prestigious than whatever the man's own block capitals might manage to convey.

Both journalists of course *do* bear the right to represent. The point is that the right to represent is not dependent on their class, the right is borne by *all* – it is universal and axiomatic. Moreover, the two newsmen's success or failure in literary terms – in other words the value of their work – is a subjective judgment, and the right to make such judgments of value is equally universal and axiomatic. The resulting asymmetries of value created by the aggregation of such judgments, and the hierarchies they create in the common stock of literature and culture, remain eternally contingent and subject to negotiation. Nevertheless, these asymmetries should in fact be considered a *welcome* expression of inequality, if they are underpinned by the kind of *a priori* equality expressed by Jacques Rancière: 'Equality is a presupposition, an initial axiom – or it is nothing'.

A Writer's Capital Revisited

Having said all that, Sommerfield's narrator asserts that journalist Pat cannot 'make the imaginative synthesis that goes beyond the facts and discovers the truth'. This is a persistent concern surrounding the idea of a true 'working-class literature', which I've touched upon already when discussing Phelan and 'a writer's capital': can those who do

not truly live working-class lives or experiences really represent their 'truth'?

To do so would appear to take a significant investment; Phelan analogises it well in *Lifer* when describing an old lag trying to explain the vagaries of the prison's arcane unwritten rules to the recently incarcerated Mansell: 'Take you years to *understand* that, but it's one of the things you got to know' (43, his emphasis). Between mere knowledge and true understanding stands the barrier of time spent. With that said, it must then be noted: Sommerfield, and Phelan in "The Slip", are both themselves choosing to represent the psychology of bourgeois characters – can they by the same token achieve 'truth'?

A black-and-white approach to the question of the right to represent, itself a form of identity politics, produced as much discomfort in the 1930s as it does today, as evidenced by debates occurring in *The Plebs*. V. Boyle reviews Walter Greenwood's *The Cleft Stick* in 1938, and is damning: '[Greenwood's] object appears to be to shock his readers by mentioning such things as pawnshops and unemployed fathers; [but fails] to arouse sympathy, anger or indignation because, I believe, he does not feel them himself' (98). There is a significant subtext at work here: Boyle is talking about the author of *Love on the Dole* (1932), one of the most celebrated working-class texts of the era. Boyle seems to be suggesting that Greenwood's very success as a writer has disconnected him from his 'writer's capital' and he is now producing an ersatz facsimile of working-class experience. This is redolent of Mirsky's complaint noted previously regarding the 'universalisation' of culture, and indeed of Antonio Gramsci's formulation of the hazard organic intellectuals face, i.e., the need to maintain contact with their milieu (Gramsci 340-1) or otherwise face becoming cultural proxies of the bourgeois.

Nevertheless, Boyle's criticism is on another level obvious: he is accusing Greenwood of a kind of inverse dilettantism, the inference being that one must feel – really *know*, on some fundamental level – what one writes in order to represent authentically and effectively.[16] However, in the same issue, W. Colyer responds to Boyle's review by arguing that '*The Cleft Stick* will bring home to comfortable people who have never had occasion to pawn their Sunday trousers, what life for a large part of the population actually involves' (97), presenting to an extent a justification for the 'social document' that Boyle finds somehow gratuitous. Jim Phelan, in the preface to *Lifer*,

[16] This is further complicated by the knowledge that although it was published in 1937, Greenwood wrote most of *The Cleft Stick*'s stories between 1928 and 1931 (Simmers) -– whether or not Boyle shared that knowledge we have no way of knowing.

justifies it in even stronger terms, attesting of his 'documentary-book' *Jail Journey* that

> the officials of our day, who studied penology, would know something of what it felt like to be a "lifer." They would see the other side. To make that possible is the purpose of all art, literary and otherwise. (6)

That such a purpose might provide grounds for bourgeois representations of the working-class 'other' if conducted in the right spirit is elaborated by Winifred Horrabin, responding to an accusation of 'slumming' found in the *Daily Worker*'s 1936 review of Hugh Massingham's *I Took Off My Tie* (1936):

> It is a kind of slumming, and the class-conscious hypersensitive approach of the communist is understandable. All the same, Mr. Massingham has done a courageous thing, a thing that takes quite as much grit and determination as to urge "the Masses" to revolt; for he has lived in a lousy slum, and been hated by the people he was living amongst – a horrid experience and a frightening one – and has found out, at first-hand, that all the foulness cannot crush out the decent human feelings of the slum proletariat. He deserves credit for it. ("In the Slums", 268)

Horrabin also feels that a crucial aspect of Massingham's account of East End slum life is that he 'is never superior – as some of the University Communists are superior – he is sensitive and sympathetic and he tries to understand' (ibid.). The *Socialist Standard*'s review of Massingham, also in 1936, echoes both sides of the debate here: A. G. A. notes that he 'does not dramatise, neither is he sentimental', but also that it is 'superficial, and does not get below the surface' ("Book Review"). Furthermore (and echoing Phelan and Sommerfield's fictional journalists), the reviewer identifies what they see as the inherent flaw this leads to: 'To be precise, it is *literary*' (ibid., my emphasis).

Horrabin's pointed swipe at the 'University Communists', though, suggests that the right to represent on behalf of and in alignment with the working-class which is usually assumed by the politically sympathetic bourgeois (Massingham, on the other hand, was a traditional liberal) is flawed in a subtler but far more corrosive way than Massingham's unashamedly acknowledged outsider's approach. Willy Goldman, 'authentic' East Ender and author of *East End My Cradle* (1940), could have had Massingham in mind when discussing the social and religious documenters of his milieu in 1938's "Literature and the East End" (published in *New Writing*):

> The writer representing this group is, however, handicapped from the start. He

> is an "outsider" – meaning that his class origin prevents him from bridging the mental gulf between him and his subject. "Living" in the East End is no substitute for the fundamental experience of being an East Ender born and bred. All the complexities involved in that experience are not his. He can only *glean* things. He would have to be a very great artist indeed to probe successfully into the souls of a strange people. (78)

So Goldman asserts that for a true working-class East End literature to occur, there is a necessity for a *native* lived experience – one akin to that which V. Boyle seems to suggest can also be somehow lost unless one maintains one's location within a milieu.[17]

A Culture Appropriated?

Goldman's essay goes further, arguing:

> In recent years the stream of crocodile tears let loose on the unemployed provoked into existence the *J'Accuse* of *Love on the Dole*. Similarly the continual "literary" exploitation of the East End by irresponsible parties has provoked into life an authentic "home-grown" literature. (79)

Jim Phelan seems to support this hypothesis when criticising the 'balderdash' of "A Rolling Stone" by poet Robert Service, the 'Canadian Kipling' or 'Bard of the Yukon' who was in fact a bank clerk (Klinck). Phelan drily observes that 'it was at one time a *sine qua non* that people who wrote about tramps should never have been tramps' (*The Name's Phelan* 63), but that subsequently authors like Jack London 'set up real vagrant-literature against the other effusions [of] spurious writings on vagabondage' (ibid.).

So, proxy representations can certainly provide the spark that ignites 'authentic' literature; the proxies are what Goldman calls the 'scene-designers', the true Eastenders bring the 'cast' (79). However, even today many assert in the name of 'cultural appropriation' that any such authors should be explicitly precluded from imaginatively attempting to represent lived experiences non-native to them.[18] Are we, then, to

[17] An authenticity, though, that could also perhaps be presumed: Jim Phelan finds it 'amusing [that] nowadays in several countries I am called a famous peasant writer, really do know peasants well, and love them, and present their problems' (*The Name's Phelan* 92), when in truth he was never a peasant – he also simply observed them as a temporary interloper.

[18] Yassmin Abdel-Magied, for example, writing in *The Guardian* in 2016 claimed that 'it's not always OK if a white guy writes the story of a Nigerian woman because the actual Nigerian woman can't get published or reviewed to begin with' ("Lionel Shriver"). However, the existence of a fictional Nigerian woman does not equate to the existence of a corresponding real-life silenced counterpart. Moreover, if indeed there *was*

retrospectively denigrate the likes of Dickens, Eliot, and Orwell on similar grounds, despite, as Goldman seems to suggest is possible, their works helping to facilitate the cultural terrain onto which other 'authentic' working-class literature emerged? Challenging their relative pre-eminence in terms of literary value or political bias, for example, is indubitably not the same thing as obviating theirs or similar possible future works altogether.

Goldman continues though: 'This fact – the fact of their birth – is all that [home-grown] writers share in common. There is no identical viewpoint among them', and whereas they may carry 'an underlying protest at previous superficiality … each of the writers preaches his own personal brand of humanity' (79). The fact is that no writer can distil and ventriloquize the experience of an arbitrary group identity with anything other than an equally arbitrary authority, if that authority is based solely and merely on their belonging to that fraction – 'the fact of their birth'. As Goldman pithily observes, if spending one's life in the East End were sufficient qualification to artistically interpret the lives of its residents, then he has 'an aged grandfather who must surely be a first candidate for literary honours' (86).[19] Such a crude criterion reduces the scope of imaginative work to little more than dramatised memoir.

Even if memoir is the aim, still no claim to unassailable truth can be derived merely from fidelity to personal experience. Even then, as Jim Phelan observed in the preface to *The Name's Phelan*, it is a literary endeavour, with the attendant temptations 'to round off a passage or tidy up an episode, to make a neat story instead of the succession of inconsequentialities which a life-story usually is', an endeavour 'where one is – quite inevitably – tempted to show oneself as a combination of martyr, hero, philosopher, and other things' ("Preface"). Stephen Spender (erstwhile schoolmate of Sommerfield), discussing the French writer André Malraux in a 1937 edition of *New Writing*, captures the complexity of the relationship between author and experience well:

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a near-counterpart with latent literary ability, might not her work be provoked into existence as Greenwood's or London's was?

[19] Apposite to note here some of the comments Faber & Faber chose to reproduce in order to 'spell out its virtues' (Kelly) on announcing the republication of Goldman's *East End My Cradle* in 2011, which reflect this point and others aforementioned: 'Mr. Goldman was born to the life he describes so convincingly' (*John O'London's Weekly*); 'one of the most remarkable pictures of poor life' (*The Listener*); 'the great virtue of his writing is in his power of detachment' (*Sunday Times*); 'unusually objective' (*TLS*). These choices serve to demonstrate that even today the perceived selling points of working-class writing are still informed by the enduring assumptions concerning its appeal and/or value: i.e. authentic but impartial documentary.

> The writer must create from a centre which is his environment: and it sometimes happens … that the writer does not fit into his environment. He is then driven to discover some other environment, or, if he is intensely individualist, to create his environment: first to create his environment, and then to create literature from the centre of his environment, from the centre of his own legend. (246)

All literature consists of contributions to the common cultural stock, presented through a personal lens which cannot be solely attributed to facts of birth or postcode. As such, one wonders if the distinction between the 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' voice in working-class literature (or any other branch of literature) is a circle that even needs to be squared, or indeed ever can be – rather, it is negotiated on a spectrum.

With that in mind, working-class literature is an illuminating example to engage, given that it has accrued certain related stereotypes like burrs from the sticky willow of Marxism: claims (or aspirations) to be an autonomous, discrete literature, and an attendant inherent antagonism towards bourgeois literature. Perhaps, in truth, and for humanity's sake, 'authentic' and 'inauthentic', working-class and bourgeois are – and indeed should be – in some ways ultimately inseparable.

A Narrow Orbit

Furthermore, if the notion of 'appropriation' is to be at least coherent (if not justifiable) then it must cut both ways. Goldman argues:

> The human drama has so many more factors than the one of Poverty. It is as mistaken to single out this factor to the exclusion of all others which influence it and which it in turn influences, as would be to write a novel about the wealthy classes in which the main activity was the cashing and spending of cheques. (78-9)

Goldman's last observation is accurate: working-class authors frequently write the bourgeois in exactly the same reductive, boilerplate manner that many claim to resent the other way around. That is to say, in countless working-class texts, portrayals abound of bourgeois characters as, well, pretty much cashing and spending cheques and not much else, portrayals which are every bit as stereotypical as any Hugh Massingham has ever presented of Cockney squalor. In Sommerfield's *May Day*, for example, he archly portrays rich men and women for whom 'taxes, death duties, servants, these were worries from

which they had to distract themselves at times. Being rich is hardly worth it you know' (69).

As we know, Sommerfield is familiar with both milieus, and we have also seen that he can inhabit both personas seemingly at will in real life – both 'tough' working-class and upper middle-class – which would dispel any idea that one can only be 'born' into one or other 'authentic' class outlook. Sommerfield's representation of the bourgeoisie, fittingly, is simultaneously caricatured and perceptive. He uses diction to represent the bourgeois world in a particular fashion, rendering an almost cartoonish opulence:

> Ben**eath** [The Earl of Dunmore] purred the lovely engin**es** of his car, which **sl**id **sm**oo**th**ly ea**st**ward**s**. Ea**st**ward**s** ran the tar-**sm**ooth road, pa**st** the glittering **sh**op window**s**, pa**st** the **sh**op**s** who**se** gla**ss** door**s** opened and **sh**ut like turn**st**ile**s** marking the flow of money. … Large men in blue opened door**s** and made **sm**ooth the way of the noble earl. **St**eel and gla**ss**, **s**oft fabric**s** and coloured wood**s** encompa**ss**ed him: the interior air wa**s** warm, di**sc**reet, hu**sh**ed with the ca**th**edral **s**anctity of weal**th**. (45)

The repetitive sibilance (highlighted above) creates a prose that slips over the page as if lubricated, and an atmosphere of tranquil seclusion, even sequestration.

In a later passage, though, where the Earl's daughter, Pamela, goes shopping, a similar diction and smooth prose is employed, but the world it creates is evoked slightly differently:

> Chantilly's crystal doors swung to after them, extinguishing the harshness of traffic noises and the crudities of the damp outer air. Within brooded a hushed luxuriousness. Polished, sealsmooth assistants materialised themselves when wanted.
>
> How drowsy warm, how soft it is in here, thinks Pamela. In these shops, one is wrapped up as in a cocoon, sheltered from the harsh outer air like a moth in its cocoon. … In London my thoughts are buffeted by the clangour of the lives of millions of people. I am reft from the slow assurance of the presence of my dogs and horses. I cannot think my own thoughts. And here, where this harsh and dangerous clangour of common life is shut out I am invaded and disturbed by other alien atmospheres. I am constrained to accept the values of existence in terms of shimmering silks and jewels; beauty becomes the line of a skirt from hip to ankle, morality the observance of harmony in the colours and shapes of fabrics. Of the rightness of these values my mother is convinced, while I am only momentarily hypnotised into their acceptance. (155-6)

This is a world completely discrete from that of 'the people', but now imagined as constrictive, stifling the somehow immanent and antecedent human values ('the values of existence') that are trapped in the bourgeois aristocrat Pamela like natural gas in shale rock.

Furthermore, Pamela is presented as consciously resisting a set of 'values' that are more accurately described as simple consumerism. I will return to this conflation of consumerism with values later in this thesis; for now suffice to note that irrespective of whether this way of looking at the world is considered to be constitutive of bourgeois 'values' or not, if it can be resisted and/or accepted wilfully then it cannot be considered as a set of values that are *endemic* to that class.

Notwithstanding Sommerfield's evident ability to 'pass' with either class, though, one of *May Day*'s major concerns is the estrangement of the classes (whereas Ellen Wilkinson's *Clash*, as we will see later, is deeply concerned with their convergence and fluidity). Sommerfield uses a recurring motif throughout to describe both class experiences: an unemployed man 'moved uneasily in the narrow orbit of his life' (40); aristocrats 'move in the narrow orbits of their world of pleasure' (79). The point is that both classes are trapped within themselves, like 'so many blinded ants … knowing nothing of what they do beyond the narrow orbit of their own immediate scurryings' (74). *May Day* is a novel of juxtaposition, shifting relentlessly and episodically between ostensible class perspectives; one of its major themes is in effect a confirmation of the difficulty of knowing the class 'other'. However any such difficulty is undoubtedly shared on either side of the seemingly unbridgeable divide: 'There were two races in the world, and they live in all countries' (40).

A Mixed Scene

Ian Haywood argues that the British working class were 'born out of exclusion, absence, and denial of fundamental rights. To be working class was to be unrepresented' (1), that arguably they were 'made' (as per E. P. Thompson) in 1832 when the seeds of Chartism were sown in response to the denial of the franchise in 1832's Reform Bill. The nature of this exclusion, however, is a far more all-pervasive and societally constitutive phenomenon, with a much longer history. Ivan Illich's more general, blunt formulation – 'industrial society cannot forgo its victims' (*Shadow Work* 115) – points a little more acutely towards its somewhat ambiguous essence. Rancière fleshes it out most exhaustively in *The Philosopher and His Poor*; indeed, it is the central thesis of the book. According to Rancière, from Plato onwards it has been philosophers, those who grant themselves the leisure to

think – those who have what Phelan calls 'a real mind-life' (*The Name's Phelan* 152) – who ultimately define the intellectual possibilities of those who do not possess that leisure, and thus in a sense create them as a class – as a normative and discrete category.

Rancière's conviction is that philosophy depends for its very existence on what it excludes; it is in fact constituted by and through the act of exclusion, creating along the way a simulacrum of intellectual life for those it excludes:

> …an ersatz that philosophy cannot do without, since in order to preserve its role in the legislation of legitimate thoughts, it is itself obliged to produce a discourse on non-philosophy, on illegitimate modes of thinking. (*PP* 131)

So, following Rancière, bourgeois authors, in (even subconsciously) claiming the *sole* right to think through and document working-class experience on its behalf, simultaneously create for the working class a discrete but diminished, ancillary 'philosophy of the poor' (ibid.). In practical terms, this means the conflation of certain conventions and orthodoxies (an obvious example being linguistic registers like Received Pronunciation) with the notion of 'high culture'; and thus, by default, establishing as an obverse 'working-class culture' anything that fails to conform to those norms. Furthermore, the foundation and provenance of that culture is the workplace, and so when 'the literati [celebrate] work as the true culture of the poor', they do so while also warning against 'the dangers of developing a split personality' (xxvi) – that is to say, the working classes granting themselves the right to occupy *both* realms intellectually, i.e. work and leisure.

That the so-called 'true culture of the poor' is more often than not *celebrated*, as opposed to condemned or mocked, is in fact crucial. Ultimately, this is in Rancière's view one of 'the master logics of modernity: exclusion by homage' (ibid.), identifying a similar tendency in Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* 'with its insistence on opposing proletarian *amor fati* to bourgeois culture games' (ibid.). We have already seen Phelan and Sommerfield's journalists embody this sophistic exclusion by homage: they are infatuated and titillated by the noble savages they come upon, nevertheless, to them, only when they benevolently apply their superior literary faculties to the fascinating but faulty narratives of working-class life does it become Literature: Phelan's newspaperman decreeing the shape of the narrative and who is or isn't a hero; Sommerfield's Pat re-imagining the mute and inglorious man on the steps of Holborn viaduct. They reflect that the spurious division of 'class cultures' is more effectively maintained not by open assertions and/or jealous

guarding of bourgeois superiority, but by an effusive, indulgent (but nevertheless condescending) reverence for oh-so-authentic expressions of so-called working-class culture, conducted within sanctioned paradigms. This rings even more nauseatingly true today, as I will address with reference to the Kit de Waal edited anthology *Common People* (2019) at the conclusion of this thesis.

Furthermore, as a counterbalance to this 'exclusion by homage' there also exists a kind of meta-narrative one might term '*in*clusion by asceticism'. Albeit from different perspectives, both Ortega y Gasset and Rancière identify this tacit narrative whereby a supposed abnegation of the baser rewards of worldly success proves a certain elite strata worthy of power and hegemony (a neat trick). Essentially this amounts to the self-justifying aristocratic idea of *noblesse oblige* with a sprinkling of virtuous austerity to make it appear more like an equal transaction.

However, it is important to note that Ortega y Gasset very specifically does not equate this nobility with social class (as is often misunderstood) – in fact, particular ire is reserved for the philosophically deficient, self-satisfied bourgeois who, *qua* possessors of societal influence, in fact share the primitivism of mass-men:

> For philosophy to rule, it is not necessary that philosophers be the rulers – as Plato at first wished – nor even for rulers to be philosophers – as was his latter, more modest, wish. Both these things are, strictly speaking, most fatal. For philosophy to rule, it is sufficient for it to exist; that is to say, for the philosophers to be philosophers. For nearly a century past, philosophers have been everything but that – politicians, pedagogues, men of letters, and men of science. (115)

This is a very utopian formulation: essentially, the philosophical rigour of the best of men could restore what Ortega y Gasset sees as Europe's lost 'moral code' (187), magically trickling down, infiltrating and influencing the ordering of society, in an atmosphere that is supra-class. Ultimately, the point is that though Rancière and Ortega y Gasset approach this issue from quite different perspectives, perhaps even with the advancement of quite different interests in mind, there nevertheless is evidence of a related conviction: namely, that pursuing autonomous, belligerent cultural and philosophical formations along class lines is a both a red herring and a fool's errand.

In this sense, for all its evident frustration regarding the seemingly irreconcilable 'two races in the world', *May Day* nevertheless strikes me as an optimistic book irrespective of its author's political convictions. Sommerfield wrote of *May Day* much later in 1984

that 'when I wrote it I'd have probably said that [it] was Socialist Realism. Now I'd call it early 30s communist romanticism' ('Author's Note', xviii-xix). Sommerfield had in mind its rather simplistic, idealistic bent, which had perhaps not aged well in the light of the inarguable social advances of the half century subsequent to its publication. However, I propose that one facet of its straightforwardly utopian tone remains both relevant and appropriate: that is, both its sympathy with, and attempt to connect with and imagine the bourgeois experience. Bubbling under *May Day* is a persistent hinting at the possibility of, and most certainly the need for, a mutual understanding: 'The class struggle is not simple, a revolution is not a fight between those on one side of a line and those on the other. But today things are artificially simplified' (*May Day,* 201).

This 'artificial simplification' evokes Jacques Rancière, echoing as it does his disillusionment with Marxism at the point where he saw the proletariat being abstracted from actual experience to become 'a normative category consecrated by a certain Marxist "science"' (Donald Reid, xx), from which were subsequently born theoretical approaches that asserted the possibility of an autonomous, revolutionary route to working-class emancipation.[20] Furthermore, underpinning *Proletarian Nights*, Rancière's radical analysis of nineteenth century French working-class utopian visions, is an assertion of the need to re-examine such artificial simplifications:

> We must take [a] detour on the supposedly direct road from exploitation to class message, from worker identity to its collective expression. We must examine the mixed scene in which some workers, with the complicity of intellectuals who have gone out to meet them and perhaps wish to expropriate their role, replay and shift the old myth about who has the right to speak for others by trying their hands at words and theories from on high. (22-3)

A mixed scene, that is, where class identity is contested by utopian worker poets and thinkers seeking to transcend class altogether. For these workers, meeting and commingling with the bourgeois 'other' at the margins and appropriating for themselves 'the "night" of poets and thinkers' (219) ironically makes class-consciousness more acute: engagements with 'those other worlds, which supposedly anaesthetise the sufferings of the workers, can actually be the thing that sharpens their awareness of such sufferings' (19). This awareness can in fact precipitate ever-proliferating contributions *by workers* to a more accurate understanding of themselves as a class – that is, fundamentally, as

[20] Rancière, specifically, had his former mentor Louis Althusser in mind (Donald Reid xix).

economically/politically disenfranchised – as opposed to contributions *on behalf of* workers which tend to seek, whether consciously or otherwise, to establish the working class as a disenfranchised *culture*, to be curated and admired, but never to acknowledge that if there are to be discrete 'class cultures' then their very existence is predicated on the perpetuation of separation, of exclusion. In short, not to abolish classes, but to consecrate them. This is a narrative advanced across the political spectrum; it does perhaps remain a little surprising, though, that this is deeply characteristic of the ostensibly emancipatory theory of the left, then as now.

Furthermore, embodied as we have seen by Sommerfield and Phelan, we might imagine a mixed scene in literary terms, in which the supposedly binary registers of class could be compromised by working-class authors who claim the right to think and imagine the 'class other' by occupying bourgeois subjectivities, as bourgeois authors have hitherto so confidently and routinely done in terms of the working class. From the other side of the coin, we have seen the inhibitions that questions of fidelity to working-class experience impose, the false dichotomies of overt political content versus detached objectivity and of the stylistically esoteric versus the 'plain', answered or at least compromised by the texts in this chapter. The formal problems of the novel have been shown to be problems as much dictated by fiscal concerns and arbitrary literary expectations, as opposed to being a property of an alien, irreconcilable form. We have seen that political content does not necessarily and inherently compromise literary quality; we have seen exposed the assumptions of the right to represent, and the governing but ultimately discretionary literary conventions that attend that right. Related and deeper issues of proxy representation and cultural appropriation prove not to be quite as simple as matters of oppressive power relations and thus 'bad'.

In that light, perhaps we might think differently. Perhaps we might conclude that a free ranging across the imaginative spectrum may not only serve as the seed that germinates other imaginative works, but also unlock potential reservoirs of mutual understanding between classes; classes that are ultimately comprised of human beings who are really not so different as theories of class might have us believe. Rancière saw such a mixed scene as being enabled by 'the transgressive will to appropriate the "night" of poets and thinkers, to appropriate the language and culture of the other, to act as if intellectual equality were indeed real and effectual' (*PP* 219). That '"night" of poets and thinkers' is a literal reality as well as a figurative intellectual terrain: the abstract right to think, to imagine,

is made real and verified simply by its practice, but that practice requires actual time away from work, i.e., leisure. As we have already begun to draw out in this chapter, the 'language and culture of the other' never rests upon simple (and often fatuous) binaries, but in fact should point towards the endlessly myriad nature of human personalities and our unending need to communicate, not least through art. Paul Valéry wrote that 'if what has happened in the one person were communicated directly to the other, all art would collapse, all the effects of art would disappear' (qtd. in Berthoff 11): indeed so, and it must be remembered that 'the other' in art is (should be) ultimately everyone and anyone, not an avatar for an arbitrary group chosen from a suite of cultural monoliths. Rancière's final point, though – that we must 'act as if intellectual equality were indeed real and effectual' – is central to this thesis. It is, though, the *attitudinal* component implied in this formulation that is paramount, and best expressed in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*'s related formulation that struck Rancière with a life-changing force: 'Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified'.

Authors may *emerge* from the working class, understood as an economic reality, but they are not forever bound to it or by it in perpetuity; their intellectual and aesthetic possibilities, interests, and/or priorities are not indelibly defined by it as bearers of a class 'identity'. Reiterating and reinforcing this might better advance the mixed scene Rancière described. Such a mixed scene is indubitably worth striving for, certainly more so than pursuing ever harder and faster demarcations between 'bourgeois' and 'working-class' cultures as normative and discrete categories. This can only be done by rejecting wholesale the concept of 'class identity' as an ascriptive reality. Because ascriptive identities have one thing in common: in the final analysis they confine rather than liberate.

George Garrett

'Living as I am, I have never had the chance to be book.' [*sic*]

George Garrett indeed did not have much of a chance 'to be book', opining as such in a letter to *New Writing*'s John Lehmann, his erstwhile publisher during the 30s ("Letters" 258). While I can only speculate whether or not the irregular grammar of this statement was a mere typo or a more deliberate (and literary) rhetorical device, the fact remains that it not only perfectly encapsulates the concrete realities of Garrett's writing life but also distils a sense of the many peripheral issues surrounding representation and identity in working-class writing of which material circumstances are an undoubted crux. The freedom 'to be book' is not unfettered for working-class authors, and more especially 'to be the book one *wants to be*', as it were.

Garrett was born in 1896 to parents of both Protestant and Catholic Irish stock. Stowing away on a tramp steamer in 1913, he jumped ship in Buenos Aires, and subsequently was a fireman on a merchant ship and travelled widely, from South America to Canada, from Egypt to India and the Canary Islands. Settling for a time in New York, he became a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (the 'Wobblies'), and was forced out of the USA in 1920 after a crackdown on that organisation. He then returned to the city to which he is indelibly tethered, Liverpool, where he lived most of his life and was a prominent labour activist, but also an author, playwright, and occasional actor.

Notably, he was acquainted with George Orwell, for whom he served as a guide to Liverpool during the writing of *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937); of Garrett, Orwell wrote in his diary:

> I was very greatly impressed by Garrett. Had I known before that it is he who writes under the pseudonym of Matt Lowe in the *Adelphi* and one or two other places, I would have taken steps to meet him earlier. … I urged him to write his autobiography, but as usual, living in about 2 rooms on the dole with a wife (who I gather objects to his writing) and a number of kids, he finds it impossible to settle to any long work and can only do short stories. (*The Orwell Prize*)

This entry points to a number of issues salient to this chapter. Firstly, Orwell's urging of Garrett to write an autobiography is indicative of the pressure often placed on working-

class writers to adhere to content and narrative directives dictated by bourgeois patrons and the literary establishment in general (then and now). Secondly, Orwell confirms and expands on Garrett's material conditions and their corollaries and ramifications which Garrett expressed as 'living as I am' in the epigraph above. Lastly, Garrett's use of pseudonyms is noted, which the editors of *Ten Years on the Parish* (a collection of Garrett's letters and other writings) attribute to reasons both concrete – for example, the fear of being deemed unavailable for work by the Unemployed Assistance Board – but also conceptual, citing his 'belief in emphasising the collective and the subsuming of personal identity' (Morris et al., *Ten Years* 16), a persistent trope and aspiration in working-class writing. This final point is where Garrett was wrong (if indeed he did believe so): personal identity can be subordinated but never subsumed, and the collective can be emphasised – even identi*fied* with – but this is necessarily provisional. It is a mistake to construct it as an identity in itself.

Two Room Tourism

The two rooms Orwell notes are very definitely the realm of the material; indeed Garrett in another letter to Lehmann complains that his bourgeois patron 'will probably have *a room of [his] own* to write in, not a crowded place where each member of the family is treading on the other's heels' ("Letters" 270, my emphasis). However, it is impossible not to hear an echo here of Virginia Woolf's 1929 *A Room of One's Own*; whether the reference was intended or not, I cannot know. Nevertheless, Woolf's argument is relevant: she is referring to not only a literal but also a figurative space in which to write (in her case, for women in a male-dominated tradition). In Garrett's case, this figurative writing space is perpetually attenuated by the open objection of his intimates, as Orwell notes. However, there is a deeper undercurrent to this attenuation emanating from Garrett's social milieu at large. Garrett complains to Lehmann that if he was to use rooms in friends' houses 'it would be as an exhibit' (ibid. 246), that 'a fellow sitting down to write is considered a freak' (ibid. 255). He compares the 'psychology of [Lehmann's] friends who appreciate there are times you should be let alone' (ibid. 254) to the entirely diametrical attitude of Garrett's milieu who cannot see that 'when I sat down to write I was doing hard work' (ibid. 271). In short, Garrett feels an alienation akin to the circus grotesque,

and must constantly justify himself and contend with a general belittling of writing-as-trade.

An obvious comparison to draw is with Orwell himself, whose well-meaning excursions into conditions of privation required something of a determination to 'tough it out', but because an escape route always existed he could never really inhabit the daily pressures of a life lived like Garrett or other similar working-class authors. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), for instance, Orwell muses that 'sooner or later I should have to go to B. for more money, but it seemed hardly decent to do so yet' (114). This brings to mind a modern-day articulation of the same point, in the British band Pulp's 1995 song "Common People", which rebukes the voyeurism of upper-class slumming: 'But still you'll never get it right … If you called your dad he could stop it all' (Cocker et al.). Edward Said hammers a very similar point home in his essay "Tourism Among the Dogs": 'the off-stage presence of home and the possibility of a phone call to Eric Blair's [i.e. Orwell's] Aunt Nellie constitute the narrator's bad faith when he was a *plongeur* in Paris or a tramp in England' (95).

The imputation of bad faith, though, is certainly contestable. Intent to deceive, insincerity, even dishonesty? Perhaps Said means the term in Sartre's existentialist sense, i.e. self-deception employed to evade responsibility for one's actions. This may be fair to say of Pulp's fictitious girl from Saint Martin's College, reproached by singer Jarvis Cocker for thinking 'that poor is cool', and contemned because 'everybody hates a tourist / Especially one who thinks it's all such a laugh' (Cocker et al.). However, it seems unduly harsh to attribute this attitude to Orwell whose motives seem at the very least a good deal less frivolous. Nonetheless, Said continues (reviewing an Orwell biography), noting

> …the peculiar force of [the authors'] tautology, "Orwell belonged to the category of writers who write." And could afford to write, they might have added. In contrast, they speak of George Garrett, whom Orwell met in Liverpool, a gifted writer, seaman, dockworker, Communist militant, "the plain facts of [whose] situation – on the dole, married and with kids, the family crowded into two rooms – made it impossible for him to attempt any extended piece of writing." Orwell's writing life then was from the start an affirmation of unexamined bourgeois values. (95)

This is an extraordinary criticism. In the first instance, as Christopher Hitchens has rightly observed, 'the evidence that supposedly shames Orwell by contrast is in fact supplied by – none other than Orwell himself!' (43); i.e. Orwell is at least in some small part responsible

for Garrett being known at all. For example, in "The Proletarian Writer", Orwell praises Garrett's work alongside Jack London, Jack Hilton, Jim Phelan, and James Hanley (42). Secondly, though, and more importantly, what is a 'bourgeois *value*'? As previously discussed, and as will be returned to throughout, I take issue with the idea of values as inhering in social classes. Furthermore, even if Orwell did hold such a thing as 'bourgeois values' (however these are quantified), it would still seem a stretch to blithely characterise them as unexamined, and indeed extend that observation to characterise his entire writing career. This example demonstrates exactly where the fetishist passion for lived experience, the cornerstone of identity politics, becomes toxic.

Two Room Fashion

Some appreciation of nuance is necessary in this realm. In "Common People", Cocker is mocking a patently obvious, empty, and overt iteration of 'poverty tourism': 'Smoke some fags and play some pool / Pretend you never went to school' (Cocker et al.). His ire is directed towards a dilettante indulging themselves in displaying what she understands to be markers of 'working-class culture', and by extension castigating and rejecting such lazy stereotyping. Fags and pool are but two modern examples of such perceived markers, which have persisted as long as the working class has been understood to exist *qua* a class.

For instance, Garrett's short story "Apostate", depicting an incident concerning a young schoolboy, Cuff, and corporal punishment in a Catholic school, displays close concern with clothing and its implications. Cuff attends school primarily to avoid 'being sent to an orphanage where the boys wore cheap stereotyped uniforms' (103), but nonetheless is poor enough to qualify for 'police clothes or the "Dees clothes," as they were familiarly called by his schoolmates' (104), which are a form of charitably donated clothing including wooden clogs. For Cuff, this makes him feel 'marked out for everybody's attention' (106), as if 'every tongue was talking about him, the lad with the "Dees clothes"' (ibid.). Other stories also feature clothing, with varying subtexts. In "Firstborn", a sewer cleaner is saving for a silk baby robe, but on the day he is to collect it he is sent down a sewer to clear a blockage which turns out to be a dead baby, discarded presumably for lack of money. Its closing scene in the shop as he collects the robe very

clearly juxtaposes the aspirational nature of such purchases with the grim reality represented by the baby, and as a result 'to him the robe was smelly, the sheen was green-mouldy and the folds were horribly teeth-marked' (39). So, respectively, "Apostate" is explicit about the shame attached to inferior clothing within Cuff's working-class milieu, whereas the expensive silk robe in "Firstborn" seems repugnant in a similar milieu where life is so cheap.

The clothes in both examples are not cultural expressions, but rather items that reflect/refract material financial reality. This fact finds its illuminating obverse in contemporary fashion discourse. Articles like "Why Fashion's Reappropriation of British Working Class Culture Isn't a Bad Thing" (HB Team) and "British Fashion Exploits, Celebrates and Fetishises the Working Class" (Deeley) have differing views on whether such an 'appropriation' is a good or a bad thing. However, this is a completely irrelevant discussion when both viewpoints are founded on the same false premise: that the working class is, or has, a culture to be appropriated. This is not a new phenomenon, as Melisa Gray-Ward has noted:

> In 1967 Roland Barthes said that clothing was a language: an ensemble of symbols combined by the wearer to communicate their sense of self. What we wear says less about who we are, and more about who we want people to *think* we are. Clothing allows us to shift between classes, or at least appear to. In eighteenth century England wealthy young men would "dress below" their prescribed class to rebel against a system they benefitted from. ("What It Means")

Whether the fashion industry's fascination with so-called working-class fashion is either 'drawing inspiration' from or 'maliciously appropriating' the culture of an entire class of people as expressed by its clothing misses the point entirely. Rather more pertinent is the fact that the industry is subtly complicit in altering the perception of the term 'working-class' from one which denotes an economic position (and not a desirable one), to one that denotes a subculture to be valorised and 'respected'. This reaches its outstandingly heinous extreme with t-shirts emblazoned with the slogan 'WORKING CLASS', and – with an irony so magnificently grotesque as to be scarcely believable – hoodies emblazoned with 'UNEMPLOYED' available for £25 from H&M (O'Flynn).

This dynamic operates in reverse in Garrett's "The Overcoat", where an item of fine clothing is linked to the 'pull oneself up by one's bootstraps' aspirational narrative that the working class is encouraged to accept and buy into. Bert Allan's brother Andrew

has just been taken to hospital quite suddenly, and Bert sits in their shared bedroom (indeed on their shared bed) and reflects on his brother. Bert had found his brother's interest in books peculiar, wondering how he 'could sit for long hours cramped over stuff of that description' (52). The only practical benefit he can see of his brother's eschewing of racing and movies is the expensive overcoat he has been able to afford due to the savings that are an adjunct of the virtuous sacrificial asceticism of the autodidact. The coat is then constructed as a loose metaphor for his brother's superior intellect: 'It was an excellent garment, superior in every respect' (ibid.). Eventually, the trying on of the overcoat becomes a trying on of a different, unattainable character:

> He could not help being amused at the ludicrous, stunted reflections he saw [in the mirror]. The overcoat was much too big. … He stood off from the glass, and while viewing himself from several angles, experienced an inward swelling as if his body was eager to grow all of a sudden. This pleasant sensation encouraged him to persevere with the try-on. … after twirling a white scarf loosely around his neck, he put the overcoat on again. A remarkable improvement was instantly recognised. … he noticed how the overcoat, though still inclined to flap at the bottom, was gradually becoming adapted to his figure. (52-3)

As he continues to wear it from day to day, 'he feels 'much smarter and prosperous in it' (53), and begins to find himself 'disgusted' by his own original coat (54). Bert notices that no other men in the street wear 'an overcoat half as good as Andrew's' and is 'impressed by this fact', but is also nettled and disturbed to overhear one of two gossiping women remark that 'his coat doesn't fit him very well' (ibid.). Nevertheless, as time goes by, 'unconsciously, he was adopting his brother's brisk gait … and the unbowed head' (55), until the moment when he is finally mistaken for Andrew, as a smiling stranger whispers to his companions that 'that fellow has the right stuff in him. What a headpiece! His last lecture was unanswerable' (ibid.). This pierces the illusion:

> …[Bert] was half-prepared to go back and say in explanation: "You're all mistaken, fellows. I'm not Andrew. I'm only his brother. I'll never possess brains like him. I'll never be the man he is; never in my life." But he did not go back. Instead, he accepted similar acts of misplaced respect, as if he were the person genuinely entitled to them. In turn, they produced an exhilarating effect, and also a fresh craving which he deliberately sought later on, by slowing his pace to gather snatches of praise from the ordinary conversations of a group of men he happened to be passing at the time. (55-6)

However, after visiting his brother in hospital the illusion begins to sour 'and he regretted

ever tampering with something he had no right to touch" (58), and eventually feels a tinge of relief when he decides to stop wearing it. Ultimately, as he is cleaning the coat before returning it to the wardrobe, 'toil[ing] over a stain that was bafflingly obstinate' (62), he learns of his brother's death. "The Overcoat"'s eponymous aspirational garment, then, is constructed as a symbol of the self-realisation and (limited) power which knowledge and education can enable. Which makes the girl in Pulp's "Common People" all the more egregious in feigning a lack of education – one can be certain Orwell never did such a thing.

Two Room Culture

Edward Said, though, as we have seen, holds that Orwell's 'bad faith' is an *a priori* disposition, inherent in and evidenced by his economic position in the world. To then further add a causal relationship where one's economic origin automatically produces reified 'unexamined' values seems to me an unexamined conclusion, one that affirms a sense of 'bourgeois' and 'working-class' as being hermetically sealed, antithetical cultures, with this antithesis underpinned by and determined by money – presumably from birth. How poor would Orwell have had to be at the outset in order that his faith would not be questioned? Exactly how much money must one have for one's values to be deemed unexamined and bourgeois? The necessary companion of Said's righteous castigation of the apparently dishonest gawker Orwell is in fact what Cocker is explicitly reacting against: that is, the essentialisation of working-class people on the basis of their poverty.

Walter Benn Michaels has summed up the literary manifestation of this rather well, and bears quoting in full:

> …[literary criticism] has made its particular contribution by beginning to study the literature of the working class in the same way that it now studies African American or Asian American literature. What this does is turn class position into culture, something – like heritage – to be proud of after all. But why should the fact of poverty be a point of pride or a badge of authenticity? And why should professors of literature be committed to appreciating the poetry of the poor? Or to thinking that it counts as a blow for justice when they do? If you are committed to equality, that commitment is – must be – based on the idea that those who have been denied equality have been deprived. And the commitment to the poor is based precisely on the sense that they are deprived, that they are victims. But once we start insisting that working-class literature has

> its own value and that, as literary critics, we have done the poor an injustice by failing to appreciate their literature – you commit yourself not only to ignoring but erasing the inequality, not by removing the deprivation but by denying that it is deprivation.
>
> My point here is not that working-class or poor people can't produce great literature but that they do so only by overcoming an obstacle, the obstacle of being working-class or poor. Denying that poverty is an obstacle – treating working-class literature on the model of, say, French literature – denies the relevance of class inequality. From this perspective, the idea that teachers of literature should be committed to what one critic calls "valuing" "working-class cultures" is fundamentally reactionary. Indeed, the minute you start reading literature by poor people in the same way you read ethnic literatures, you've arrived at something like inequality heaven. Where you just used to distract yourself from economic difference by focusing on cultural difference, now you can celebrate economic difference by pretending that it *is* cultural difference. (200-1, his emphasis)

That is, material class position is transformed into cultural 'working-classness', and then venerated as somehow noble in the same way as, for example, 'blackness' or 'queerness'. As William Egginton puts it, the concomitant 'balkanisation of [such] fields' ("Opinion") in humanities departments makes the study of the marginalised risk becoming *in itself* 'marginalised – or self-marginalised' (ibid.); whereby the very differences we should be seeking to erase, minimise the significance of, and/or draw into the larger parish of universal humanity, in fact become vested interests for certain actors and thus further perpetuated.

It is one thing, and to me perfectly obvious, to observe that there are certain aspects of anyone's lived experience that cannot simply be replicated by temporarily placing oneself in the same material conditions: as Cocker wrote: 'You will never understand / How it feels to live your life / With no meaning or control … [You'll] never watch your life slide out of view' (Cocker et al.). However, in my extensive reading of Orwell, I have never known him to suggest that he has been able to fully inhabit the epistemological reality of knowing one has no future; rather he has attempted to imaginatively scratch the surface. It is quite another thing, though, to suggest that the faith of one's actions is inescapably defined by one's class position, that a concern with the economic conditions of others must necessarily be hollow, and that one's values must and shall be lazily and/or blindly held as a similarly inevitable product of one's economic position.

A recent *Guardian* article, for instance, bemoans the lack of working-class lecturers in universities. It attributes this dearth in no small part to the need for working-class students to 'conform to middle-class values while they study' (Reynolds, "Working-Class

Lecturers"), which makes it hard to form 'productive intellectual relationships with lecturers who may have very different cultural values' (ibid.). However, while success at university in social terms may in some ways be affected by norms such as dress, as I have noted above, this in itself has been 'reverse appropriated' to make working-class 'cool'. Furthermore, in general terms, success will indeed be affected by the need to overcome well-documented financial pressures. But these material factors must be separated from *actual* values, especially those that academic success is predicated upon – hard work, intellectual curiosity, etc. – and it must be consistently maintained that these are not in some way endemic to one's social class. Because otherwise, ultimately, the end result is the poverty of low expectations.

All of this is important in literary terms because the corollary of these kinds of erroneous assumptions is that 'working-class literature' as a definition comes to mean something other than simply 'literature produced by a member of the working class'. Such a definition could be a potentially useful 'generic' distinction if, for instance, one were specifically seeking examples of some of the unique epistemological aspects (as discussed above) of that class position imaginatively – and effectively – rendered. Why one might wish to do so is perhaps best grasped via the rationale for 'committed' writing in the Marxist sense, the purpose of which is laid out by Engels:

> …under our conditions novels are mostly addressed to readers from bourgeois circles … Thus the socialist problem novel in my opinion fully carries out its mission if by a faithful portrayal of the real conditions it dispels the dominant conventional illusions concerning them, shakes the optimism of the bourgeois world, and inevitably instils doubt as to the eternal validity of that which exists. (Engels et al. 88)

So, essentially, that through literature hitherto hidden aspects of life as a member of the working class may be brought to light (whether the intent be antagonistic or in the interest of cross-class solidarity is somewhat beside the point here).

However, when the economic position of 'working-class' begins to be figured as a discrete *culture*, then a presupposition forms that anything and everything written by a member of the working class is produced by and/or should be refracted through the prism of that economic position, and indeed is usually *required to be so*, so best to tickle those jaded bourgeois palates. As contemporary author Kit de Waal has observed, echoing but problematising Engels' formulation:

> …working-class writers, it seems, must endlessly regurgitate their own life stories – or versions of them – whereas middle-class writers can explore the world, the universe and beyond. The assumption being that working-class writers and stories are marginal. They are not: more than a third of the population is from traditional working-class origins. And it is also assumed that in order for these stories to be commercial they have to be filtered through middle-class sensibilities or explained for an imagined middle-class reader. This squashes the multiplicity of working-class experience into a few standard tropes: the misery memoir, the escape, the clever boy or girl "done good". ("Make Room")

So, one man's dispelling of illusions and shaking of optimism, is another woman's diminishment of creative potentials. This is a fine balance not easily codified or theorised. It is a pendulum that swings from one pole – 'working-class' as an economic position productively made visible through fiction – to another – 'working-class' as marginal culture, to be appreciated and respected, but usually, in reality, to be the vicarious entertainment of those in more advantageous class positions.

Two Room Literature

This is a problem that manifests itself even when the best intentions are present, as evidenced by George Garrett's relationship with John Lehmann. Behind Lehmann's launching of *New Writing* lay a clear intent to promote cross-class solidarity, and break down barriers between the bourgeois literary world and the more submerged world of working-class authors (Morris et al., "Dear Garrett" 204-5). I have previously noted that Lehmann was conspicuous for his editorial and aesthetic judgment, constructive encouragement, and commitment to aesthetic quality. I have also, though, touched on the imbalance of power in such relationships; as Andy Croft points out, 'Few working-class writers between the wars were able to secure publication for their work without this sort of encouragement, support and material help from at least one established writer' (*Red Letter Days* 178). This can take the form of more straightforward editorial interventions (Morris et al. describe a dispute between Garrett and Lehmann regarding the use of the word 'stream' over 'rivulet', for instance ["Dear Garrett" 205]), but also a more *a priori* form of intervention. During their correspondence, Garrett mentions the unemployed march of 1922, to which Lehmann responds 'why not write the story of that march?' ("Letters" 228). However, this comes with an attendant injunction: 'Make it racy' (ibid.).

After Garrett completes the MS some months later, he writes to Lehmann granting that 'whether the result is in keeping with your requirements is up to you to say' (ibid. 233).

Now it is fair to say that these sorts of directions may well have had at least as much to do with Lehmann's commercial sense as a desire to administer and oversee the creative process; in other words, he knew the audience *New Writing* was actually reaching. It also seems clear that Garrett was as aware of this as Kit de Waal is today; Alan O'Toole has pointed out that 'George realised that the average member of the working class did not read *Left Review*, much less *The Adelphi* and other such self-consciously "arty" magazines' (69). O'Toole further notes that 'It is always disillusioning for a working-class writer to realise that he has an almost exclusively middle-class audience' (ibid.), and it seems to me that O'Toole's innocent qualification simultaneously misses the point and makes it. That is to say, while it may indeed be true that this is disillusioning, what underpins the *reason* for this disillusionment is the assumption that it is a desirable aim for working-class writers to primarily reach working-class readers, which in turn tends to suggest that bourgeois writers should be principally targeting bourgeois readers. This kind of thinking covertly figures as anomalies those working-class readers who might prefer to pick up your Prousts, Pynchons and any other 'highbrows' of the literary world, and also erases the reality that the bourgeois readership in the main was and is probably quite happy with Arnold Bennett or Jo Nesbø, thank you very much. In short, it further contributes to the conflation of cultural preference with economic position.

It is also worth questioning to what degree the authors themselves are responsible for these assumptions, as opposed to the 'literati' or the literature industry in general. The American author Jonathan Franzen, for instance, has written that

> to the extent that novelists think about audience at all, we like to imagine a "general audience" – a large, eclectic pool of decently educated people who can be induced, by strong enough reviews or aggressive enough marketing, to treat themselves to a good, serious book. We do our best not to notice that, among adults with similar educations and similarly complicated lives, some read a lot of novels while others read few or none. (75)

Interviewing a linguistic anthropologist for the same article, he further notes that her findings suggested that while class elements may exist in terms of the inculcation and content of reading habits, these are by no means uniform: working-class communities in the Protestant Midwest, for instance, strongly promote literature as self-improvement (75-6). All of which seems to support the hypothesis that while class may figure in literary

habits, most obviously in terms of available leisure, it is by no means a determinant.

Furthermore, as the Garrett/Lehmann correspondence continues it points towards a choice that bourgeois writers are generally not required to make, at least not before a word is written: Garrett suggests that he may 'want to work [the hunger march piece] in with something bigger later on' ("Letters" 236); to which Lehmann's immediate response is 'Is it a sort of biography? Or a novel?' (ibid. 238). Perhaps innocuous, but the divergence is articulated. Garrett's reply, longer than was customary, makes plain the exigencies at play: 'I have started under a lot of outside pressure to write a book on "Unemployment" (I mean the flesh and blood experiences)' (ibid. 239); to which Lehmann replies: 'I think you've got a social duty to do something about it too' (ibid. 241). Who knows what kind of writer George Garrett may have become were he economically emancipated enough to choose his own literary path, unfettered by an unceasingly prescribed obligation to describe the water whilst he was drowning.

We can see, then, in literary terms how easily a call like Engels' for 'commitment' can narrow into a set of proscriptions as bemoaned by de Waal and played out between Garrett and Lehmann. And the endgame of these kinds of monocultural attitudes is, ultimately, the dead end of what we now call identity politics. And, importantly, this cuts both ways – Garrett himself is not immune to its insidious creep, that elevation of lived experience to an unassailable primacy that draws all possibility of solidarity down ever-proliferating counterproductive cul-de-sacs. He admits that 'yet I am keen on this "Unemployment" book, not as my own particular bellyache but to give the average person a "feeling" idea of what it means,' and that he thought it 'the only other way left of getting under their skins' (ibid. 239), a sentiment deeply redolent of Engels' mandate, and of course an admirable and important ambition.

In a subsequent letter, though, in order to demonstrate to Lehmann 'that I do recognise my social duties' (ibid. 242), Garrett relates to Lehmann that he personally showed Orwell around Liverpool during the writing of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. However, in a letter dated a week later, he condemns Orwell's book as 'a terrible hotch-potch' and 'one long sneer' (ibid. 245), without outlining why other than to say that 'a book of that type can do a lot of damage' (ibid.). This begs the question: how? What form of damage? At what point does a dangerous 'misrepresentation' occur, especially in a non-fiction account, in which Garrett himself has had a personal involvement? This can only ever be the subject of speculation.

However, perhaps Garrett reveals something significant in another letter to Lehmann where he mentions another working-class writer, Lewis Jones:

> […it has been] said that Lewis Jones wrote "Cwymardy" while drawing the U.A.B. That may be so, I don't dispute it. But Lewis Jones nor nobody else ever tried to write under the conditions I am doing now. They are unique and abnormal. (ibid. 263)

To be clear at this juncture – I am in no way seeking to diminish the very real material conditions under which Garrett wrote: they were as close to intolerable as one could imagine. But it is hard not to detect a note of equivocation in regard to Lewis Jones' material conditions, and furthermore a very clear foregrounding of the uniqueness of Garrett's own position. Could it be that Garrett's negative assessment of Orwell's work is due (being as it is compiled from myriad observations) to its inevitable divergence from or simply its plain difference to Garrett's own very specific experience and outlook?

Two Room Truth

To this point, consider Garrett's attitude to Conrad. In a critical essay on Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, published in the *Adelphi* in June 1936, Garrett opens with the following statement:

> The true artist is supposed to portray life whole, but it is almost next to impossible for an artist or anybody else to see life whole. Seeing is determined by an awareness of intense experience, but does not always exclude personal prejudices. And personal prejudices must not pass as whole truth. (240)

This seems a self-evident statement on the face of it. I am first drawn, though, to speculate on the import of the phrase 'supposed to': is this meant in the sense of 'thought to'; i.e. a reader assumes (supposes) that a good artist automatically presents a full expression of life and all its facets? Or does it denote the sense of 'obliged to'; i.e. that a good artist is duty-bound to portray life with integrity and completeness? I suspect the latter; and in this, Garrett seems to anticipate György Lukács' injunction from *The Historical Novel* to convey a 'totality' because 'an exclusive portrayal of the oppressed and exploited classes … would be a narrow interpretation' (49). This was first published in Russia, translated from the

German, a year later in 1937, but not in English until 1962 – again, I can only speculate whether Garrett was cognisant with these sorts of ideas through contemporary Communist circles.

Nevertheless, Garrett, in my opinion rightly, sees objective portrayals of the totality of life or society as a 'next to impossible' task; or at least that any attempts to do so must necessarily be prejudiced by the prism of the author's own perception. However, this does not obviate attempting to relate experience to a larger context; as Michael Murphy argues, 'Garrett was always looking for ways of taking personal experience and, by means of dramatising or fictionalising it, pushing it to some kind of logical narrative conclusion' (xiv). Personal experience, then, is extended for dramatic reasons and in search of a more universal analogy. This, in the end, is one way in which fiction is elevated above the level of mere reportage or straightforward memoir.

Furthermore, of course, even avowed memoir is not a pure record of fact or truth; as André Gide wrote: 'Memoirs are only half sincere, no matter how great the concern is to tell the truth: everything is always more complicated than one supposes' (qtd. in Nalbantian 18). As an attendee of the weekend schools run by the *Adelphi* magazine (O'Toole 69), Garrett may well have come across one of the magazine's founders, Max Plowman, author of First World War memoir *A Subaltern on the Somme* (1928). Even though Garrett was apparently unimpressed with the sycophancy of the school's attendees towards its organisers (ibid.), Garrett perhaps had more in common with Plowman than he may have thought. Garrett regularly used pseudonyms ('A. Foundling' and 'Matt Low', among others), a practice informed by 'Garrett's own belief in emphasising the collective and the subsuming of personal identity'. Plowman published *Subaltern* under the pseudonym 'Mark VII' (the official designation of the British Lee Enfield rifle's .303 cartridge); Malcolm Pittock has argued that he did so to avoid the book being read in the light of the specificity of Plowman's own experience (220), a similar sentiment to Garrett's. Plowman himself illuminates the reasoning behind this in *Subaltern*'s "Introductory": there is a necessary ambivalence surrounding the recording of experiences in a manner that 'must be as candid and truthful as the writer can make them' (Plowman vii) while searching for a more representative truth. Plowman recognises this explicitly: 'Many of his experiences were doubtless common to millions, and if it is their attention he would engage, then something other than the bare record of facts will be required' (viii). He further recognises that the manifestation of 'truth' is a continually developing

phenomenon, which might be expressed in ever-changing ways by the author's continuously maturing perception: 'All that is sufferable in the way of reminiscence must be truth expressed through personality. And that is art' (ibid.).

Garrett's insistence that 'personal prejudices must not pass as whole truth', then, would seem to agree with Plowman's formulations. However, in the next paragraph of his critical essay on *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, he begins his castigation of Conrad by saying 'Conrad had his [i.e. personal prejudices]. He could write romantically of a ship in a heavy sea, but when it came to the men aboard he wrote as a conservative-minded ship's officer' (240). His criticism of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* centres around the character of Donkin, whom Garrett feels is made a scapegoat for all the ship's travails, presented unfairly as an 'inefficient carcass' with 'miserable arms no thicker than pipe stems' (241). The body of the critique is concerned with what he sees as factual errors based on an ignorance of certain realities. For instance, he feels that Conrad's presentation of Donkin as a kind of 'deserter' who has run away from his last posting on an American ship is erroneous, citing the fact that conditions on 'Yankee' ships of the period were so notoriously harsh for 'Limejuicers' (Englishmen) that Donkin would have been compelled to run away (241). Garrett also points out what he sees as inconsistencies in plotting; for instance that Donkin is able to easily rob the sea chest belonging to Wait (the titular 'Nigger' of the story, who is isolated on his death bed) when it has been previously insinuated that men are constantly hovering around the ailing man (245). Garrett sees all of this as a gratuitous blackening of a character who is in fact 'the only seaman aboard the *Narcissus* who constantly asserts his rights' (241), tacitly linking this to the defence of labour rights in general against an officer class which is analogous with the ruling class, of which Conrad, for Garrett, was a part. Garrett is undoubtedly persuasive on many of these points.

However, Garrett concludes by writing:

> Perhaps at some time in his sea career a Donkin had told Conrad "where to get off". And Conrad probably wrote *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* to let a reading public know exactly what he thought about the Donkins. Some day, the Donkin might write the story of the sea. (245)

Garrett's story "The Jonah" is an interesting parallel here. Also a story set aboard a ship, concerning a man known as 'Sparerib', the story's eponymous Jonah, it is (without delving too deeply here) in essence a story about bullying, the impossibility of invisibility, and of group dynamics aboard a ship in general. Describing him as a false-eyed, quasi-Dickensian

grotesque, a 'thin dwarfish man' (42), and portrayed as an outcast aboard ship, Garrett however includes a sympathetic backstory emphasising the pathetic gratitude with which Sparerib greets the opportunity to be exploited and abused:

> …he murmured, "Thank you, sir." To be found a job in less than four days was an achievement well worth the half month's wages he had promised to allot before sailing. Greatly excited he bundled his few clothes together, for this was his first trip to sea. With nerves tingling he followed the older man. (41)

In short, it is hard not to see Sparerib as a corrective avatar of Conrad's Donkin. Perhaps Garrett saw himself as that Donkin, identifying with and indignant on behalf of an unfairly stereotyped figure.

However, even cursory attention paid to the life and times of Joseph Conrad would suggest that being so quick to stereotype the author of *Narcissus* on the basis of his representative fiction is equally unfair; and as we all know, two wrongs don't make a right. It is true, he was the scion of a family belonging to the Polish *szlachta* (nobility), and was doubtless a conservative-minded man. However, he was also the son of an avowed 'Red' Polish revolutionary (his father Apollo), and he carried a 'lifelong guilt' at his early refusal to follow in his father's footsteps and Conrad's own later choice of exile over resistance (Meyers 11). Previously exiled to Russia with his family at age five, his mother died of consumption at age eight, and he is orphaned around eleven ("Chronology" vii). He goes to sea at age seventeen, and in financial difficulty at around twenty attempts suicide (ibid.). He is employed as an ordinary seaman until he passes the British Merchant Service second mate's examination at around twenty-three (ibid.). None of this is noted as an attempt to simply garner sympathy for Conrad; but rather to demonstrate that this is a man who is no stranger to hardship and furthermore no stranger to the lot of the ordinary seaman, rather than someone – to borrow Said's phraseology – whose life was 'from the start an affirmation of unexamined bourgeois values'.

Is it any wonder, then, that Garrett's accusation – that 'he wrote as a conservative-minded ship's officer' – both stands up to scrutiny and simultaneously does not? It is true, he writes of the crew as 'voiceless men', 'inarticulate and indispensable', 'the everlasting children of the mysterious sea [whose] successors are the grown-up children of a discontented earth' (Conrad 22); Conrad is undoubtedly guilty of an infantilisation of the seamen. However, when he writes 'Well-meaning people had tried to represent those men as whining over every mouthful of their food … But in truth they had been men who

knew toil, privation, violence, debauchery' (ibid.), it is hard not to detect a desire for correction redolent of Engels: 'by a faithful portrayal of the real conditions [the author] dispels the dominant conventional illusions'. Gail Fraser has argued that the novella was at least partly an attempt to 'render justice to the community he had known for sixteen years, first as ordinary seaman and then as its only officer born in the Ukraine' (xiv), noting its clear undertaking to represent and demystify nineteenth-century thought regarding the seafaring world with a 'fidelity to the speech patterns and details of physical labour' (ibid.). All of this was attempted with a committed urgency Conrad himself expressed: 'I must enshrine my old chums in a decent edifice' (qtd. in Fraser, xiv).

It is also true, though, to say that there *are* aspects Conrad cannot fully grasp, where he observes but not inhabits. His characterisation of the oldest seaman aboard, Old Singleton, is a case in point, and doubly interesting in its pointed engagement with Singleton's relationship to literature. He is shown reading Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1828 *Pelham: or The Adventures of a Gentleman*. Singleton is shown holding the book 'at arm's length', 'spelling through *Pelham* with slow labour, and lost in an absorption profound enough to resemble a trance', while 'his lips, stained with tobacco-juice that trickled down the long beard, moved in inward whisper' (7-8). I am reminded of Tom Leonard's "Fathers and Sons", in which the working-class poet remembers being ashamed as his father 'whispered the words out loud / reading the newspaper' (lines 2-3); the poem as a whole is an implicit critique of assumed linguistic hierarchies. Given that Bulwer-Lytton's novel 'had been all but forgotten by the British reading public' (Allingham) by the time Conrad mentions it in *Narcissus*, it seems an oddly specific choice; indeed it hardly seems necessary to specify a particular novel at all in the context of the passage (as opposed to simply 'a book'). Might Conrad have had its particularly ornate prose in mind on similar terms to Leonard; i.e. to point out that the ostensibly cultural/intellectual barrier of 'bourgeois' prose fiction is in fact primarily a linguistic/literacy one related to its habitual register?

Lest this seem overly speculative, it appears clear that the choice of Bulwer-Lytton in fact bears concrete relation to reality, and also makes a more evident point. The notes to the Penguin edition of *Narcissus* cite Richard Dana's 1840 memoir *Two Years Before The Mast* as evidence that 'Lytton's books were popular among reading sailors' (Stape et al. 421). Conrad, though, delves further:

> The popularity of Bulwer Lytton in the forecastles of Southern-going ships is a wonderful and bizarre phenomenon. What ideas do his polished and so

> curiously insincere sentences awaken in the simple minds of the big children who people those dark and wandering places of the earth? What meaning can their rough, inexperienced souls find in the elegant verbiage of his pages? What excitement? – what forgetfulness? – what appeasement? Mystery! Is it the fascination of the incomprehensible? – is it the charm of the impossible? (7)

If we disregard for the moment the infantile imagery and ask what Conrad's motivating concern is here, we might find something altogether more nuanced. Conrad has specifically chosen *Pelham*, 'a novel which concerns itself with the issue of social exclusivity versus social inclusion' (Allingham), the juxtaposition of 'high life' and 'low life' as it were. He is using it to rhetorically point to an erroneous assumption: that Lytton's unfamiliar literary register should be of no interest to the ordinary seaman, and that indeed by rights it should in fact present a barrier to the derivation of meaning. This is erroneous because, of course, there is no reason whatsoever that this should be impenetrable to the ordinary seaman: *Pelham* is to Singleton no more an esoteric expression of a discrete and inherently unintelligible culture than Garrett's fiction is to bourgeois readers. Effortless reading of polished sentences and elegant verbiage is a question of relative familiarity, not class identity. Indeed, as Conrad's sailors point out in discussion, there are but two arbitrary differences between seaman and gentleman: 'One said:—"It's money as does it." Another maintained:—"No, it's the way they speak"' (27). As I say, it is of course in practical terms both. What is 'wonderful and bizarre' for Conrad is that Singleton's (nor sailors' in general) literary and/or cultural preference is not automatically conditioned by his class position. Nor is anyone's.

Therefore, Garrett's condemnation seems ill-founded on his own grounds. How can anyone write '<u>the</u> story of the sea', when 'seeing is determined by an awareness of intense experience, but does not always exclude personal prejudices'? No such story can exist; as Conrad writes in *Heart of Darkness* (1899):

> …it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream – alone. (55)

Conrad the bourgeois, ultimately, cannot share Garrett's unique, *specific* experience, but then neither can working-class Lewis Jones, nor Jim Phelan who once bemoaned 'what-name writing about firemen in stokeholds, never having gasped even once to a lungful of sulphur' (*The Name's Phelan* 271). Obstacles to the realisation of literary production remain

very real to certain segments of society, then as now; this seems self-evident to say. But never more so than in a contemporary Western context, the material reality of a potential author's current class fraction should be acknowledged as the primary obstacle. Creating a further obstacle out of an impossible fidelity to one or other intrinsic characteristic recast as 'culture', be that gender, skin, or a newly-naturalised 'class disposition', is neither coherent nor helpful. Needless to say, this has a wider relevance: a focus on ameliorating economic equality is an emancipatory political program; a focus on encouraging the current powers-that-be to pay due deference to and 'respect' for an infinite number of discrete identities and 'cultures' is not, precisely because this can be easily achieved without altering economic inequality *at all*.

Furthermore, perception is a constantly changing, constantly maturing prism, conditioned by circumstance's ebb and flow. Janet Montefiore argues in *Men and Women Writers of the 30s*:

> Once a memory is verbalised its meaning is shared with others… . And since the individuals who remember, and the social context which defines their way of remembering, exist in the "present moment" in which their past is recalled, their (re)constructions of that past must be profoundly affected by the ideas and values current at that present moment. (9)

And when such memories are, as Plowman wrote, 'expressed through personality [then] that is art'. Arriving at this point entails both conclusions and possibilities. Firstly, that claims to 'authenticity', *even those based on lived experience*, are necessarily partial in both senses of the word. Secondly, that the tenor of memory and its subsequent representation is constantly susceptible to the passage of time and the ideological and moral climate of the epoch. This is perhaps especially true for working-class authors, many of whom have perennially experienced anxiety pertaining to this form of mutability, as their upward social mobility inevitably alters and complicates their class position (an anxiety we will explore further with regard to Ellen Wilkinson). Thirdly, that art expressed via personality can still share meaning with others. When this is seen to be neither unassailably endorsed by, nor inherently limited by (impossible) claims to truth or authenticity that are strictly tethered to personal experience, then this opens the field to allow literature to aspire to a more universal meaning, without sacrificing an appreciation of the author as a unique medium on which that meaning is founded; a literature where even an intended audience is not the only productive audience; a literature where the author may range freely across all

imaginative terrains.

How might this be achieved for working-class authors? Perhaps by cleaving ever more faithfully to Rancière's affirmation of equality as a fundamental philosophical reality, and supporting the alleviation of material inequality, we might allow those authors' creative potential to flourish, or at the very least be nurtured.

Two Room Representation

Garrett believed 'in emphasising the collective and the subsuming of personal identity'. I disagree, especially so in the climate of present-day identity politics: if collective is understood to *really* mean 'all', then the relentless focus on group characteristics falls awkwardly between that idealised collective and the sovereign individual, which should never be subsumed by any collective. Garrett himself failed to solve this conundrum nearly a century ago, as we have seen – one can never fully subsume 'I'. Nevertheless, one can complicate things via narrative strategies. In what I consider to be his best and most important piece, "Letter Unsigned", Garrett meditates on writing, its significance in a working-class context, and personal/collective identity in illuminating fashion, drawing together many of the threads from this chapter.

Published in the *Adelphi* in November 1935, the story opens thus, with the writer of the eponymous letter trapped with a group of seamen in the crew's quarters of a sinking ship:

> Dear Andrew – At this late hour of the night, the gloomy downstairs forecastle of a disabled tramp is not a very encouraging place in which to start a letter to an old friend, but as my predicament at the moment compels me to try anything sooner than sit brooding, I trust you will appreciate my difficulties and overlook the subsequent scribbling. Some of it, however, is bound to have a personal appeal, for despite the furious Atlantic gale swamping the deck overhead and the terrible racket of loosened ventilators being bashed about by heavy seas, I am using your gift fountain pen for the first time. (88)

Garrett immediately establishes two significant functions within the story. The first is that, as the title tells us, the letter is anonymous, 'Unsigned'; the identity of the narrator is never revealed. The second thing to note is that the story is told in epistolary form. What this does is create two audiences within the story itself. Firstly, its ostensible status as a private

letter with a named recipient creates a listening presence, the addressee Andrew, the imaginary intended recipient of the letter. Secondly, its parallel status as a story written for publication also obliquely implies and presupposes a more general audience, reading this letter from one friend to another as an exchange within the boundaries of their fictional world. In fact, though, three audiences exist.

William Wimsatt, discussing poetry in *The Verbal Icon* distinguished the 'actual' reader: 'something like a reader over another reader's shoulder; he reads through the dramatic reader, the person to whom the full tone of the poem is addressed in the fictional situation' (xv). For example, when Burns in 'To a Mouse' directly addresses the 'Wee, sleekit, cowran, tim'rous *beastie'* (line 1, his emphasis), he creates a dramatic reader, the immediate audience within the poem – the mouse. But then there is the reader at large, the 'actual' reader, an audience reading through the titular mouse, to whom Burns is really making his famous ecological/egalitarian point. However, it is clear that there is also what one might term an 'implied reader' explicitly named within the poem, the careless farmers who wield a 'murd'ring *pattle'* (line 6, his emphasis).

Garrett, via the epistolary form, is harnessing a similar dynamic, there is a distinguishable threefold audience in play. The dramatic reader is obviously Andrew, the recipient of the letter. There is also the 'actual' reader, i.e. the public at large (or at least the *Adelphi*'s readership). However, I contend that an equivalent to Burns' farmers exists, although not explicitly named within the story; an 'implied reader' that is the contemporary literati, perhaps even Lehmann himself.

For the 'actual' reader, the first conundrum is the identity of the narrator (usually conflated with the author themselves). Garrett complicates this from the outset, and with good reason, as we shall see. The diction of the opening paragraph seems very formal – even bourgeois; there is a very definite public school, 'stiff upper lip' feel to his words. This is a man in grave danger, very likely facing certain death, who asks his friend to 'appreciate my difficulties'; furthermore, the very self-deprecation of 'subsequent scribbling' suggests the polite modesty of a confident writer. The gift of a fountain pen only serves to reinforce the impression.

However, in the very next paragraph he writes that: 'this is the second night in succession that four other stokers besides myself have been trapped in the poky little downstairs forecastle' (88). The use of 'other' is crucial here; simply 'four stokers besides myself' would not immediately beg the question that 'four other stokers' does: that is, that

the narrator himself is also a mere stoker. It is, however, still possible to admit a degree of ambiguity. At this point, Garrett deftly invokes the status of writing to maintain that ambiguity: the four other stokers 'are all staring quizzingly at me, as if writing a letter under these circumstances is something I ought not to do' (88), creating an immediate distance between them and the narrator (redolent of Conrad's use of Old Singleton, not to mention Garrett's own milieu as previously noted). Furthermore, the identity of Andrew is very briefly alluded to when the narrator refers to his 'calibre', a term normally used to refer to a degree of social standing or importance, of quality or rank. Who is writing this letter, and to whom?

A little further in, Garrett removes the ambiguity, and in doing so begins to address the status-anxiety of the working-class writer, and also begins to insinuate his implied reader. He writes:

> …perhaps you can easily imagine the cheerless conditions under which a dunderheaded stoker like myself is making an effort to write, particularly when the other four fellows persist in eyeing me so suspiciously. (89)

Garrett had of course written at length to Lehmann bemoaning the fact that 'a fellow sitting down to write is considered a freak', in domestic conditions where 'the whole bunch of us are crowded in together. There is no separation' ("Letters" 253). Now we are presented with a literate stoker, cooped up in a forecastle with four other stokers staring at him 'like a pack of despondent dummies' (89). It is not a stretch at this point, in my opinion, to begin to conflate the 'dramatic reader' Andrew with an 'implied reader' in Lehmann, or at least a 'Lehmann-figure' as a personification of the publishing industry.

As the story progresses, the sense of a metaphor for the liminal state, and the travails and privation of the working-class writer of the 1930s is only further amplified:

> It is a wonder that none of them have been brassy enough to sneak across to where I am sitting, and peep over my shoulder to read what is on this page. You ought to have seen how they opened their eyes when I brought the writing pad out of my bag, planted myself at this narrow table, pushed the empty food dixies aside, and took your pen out of its fancy cardboard case to fill it with ink. They all jerked their heads up and stared straight at me as if I had gone crazy. Not one of them spoke; they just kept on staring. In fact they have done nothing else for the past twelve hours but stare, stare, stare.
>
> I know, though, they are supposed to be resting after a twenty-four hours' stretch of dangerously hard work, that they have not been in their bunks for two days and nights, but neither have I. And on account of the impossibility of getting along a storm-swept deck one way or the other, they've had nothing

> to eat since yesterday, but neither have I. I am just as weary and hungry as they are, and maybe as upset. How can I be any other way? (90)

'But neither have I,' he chimes, 'but neither have I'. As Garrett wrote to Lehmann two years after this story was written: 'my time is used by others in distress who forget or don't seem to understand I have my own load of troubles' ("Letters" 239). Back in 1935's fictional world, though, defiance remains, and is articulated thus:

> Let them stare! I accept it as a challenge. They won't master me. I will write on in sheer defiance. I have got too much down on paper now to care what they think. I am quite certain that if any one of them at this moment dared to interfere with me or snatch the writing pad away, I would whip a razor out and slash their bloody throats open without compunction. (93)

As the water seeps in and inexorably rises, threatening to drown them then and there in the forecastle, the narrator's dislocation from his class peers deepens: 'Why should I bother my head any more about what they think. They are only a bunch of ninnies. They all act like sheep' (96). There seems no possibility of communication, of fellow-feeling: 'Why the hell don't they talk to me or talk to each other? But no, not a solitary word. … I would be very lonely and desperate, Andy, if I had not you to talk to through this letter' (97). Here, the need for an 'intellectual interlocutor', as it were, is made explicit; it becomes almost totemic: 'I must not lose control of myself. How glad I am I began this letter. The writing helps to sustain me' (ibid.).

However, as the water laps over their bunks and death seems certain, the tenor changes, and Garrett begins to allude more specifically to that liminal state between classes that many working-class writers inhabit. That sustained connection to their class, to non-empirical realities that cannot be simply observed or even gleaned transiently, confers literary power but also, as Chris Hilliard argues, simultaneously a sense that 'their articulacy placed special community obligations on them' (128). Hilliard also remarks that working-class writers often perceived their motivation to write 'as if it were a mystical ailment' (6), and that the writing itself entailed 'both representativeness and strangeness' (128), setting them apart from their communities. Garrett, though, (through his narrator) can see a possibility:

> I shut my eyes tight for the moment. When I opened them again the other fellows were sitting up in their bunks staring at me so pathetically; I felt sorry for them. But what can I do except what I am doing: write on? I do believe my

> action is keeping them alive. I know it is keeping me alive. (100)

This is a significant moment: it is a turning point, where the realisation of the power of representation seems to dawn on the others. What sustains the writer becomes sustaining for the written-about. When he writes: 'I see the pain written on their faces' (101), it almost carries the power of a manifesto. Finally, as the situation becomes desperate, and one of their number deliberately slips under the water in quiet suicide, comes a passage in closing:

> This is the worst fix ever I was in. People who talk as if they know say that men pray earnestly under such conditions. Well, if that is so, I see no outward signs of it from any of the other three. What is happening inwardly I cannot say. I only know I am scared to death.
>
> We are not dead yet. The other three, Williams, Collins, and Brown, turned their heads to look in my direction. Their faces were full of suffering, yet I caught the flicker of a smile. It seems like that to me. Anyway, quite spontaneously, I touched my forehead in salute, and they returned it, Andy, they returned it. All my bitterness evaporated. I felt rotten and good at the same moment. Perhaps all the time I have been misjudging them. Somehow I feel at peace within. (102)

So much of Garrett's condition is here in microcosm. In 'People who talk as if they know' can be seen the literary expression of the duty, even *burden* of the 'truth' that working-class writers have often wrestled with within their works. But the 'Unsigned', anonymous author here accepts that he 'cannot say' what the truth of others' inner lives is, regardless of shared class. But he can remain elided in favour of a kind of collective representation, naming the others – 'Williams, Collins, and Brown' – but not himself, creating a shared meaning precisely and only by sharing his inner self and allowing them to identify with him voluntarily, not by setting out to write '*the* story of the sea'.

In this way, the arc of this story is noteworthy: only towards the end do the other crew members seem to sanction what is in effect the literary narration of their shared demise. Of course, Andy, the Lehmann-figure, is also named, invited via words and language to share, without bitterness or reproach, in an experience which of course he can never truly share. The letter will never reach the fictitious Andy; the real-life Lehmann, in Pulp's words, 'will never understand / How it feels to live your life / With no meaning or control', he'll 'never watch [his] life slide out of view' (Cocker et al.). Nonetheless, this does not negate or diminish the fact that there is much they *do* share.

'Yours sincerely, George Garrett'

As a postscript, though, it is saddening to note that in Garrett's real life, no such redemptive turning point was reached. In June 1937, he writes: 'I broke down and cried for an hour. My brain snapped, and in a moment I was a physical wreck' ("Letters" 264). In July 1938: 'I've been Knocked out. It's no use [*sic*] … I could feel my mind going. When a man tightens his fingers around a baby's throat, he has reached a pretty dangerous condition' (ibid. 270-1). This was to be his last known correspondence with Lehmann, and in a sense crystallises why, as I argued when opening this chapter, George Garrett indeed did not have much of a chance 'to be book'. And it is worth repeating, with double force, that this was not due to Orwell's dilettantism or unexamined bourgeois values, nor was it due to a working-class culture and bourgeois culture that are mutually unintelligible, nor was it due to the claiming, justly or unjustly, of identities either congenital or appropriated. It was due to the fact of poverty. As Garrett wrote in closing that last letter, it is *this* that ensures so many voices are not heard, or lost:

> Perhaps later on, I can collect my scattered mind a bit to write a piece, but under the present conditions it is impossible. I dare not risk it, believe me.
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> George Garrett ("Letters" 272)

Ellen Wilkinson

'Am I Socialist "us" or Bloomsbury "them"?'

'Am I Socialist "us" or Bloomsbury "them"?' (31): this was the question asked of Joan Craig by Tony Dacre, both of whom are characters in Ellen Wilkinson's 1929 novel *Clash,* set against the backdrop of the 1926 General Strike and its aftermath. Ultimately, it is the fundamental question that the novel contends with, and undoubtedly a question that preoccupied Wilkinson during her own life. The question encapsulates the problem of viewing social classes as fundamentally discrete and antagonistic: one cannot simply draw an impenetrable border between two belligerents; rather, the two merge and blend at the margins, and their boundaries are porous. This simply becomes yet more true when attempting to view them through the prism of culture and/or values, as we will see.

Ellen Wilkinson was the first female Minister for Education in the post-war Labour government, introducing free school milk and raising the school leaving age to 15, and was also a prolific writer and journalist, but is perhaps best remembered as the MP for Jarrow who led the iconic 1936 Jarrow Marches to London to draw attention to the plight of the unemployed in the North East. She was born in 1891 in Manchester to a cotton worker father, a fierce autodidact of strong Methodist faith. Before winning a scholarship to Manchester University, and from there pursuing her rich and varied political career, she was a teacher at Oswald Road Elementary School, where her approach to education made her few friends among her superiors: she preferred to engage her pupils' interest rather than teach by rote (Vernon 7-8) – in this, we can hear an echo of Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster. Short in stature, flame-haired, and uncompromising in her politics, this was an altogether formidable woman, often referred to as the 'Fiery Particle' and 'Red Ellen'.

Joan Craig is a labour activist moving between two worlds: in London, the politically significant meetings of the TUC's upper echelons, along with the elite social circles of Bloomsbury; in the industrial North, the rallies, organisational activities, and relief efforts of the working classes. Mary Joannou and Ian Haywood have identified these contrasting locations as a significant 'cultural geography' occurring in the novel, where the north is a place of 'grim industrial reality' as opposed to the 'seductive south' as embodied by London (and more specifically Bloomsbury) with its enlightened attitudes to pleasure and

high culture (xvi). They further argue that this juxtaposition reflects the 'two nations' of preceding 'Condition of England' novels, and anticipates the 'symbolic national landscape' addressed by the Angry Young Men of the 1950s (ibid.). This geographical contrast, then, in fact informs and mirrors the class divide that is the novel's concern, and indeed the open conflict of 1926: hence the title.

The title, though, can also be seen to refer to a clash occurring on a less obvious level; that is, the clash occurring within the character of Joan, and indeed Ellen Wilkinson herself: biographer Betty Vernon confirms that the protagonist Joan Craig is a semi-autobiographical avatar of Wilkinson (4). Granted access to the Bloomsbury milieu by virtue of her political precocity and her personal connection to the aristocratic Mary Maud Meadowes ('based on Wilkinson's friend, Margaret Lady Rhondda, editor of the feminist journal *Time and Tide*' [ibid.]), working-class Joan finds herself mixing and mingling at a cultural and political intersection. What she finds there, alongside (or rather within) the straightforwardly patrician and sometimes hostile upper classes, is a beneficent patronage of the striving working classes as embodied by wealthy Mary Maud ('Utterly without a sense of class or wealth, she loved to bring people together who could help each other' (9)), and the left-leaning literati as embodied by her suitor, the jaded and cynical writer Tony Dacre ('Anthony Dacre, the suffragist, the egalitarian' (37)). In short, what we would now call 'champagne socialists' or the 'metropolitan elite'.

A Politicised Romance

Joan's relationship with Tony is the central thread of the narrative, around which its serious political ideas are woven (Joannou and Haywood deem *Clash* 'Wilkinson's attempt to politicise literary romance' [xiv]). Introduced at a meeting of the TUC's General Council, the two are quickly smitten with each other; in particular, Tony is deeply impressed with Joan's capable self-possession: 'this girl was alive, intelligent, and completely unself-conscious. Dacre had not met her kind before' (18). There is a strong current of feminist ideas at play here, which is especially significant when it comes to the inconvenient fact that Tony is married to the aloof socialite Helen, who, while self-confessedly no longer in love with her husband, is certainly not willing to sacrifice reputations with a divorce. Hence, the maritally-bound Tony (at his wife's suggestion)

offers Joan the choice of becoming a kept woman, so to speak, by taking a flat for her, with all the material advantage that would entail. The condition, though, would be that Joan give up her work for socialism.

Tony pays much worthy lip service to an imagined feminist future: 'No, Joan, perhaps I am thinking a bit ahead – to a time when equality is unquestioned, as it is now among intelligent men and women' (112); but nevertheless makes a (comical) quasi-biblical paean to the woman who sacrifices herself to the role of lover:

> Such women, Joan, could be great lovers and creators. The wealth of spiritual power that could raise them to a great career could give a new meaning to marriage. … To their husbands they would bring fulfilment and the peace that passeth understanding. These men could do great things for the world. (112)

However, he is seemingly oblivious to the irony of his own refusal, as an apparently intelligent man, to accept the equality by which a woman could do great things for the world in the here and now. Ultimately, the crux of the matter is this: 'He was determined not to be a complacent background to her political life. He loved her with his very soul and she must give him all or nothing' (113). This of course represents an impasse for Joan that offers no easy resolution; furthermore, put plainly, it is an unjustifiable demand that embodies an egregiously chauvinist narcissism.

And what of Tony's 'very soul', with which he loves her so ardently? In truth, it is but a pawn in a larger game, with class at the centre. While Mary Maude was every inch the idle aristocratic romantic and an old-fashioned matchmaker at heart, one who 'had greeted Tony's interest in Joan with joy' (45), we also learn that she is deeply ambivalent on this front. As a social progressive formerly imprisoned as a suffragist, she also sees it as imperative that Joan not sacrifice her political career – and the consequent advancement of feminist progress – on the altar of a man (57). However, as Joannou and Haywood have argued, Wilkinson's narrative insists that 'feminist advance must be reconciled to the ongoing struggle of the working class' (xvii), and this is consistent with Wilkinson's own view: as biographer Betty Vernon tells us, 'Ellen grew to accept that, important as winning the vote for women might be, it was merely a milestone along the way towards the long-term objective of economic justice' (42). Wilkinson knows and acknowledges what many feminists and advocates of other identitarian agendas either fail to grasp, ignore, or simply refuse to accept to this day. That is, while their aims are (usually) inarguably just, and indeed are shared by a great many people whose own identities do not directly qualify

them as the focus of those aims, those aims are necessarily auxiliary negotiations relative to the primary, and indeed only struggle that can meaningfully exist as a political program in itself, while simultaneously encompassing all others; i.e. the class struggle.

And so, when the narrator tells us that Mary Maud 'wanted someone to fight Helen for Tony's soul' (45), we are drawn to speculate on the nature of the metaphor: is it romantic or political? The answer is, in truth, both. Mary Maud is shown to harbour an unapologetically 'deep, maternal love' for Tony (45), and believes he would be happier with Joan. However, Wilkinson uses this to obliquely embed a political angle. She has Mary Maud lament that Tony

> can be dragged off work at any time for Helen's purpose. That is her ultimate mistake, for Tony has the makings of a great writer really, and he knows his work isn't what it ought to be. It sells … but that fashionable stuff isn't what he wants to do. (43)

Mary Maud thinks that she knows what Tony 'wants to do' better than him – 'your work is … getting bitter, cynical. It's not like you' (42) – but what he *wants* to do is largely irrelevant. What *is* relevant is what he can be *paid* to do, and so Mary Maud's 'large fortune, anything she could do for him, was his' (45).

George Orwell, in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), elucidates this transactional nature of literary production well:

> Money and culture! In a country like England you can no more be cultured without money than you can join the Cavalry Club. … Money writes books, money sells them. … Invention, energy, wit, style, charm – they've all got to be paid for in hard cash. (14-5)

This of course has a bearing not just on wit and style, but on content, on what books can be made to *say*. The fight for Tony's soul, seen through the prism of Mary Maud, is less a romantic conflict between Joan and Helen, but in fact a fight between the two bourgeois women with contesting values, a contest that is possible precisely because the two women's bourgeois status does not determine the political values they hold.

The prize is, put simply, the controlling interest in an archetypal traditional intellectual. Wilkinson's language is deeply allusive to this end:

> [Mary Maud had] watched Helen use his passion subtly, cruelly, to gratify her every wish, her lust for domination. … Joan had character and the courage of

> her youth, but Mary Maud shuddered as she thought how little these would count when fighting a Helen roused in defence of her property and comfort. (45)

Here, 'Helen' could easily be substituted for, say, 'the capitalist class', 'Joan' for 'the labour movement. When Joan laments 'all the wealth against us, the Press, all the ways money can talk through the cinema, books and magazines' (166), she is essentially articulating Gramsci's conception of how hegemony is established and maintained using traditional intellectuals like Tony Dacre.

In this, we can see an important development in Mary Maude's character. Mary Maude's patronage was previously dependent on the sanction of that 'exclusive Bloomsbury circle' (9) of whom she was an intimate:

> Mary Maud didn't write novels or reviews or paint modernist pictures. She bought. She was amiably willing to pay for her rooms to be redecorated whenever another bright young person was taken up by the circle. She financed publications, one-man shows, eccentric theatrical productions, all with a rather detached enthusiasm. … She was so willing to go to endless trouble herself to help people that her important acquaintances were shamed into helping too. (9)

While it is never made explicit exactly to what end she may have used her financial clout in Dacre's case, the (narratorial) declaration that her fortune would willingly be placed in his service in unambiguous antagonism to the apparent controlling interest of Helen Dacre must surely carry an implication. Namely, that the aristocratic power she wields can be placed in the service of whatever end she chooses, that the wishes of her Bloomsbury circle be respected is not a *fait accompli*. It is of course usually assumed, as Helen demonstrates by saying, with regard to the strike, that 'people like you and me, Mary Maud, have got to decide' (66). The idea that actually enacting such free choices might place Mary Maud in direct and open conflict with her class is an important one, which I will develop further later.

In the meantime, suffice to note that even her indirect sympathy and hospitality towards those directly involved in the miners' cause leaves her in no doubt about that assumed power of sanction held by the polite company she moves in: '…Mary Maud felt their hostility. She had betrayed her class, she had gone back on her side. To their public-school code it was the last crime' (69). But Mary Maud is depicted as an example of 'all rich people who join a proletarian movement on mere emotion' (ibid.), and when she feels the bite of antagonism her 'comfortable nature' sees her retreat, 'settl[ing] herself before

the fire and allow[ing] herself to be petted by Suzanne [her maid] with a lovely cup of hot chocolate. She wanted to help the miners, but it was pleasanter to dream about Joan' (ibid.). Sympathy can never be the equal of conviction, of commitment.

'They know so much about life.'

The enduring bedrock of Mary Maud-ish sympathy has been increasingly exposed as the twentieth century has progressed. Post-WWII, in an era where the social and economic divide was narrowing, aristocratic patronage – i.e. the overt funding or material assistance of exceptional (and hence deserving by the customary logic) members of the working class by benign, high-minded blue-bloods – may not have disappeared altogether but was certainly less conspicuous. However, the obsolescence of that straightforwardly patrician philanthropy still left an abiding substrate: a faddish fascination of an almost anthropological tenor.

For example, Alan Sillitoe's 1959 short story "The Disgrace of Jim Scarfedale" describes a working-class man who 'marries up', and whose wife Cynthia 'used to talk about politics and books and things, saying how the world was made for blokes like me and that we should run the world and not leave it to a lot of money-grubbing capitalist bastards' (129) (perhaps she also went to St. Martin's College…). For Cynthia though, her marriage was certainly not a charitable enterprise, rather it was 'a clinical study of a working-class man' (Hanson 88), which in Cynthia's case ultimately curdled into a cruel humiliation of Jim culminating in her leaving him after six months of marriage. Even when supposedly benign, such transparently observational attitudes with a whiff of the civilising missionary enact a transformation of the working class into an essentialised 'culture'.

It may be true to say that we have now arrived at a contemporary state of affairs where decorum would dictate that the working class should no longer be unashamedly studied and observed by well-meaning Attenboroughs as if they were another species (though the existence of TV programmes such as *Benefits Street* might well contradict that claim). However, 'working class' can certainly still be maintained as an 'identity' to be 'respected' and 'recognised', which comes with a welcome ancillary benefit for those with a vested interest in maintaining a status quo that is seeing economic inequality widening again: that is, that such respect and/or recognition is easily claimed and performed, but

does not require the actual surrender of wealth or indeed power.

I have discussed the inscription of these forms of perception earlier in the context of Rancière's condemnation of the 'fetishist passion for lived experience', and J. F. Horrabin's caustic appraisal of the appetite for working-class stories as the 'tickl[ing of] the jaded palates of bourgeois readers anxious for new sensations'. *Clash*'s Tony Dacre is just such a psychology writ large. He is portrayed as being exhilarated, almost titillated by contact with 'real life' as he volunteers with the labour movement on excursions to the North:

> it was a thrill to be with railwaymen and porters and waiters and people you'd tipped, and realise them as human beings without their uniform. They know such a lot about life, Joan, that chaps like me never learn. (77)

It is important to note that this kind of experience should not be immediately dismissed out of hand as having no value: when Tony reflects that

> I'd always thought of them as a respectable background. It was good to get their viewpoint on us. It made me realise how helpless Helen and I and folks like Mary Maud are when democracy stops touching its hat and refuses to answer the bell (ibid.)

this admission represents an important and valuable realisation for any individual. Tony's captivation, 'the feel of … being in touch with reality' (91), even moves him to decide at one point that he cannot 'go back to the old quiet existence, to the old exclusive circles of experts and critics and *littérateurs*' (91), but this is in reality fleeting infatuation. This is the man who at the outset of the novel betrays himself as a classic traditional intellectual. He asks the question 'Am I Socialist "us" or Bloomsbury "them"?', and in doing so Tony betrays one of the defining characteristics of traditional intellectuals: Gramsci outlines them as possessing a certain sense of removed autonomy ('detached, without foundation, a caste' [Gramsci et al. 367]), and for Tony this creates the belief that he might affiliate himself with either class more or less at will. Wilkinson's narrator skewers any such notion, declaring with thinly disguised disdain that 'Tony was essentially middle-class' (92).

However, the use of '*essentially* middle-class' is worthy of note, especially being offered in contrast (in the next sentence) to 'that rigid, working-class patriotism that was Joan's inspiration' (ibid.). Here, Wilkinson appears to create just the kind of false dichotomy I explicitly reject, attributing to Tony the same supposedly discrete 'middle-

class values' discussed in the previous chapter. However, the two sentences quoted in their entirety open up a different possibility:

> But Tony was essentially middle-class. He had none of that rigid, working-class patriotism that was Joan's inspiration *and which Blain had so wholeheartedly adopted.* (my emphasis)

The problem of affixing class signifiers to value systems remains (as does defining 'rigid patriotism', etc.). But what's crucial is that the values themselves are ostensibly allowed the capacity to be unmoored from the permanent anchorage of one or other class, and thus are not inherent, essential – the character referred to here, Gerry Blain, was born bourgeois, but is allowed to adopt a supposedly endemic working-class characteristic.

By the same token, one need not *be* middle- or upper-class to maintain an interest in or engage in any cultural pursuit that is the ostensible preserve (falsely) of those classes. Rather, what's important is that these pursuits do not simply represent a desire, conscious or unconscious, to become incorporated into the dominant social class's hegemony, as this inevitably entails a de facto acceptance of the political status quo they rely on. Equally though, one might very well be working-class and vote Tory, for example, and indeed a very great many do – the point is that the choices are all available. I would venture, though, that the word 'wholeheartedly' is an imprecise but key factor here, or in other words, the spirit in which these choices are made. With that in mind, one need not *be* working-class in order to believe in and profess political principles concerned with the advancement of that class; rather, what's important is that one has the courage of those convictions when the chips are down, so to speak, a litmus test that Blain passes but Tony is shown to ultimately fail (as we will see).

Gerry Blain is Joan's eventually successful other suitor, a crippled WWI veteran and heir to a fortune, certainly not 'essentially' working-class, who nevertheless throws himself into the fray on the side of labour with an ascetic zeal:

> "But honestly, Gerry, what about yourself? You are every bit as much of that class as any of Helen's friends. I could quote you, yourself, against every one of your generalizations."
>
> Gerry shrugged a shoulder. "My father started life as a manual worker, and but for his luck I should have been a factory worker too. And Mother never let him or me forget it – but, anyway, I don't mean to imply that Helen's lot are the usual silly-ass type of 'best people' who can only maintain their superiority by not letting other people come near enough to them to see how silly they really are. They are a damned sight too intelligent and interested in life

> for that. They'll pet you, Joan, and make a fuss of you, because you are unusual and yet can fit in with their conventions, and they will feel they are no end advanced and democratic. But between them and the working class the gulf is fixed, and when a crisis like the General Strike comes they make no bones about which side they are on, even when the best of them admit that the workers have a case."
>
> "Well," said Joan slowly, "there's Tony and Mary Maud and Lady Christina – one can think of a good many more than the five just men to save Gomorrah."
>
> "Oh, I know there are exceptions," said Gerry rather impatiently, "but take the exceptions, the best of them like Tony and Mary Maud. Sympathetic with the workers, yes, but it's all a show to them, an interesting exhibition of unusual types. They are bored with their own crowd, so they stand outside the struggle, like keen spectators at a boxing match, and cheer the workers on to victory. But they are never in the fight. And if you go with that crowd, Joan, you will be out of the fight too. You'll be comfortable and sympathetic and interested, but it won't be long before the fight will be in the ring and you'll be in the stalls." (180-1)

This is a key passage, appearing in the penultimate chapter, as Joan's final attempts to reconcile the internal conflicts that her unusual situation has thrown into sharp relief are played out, and touches on a number of threads running through the novel and indeed through working-class writing in general – questions of authenticity, and the ways in which people navigate the class system, fitting in with conventions, etc. – but furthermore states plainly the difference between an altruism borne of conviction and one borne of the curiosity of the jaded bourgeois palate.

'It seems a shame to fight them.'

Gerry Blain's intervention above is the point at which Joan Craig internally resolves to turn her back on her well-to-do social sphere, the reason being its perceived mollifying effect – in other words, the effect of the Gramscian compromise equilibrium, and the commensurate arc that leads from organic intellectual to traditional intellectual. Joan concludes that she must 'stick with my crowd' (189) in order to maintain her crusading zeal – but why? Joan is clear: 'one can't live in luxury and pretend one is working with them [the working class] just the same' (ibid.) – in other words, she must remain constantly aware *experientially* of what underpins class division above all else: material economic reality. Her rationale is that the material precarity of the working-class organic intellectual, if maintained, mitigates – perhaps even precludes – the pitfall associated with the

traditional intellectual: i.e. belief in one's own supra-class autonomy, which in fact (according to Gramsci) only camouflages an endorsement, tacit or otherwise, of a society that both justifies and perpetuates egregious material inequality. In other words, while they tell themselves they are dispassionate and objective, they are in effect simply looking the other way, or even rationalising injustice.

This may or may not be so. However, in terms of working-class participation in literature, this problem reflects a perennial Catch-22. I have already discussed in the previous chapters the explicit controls exerted on the output of Jim Phelan and George Garrett (and numerous others) by interested parties with the clout necessary to make published work a reality, and indeed the identical but perhaps now more tacit pressure felt by contemporary authors to stick to 'standard tropes' of working-class experience. It hardly needs saying that ultimately the possession of 'hard cash' is what underpins and grants potency to the exertion of such pressures. Moreover, going beyond satisfying demands to 'make it racy', producing explicitly political work is equally dependent upon sympathetic resources, who will then assert a claim on what that work will look like. And by extension, will material success as a writer automatically make that writer a bourgeois stooge?

Joan is invited to write for a left-wing paper being put together by Gerry Blain and others, the *Wednesday Weekly*, doing 'reports from the coalfield' articles. Joan shares her work with Tony Dacre, asking his opinion:

> "This is excellent copy," he wrote, "you have freshness and real talent that ought to be developed. Why not make this your life-work? I have not worried you during this trouble. We must all do what we can to help the miners. Ordinary standards do not apply. But when it is over, here is the answer to our difficulties. Let us settle down together and I will help you to become a writer. You can reach bigger audiences this way than ever you can by speeches. My darling, I feel so happy. I feel as though a way was opening out. It has been miserable without you, my beloved, but now we can soon be happy. Write and tell me yes."
>
> This letter amazed Joan. If he objected to one independent career, why not the other? If the organiser, why not the writer? And then Joan saw that it would be no independence. Tony imagined himself leading and directing her, helping her with publishers, her writing being an interesting little hobby to fill in her time while he was writing too. (161)

On one level, what this amounts to (quite apart from a continuation of the gender politics as previously discussed) is a kind of invitation to become a traditional intellectual. And this entails ramifications, as Joan is well aware of:

> Tony, London, Bloomsbury – her mind was away on a new track. She saw herself as Tony's wife – a lovely flat, his friends, all the pleasant people she had met, holidays abroad, and writing. It would be lovely to write – a jolly way of earning money and being able to say what you wanted – but, of course, you couldn't do that, not Labour things, well, perhaps one could sometimes say what one wanted, very tactfully… (183)

Gramsci argues that: 'The bourgeoisie counts on the distractions of the surroundings, and on hints concerning the possibility of satisfying personal ambitions, to corrupt deputies – even when these are workers…' (Gramsci et al. 100). *Clash* involves distinctly distracting surroundings: the cultural and political 'crossing-point' of literary London. The lure of 'reality' that captivates Tony operates inversely in Joan, as an insistent lure away from that reality towards the comfort and status of Bloomsbury.

Tony Dacre's infatuation with reality returns us again to the thorny issue of dilettantism as discussed previously in relation to Orwell and others. I am inclined to conclude that such issues are profoundly difficult, if not impossible, to 'codify', as it were, and accusations of dilettantism can only ever be addressed on a case-by-case basis, and judged on criteria that can only ever be subjective. Ultimately, one is essentially attempting to evaluate the spirit in which the crossing of class boundaries is acquitted, and the commitment it evinces – or does not.

Helen Dacre, for example, interior designer and theatrical producer, displays no pretence of principles, being as she is usually more or less indifferent to political developments or causes. For instance, she is happy to support blacklegs, while in the same breath blithely and patronisingly profess to Joan that she 'hope[s] your miners will win … Don't have a revolution if you can help it' (25). What *is* important to Helen, is that, in her own words, she is 'dependent for her [interior] orders on people with money' (24), upon which in turn depends her theatrical endeavours, and she 'happen[s] to think my art is important' (24). As far as her husband's activities are concerned, though, she is as indifferent to these as she apparently is to politics, until the potentially corrupting influence of Joan is introduced: 'for the first time the dangerous thought entered Helen's mind: If it had not been for her [Joan], Tony would have been content to stay at home, giving a sentimental lip-service to this Socialism, as he had always done' (68). Despite her political insouciance, Helen is clearly aware of a delicate balance at play.

As discussed previously, according to Gramsci maintaining hegemony relies on the compromise equilibrium, where the dominant class makes concessions to accommodate

and incorporate the interests of those who might threaten that hegemony, without altering what is essential. Joan reflects on the Bloomsbury set thus: 'These people were so clever, yet they were so nice to meet. It was jolly to be in arguments that really mattered and where people didn't lose their tempers. It had been stimulating to hear the good stories, the talk about books and ideas' (177). Gerry Blain is quick to identify that this dynamic uses culture to neuter politics: 'They are so reasonable and they can be so kind. It seems a shame to fight them, and after a while you'd find yourself not wanting to put things so strongly – it might hurt your new friends' feelings' (179). Joan intuitively senses the corrupting influence of the compromise equilibrium; Blain more clearly sees what Gramsci sees: that for the dominant class the maintenance of hegemony is the key to neutering any resistance to capitalism *a priori*. The dominant class adapts to resistance, by attracting and then assimilating the organic intellectuals who constitute the ideological leadership of the working class. This reflects the capacity of capitalism as an ideology to adapt, which remains so today: David Harvey notes in 2010's *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* that capitalism constantly reproduces its power because it 'never solves its crisis tendencies, it merely moves them around' (215-6, 262), or as Blain remarks in *Clash*, 'If you beat them on one point they shift to another' (180).

'Just the plain yarn.'

Furthermore, shifting the focus of class from economics to culture makes it easier to amplify and exploit the anxieties and tensions felt by those who inhabit the ambiguous class borderlands. On the one hand, Joan as discussed above, or other working-class people like *Clash*'s communist activist Harry Browne: he and Joan are 'the only genuine proletarians' at a meeting of the *Wednesday Weekly* also attended by sympathetic socialites like Parma de Pratz, and aware of this he becomes 'very quiet and obviously on his guard … afraid that contact with Redfern and Parma and the rest might dilute his rebel fervour' (181), seemingly explicitly aware of a kind of bourgeois contaminant. Conversely, men like Gerry Blain, born into the bourgeois (notwithstanding his father's humble roots), seem determined to effect a kind of ascetic renunciation of the trappings of class. Upon visiting him at his digs, Mary Maud

> looked round the shabby rooms with dismay. Certainly no decorators had been at work here. The furniture was fairly comfortable but obviously belonged to the landlady. Gerry's only possessions seemed to be a desk and the books overflowing the old-fashioned bookcase.
>
> Gerry saw her glance. "It's a hole, but it's comfortable," he smiled. "I got the landlady to remove all the pictures – they were war scenes – and all her ornaments, which got in my way. Now it quite suits." (97)

However, despite any efforts to relegate its significance, the economic factor always ultimately underpins class. This is well observed by Orwell in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Ravelston is the wealthy publisher to the novel's protagonist Gordon Comstock. Ravelston is a character reputedly based on the erstwhile editor of the *Adelphi*, Sir Richard Rees, and the depiction of his relationship with the impoverished writer Comstock is also deeply redolent of the tenor of the correspondence between George Garrett and John Lehmann. Ravelston is 'used to encouraging despondent poets' and 'did not need telling why Gordon "couldn't" write', but nevertheless exhorts Comstock that he 'oughtn't to let [him]self be discouraged. After all, you produce something' (91). He is keenly self-conscious about his bourgeois status and ill at ease with his unearned wealth, apparently prepared to publish virtually anything in his left-wing journal *Antichrist* 'if he suspected that its author was starving' (ibid.):

> There was something in the atmosphere of Ravelston's flat that upset [Gordon] and made him feel mean, dirty and out of place. It was so overwhelmingly, though unconsciously, upper-class. … It would have astonished Ravelston to learn that his four-roomed flat, which he thought of as a poky little place, had this effect on Gordon. To Ravelston, living in the wilds of Regent's Park was practically the same thing as living in the slums; he had chosen to live there, *en bon socialiste*, precisely as your social snob will live in a mews in Mayfair for the sake of the 'W1' on his notepaper. It was part of a lifelong attempt to escape from his own class and become, as it were, an honorary member of the proletariat. Like all such attempts, it was foredoomed to failure. No rich man ever succeeds in disguising himself as a poor man; for money, like murder, will out. (87-8)

Gerry Blain and Ravelston are thus in this way remarkably similar. However, what is offered as a differentiating factor in Gerry is that his renunciation does not only entail eschewing the cosmetic trappings of class, but the fortune he is heir to altogether: he 'won't take a farthing. Says he'll burn the lot in a furnace if the old man leaves it to him. Now he is living on his [war] pension and what he can make by journalism' (32). Wilkinson is to an extent here also guilty of turning voluntary poverty, and by extension poverty itself, into a legitimating virtue; indeed, Gerry is fully ratified towards the end of the novel

when it is revealed on his father's death that he has already in fact frittered away most of Gerry's inheritance (156). Wilkinson, through the character of Gerry, to her credit shows an acute awareness of this vexing paradox:

> "I never was comfortable about that money except when I had decided not to touch it. Once I thought of using it for the Movement all sorts of doubts crept in. It didn't seem right somehow. I should be buying power. I couldn't help that, even though I never spent a farthing on myself." (157)

Here, money is figured as a contaminator of ideological purity, set against the potential hypocrisy of its use for ideological ends. These are not easily resolved tensions, precisely because ultimately no one can ever be perfectly pure, nor can any political ends avoid the adulterations of expediency and power.

We have previously discussed Mary Maud's battle with Helen Dacre for Tony's 'soul', and noted that this was governed by the economic power both women could wield, and that this is largely the case in general when it comes to literary/cultural production. Now here we have Gerry agonising over the same issue, but also highlighting a certain reality: if poverty is in itself turned into a legitimating cultural signifier of working-class authenticity, then this only further strengthens the position of those who have no problem laying claim to the opposite. Whereas rather than muddying class with culture, what should be constantly asserted is that in the final analysis political values are choices available to class and class alike, and no one should be duped into thinking that one must first 'perform working-classness' before adopting political values that prioritise the advancement of that class. Rather, as *Clash* shows, the worth of such an adoption will be determined when courage is required to augment conviction, as we will see shortly.

We can clearly identify the anxiety of performing class in the case of *Aspidistra*'s Ravelston. For all his worthy endeavours and the fact that the 'fatty degeneration of the spirit which goes with wealth had missed him, or he had escaped it by conscious effort', he nevertheless 'lived upon eight hundred a year or thereabouts. … of this income he was acutely ashamed' (90). How does Ravelston play this down? We have noted earlier how 'wealthy young men would "dress below" their prescribed class to rebel against a system they benefitted from'; Ravelston is no different:

> He wore the uniform of the moneyed intelligentsia; an old tweed coat – but it was one of those coats which have been made by a good tailor and grow more aristocratic as they grow older – very loose grey flannel bags, a grey pullover,

much-worn brown shoes. (88-9)

I am reminded of the down-at-heel aristocrat Withnail in Bruce Robinson's 1987 film *Withnail & I*; upon drug dealer Danny enquiring 'why's [Withnail] wearin' that old suit?', Withnail responds viciously and indignantly: 'Old suit? This suit was cut by Hawke's of Savile Row. Just because the best tailoring you've ever seen is above your fucking appendix doesn't mean anything' (Robinson 29). These are questions of desired perception: Withnail has no desire to be seen as a pleb, and in fact feels degraded by his material poverty, histrionically complaining that he is 'a *trained actor* reduced to the status of a *bum*!' (15, Robinson's emphasis). Ravelston, though, wears similar clothes *deliberately* to disguise his wealth, echoing Tony Dacre in *Clash*: 'Joan wondered if he were hard up. His clothes were well worn, but obviously from a good tailor. His shirt was *crêpe-de-Chine* and looked new. No, he couldn't be poor and buy shirts like that' (19).

The irony in all this, of course, is that the genuinely poor generally have no special interest in appearing poor. It goes without saying that not everyone especially craves the extremes of beautiful or expensive things and clothes; nevertheless, being working-class most certainly does not preclude the desire for items like Parma de Pratz's 'cubist scarf that Joan envied intensely' (17). However, if we were honest, most of us – rich or poor – at the very least would rather our clothes were not falling off us. As a deliberate choice, this is nowadays usually the preserve of university students on adolescent voyages of self-discovery, or of course – now as then – of those who would prefer to efface their class status, or perhaps to affect an absent-minded neglect of such vulgarities, so preoccupied are they with their intellectual pursuits. *Plus ça change*. Unable (or unwilling) to inhabit the genuine economic status of 'proletarian', traditional intellectuals instead aspire to the 'declassing' illusions of cultural choices. Secure in the economic safety of the bourgeois class, they become what Richard Hoggart called the 'classless intelligentsia' (300), pursuing their intellectual interests ostensibly autonomous of partisan class agendas. This apparent autonomy, though, is very much contingent upon the sanction of the bourgeois milieu, and most certainly must not threaten the status quo upon which that milieu's privileges are founded.

However, it is important to note that it is not only the more transparent bourgeois accessories who are susceptible to a conception of themselves as autonomous truth-speakers. Gerry Blain sees the truth of how hegemony speaks with a covert voice, no

doubt, and this inspires his efforts to produce a left-leaning publication: 'No capitalist millionaire could sell capitalist propaganda. He sells jam, and you don't notice the powder till you lick the spoon' (159). But in the same breath, he is proposing 'a really live Labour weekly that doesn't try to sell propaganda' (158), with Joan commissioned to report from the North with 'No propaganda, no moral, just the plain yarn at a thousand words a time' (159). It hardly needs pointed out that this is at best naivety, at worst disingenuous – as if a Labour paper could be free of propaganda in a way that an ideologically opposed journal could not. Furthermore, embedded in his mission statement is the tacit injunction to simplify, 'the plain yarn', and an echo of John Lehmann's injunction to George Garrett to 'Make it racy': 'we'll … produce something that is not highbrow but is really lively' (158).

What Blain and the *Wednesday Weekly* team are in effect actually engaging in, whether they think they are or not, is a Gramscian 'war of position' (Gramsci et al. 225-30), which is to say attempting a form of passive revolution 'whereby a social group comes to power without rupturing the social fabric … but rather by adapting to it and gradually modifying it' (ibid. 247). This is certainly so for *The Plebs*, *The Guardian*, or any other publication which assumes a position, and arguably for most forms of cultural production to greater or lesser extents. For Gramsci, cultural hegemony was a prerequisite to assuming political power (ibid. 306-7) – whether this is correct is another question. For example, as Terry Eagleton notes, Lenin asserted that 'the proletariat is unable to conquer cultural power, in anything like a substantial form, *until* it has politically overthrown the very state which excludes it from the modes of cultural production and consumption' ("Proletarian Literature" 7, his emphasis). However, Murray Bookchin has noted that 'the bourgeoisie controlled economic life long before it took state power; it had become the dominant class materially, culturally and ideologically before it asserted its dominance politically. The proletariat does not control economic life' ("Listen, Marxist!").

Notwithstanding this uncertainty, Blain's claim to a propaganda-free endeavour is plainly false; rather, what is at stake is the replacement of one supposed 'class outlook' with another, albeit one that its proponents believe to be more just. And nevertheless, whether this outlook is identified with the plain yarn of a shirt or the plain yarn of a thousand words – either way, it is retrogressive.

'The feared poison.'

Earlier, I posed the question: will material success as a writer automatically make that writer a bourgeois stooge? For Joan, this is very much a 'live' question. Engagement with forms of cultural production like *Wednesday Weekly* opens up not just the trappings of Bloomsbury, but a more general form of freedom: 'Hope and interesting work lay ahead of them, and life with all the stimulation and interest it can offer to those on whom no iron collar of routine is fastened' (160). That this is a seductive bait for Joan reflects a dynamic that is the source of a profound anxiety for working-class authors in general, and in many ways is at the nub of the idea of identifying a discrete working-class literature that refers to supposedly cultural touchstones: does the act of writing constitute a kind of 'law of diminishing returns' with regards to 'authenticity' in representation, because the act of authorship is in itself an irreversible step towards *becoming* bourgeois? On this point, *Clash* is an apposite study, as it addresses this directly and explicitly within the novel through a character (Joan) who very obviously lives out that anxiety. This though is a question that marks many other novels by working-class authors which also make explicit or oblique allusions to the status anxiety surrounding authorship, as we will touch upon shortly.

Firstly though, it is worth noting that given the well-established semi-autobiographical element of *Clash*, it is not a stretch to assume that Joan's anxiety surrounding her unconventional experience of authorship is representative of Wilkinson's own. I have discussed previously how George Garrett's use of pseudonyms was at least in part an effort to avoid the work being read in the light of the specificity of his own experience; in Wilkinson's case, though, in a way the opposite is true: Joannou and Haywood note that the character of Joan may appear to be 'lacking in plausibility, were it not for our knowledge that Wilkinson moved between these worlds herself' (xv-xvi). That is to say that Garrett's work (and that of many other working-class authors) often drew much of its force from an awareness that various elements of his lived experience as articulated in his writing were shared by a multitude of other working-class people, as Garrett remained firmly ensconced within that world. Conversely, Wilkinson's work was arguably *required* to be corroborated and substantiated by the very specificity Garrett endeavoured to avoid, reinforcing the fact that the liminal world inhabited by both Joan in *Clash* and Wilkinson in real life was an unusual, even anomalous experience.

But even bearing that in mind, Wilkinson *and* Garrett were nonetheless both

anomalies in another sense; i.e. as working-class writers *per se*. The status anxiety engendered by the very practice is a preoccupation that has persisted across the history of working-class writing. For example, Dermod Flynn, the autodidact protagonist of Patrick MacGill's 1914 novel *Children of the Dead End* remarks:

> My success as a writer discomfited me a little even. I at first felt that I was committing some sin against my mates. A man … who made money with a dirty pencil and a dirty piece of paper was an individual who had no place in my mates' scheme of things. (238)

Clash offers us an idea of why that might be:

> Carey's Main didn't read poetry … poetry would have seemed too grim a mockery in the mining towns. The young souls who might be thrilled by it had to keep this a dark secret like some fearful vice, unless they could stand endless chaff, and the souls that were unmoved by chaffing were not the type to whom Humbert Wolfe's work would appeal. (154)

Culture can appear a 'grim mockery' in conditions of privation and disenfranchisement, what Walter Greenwood in 1933's *Love on the Dole* called 'opiates [which] left a keener edge on hunger, made more loathsome reality's sores' (65). This sense of literature as a 'fearful vice' is further reflected in Alan Sillitoe's mid-century short story "The Fishing-boat Picture" (1959): in a husband-and-wife domestic scene, the perplexed and irritated wife erupts: "'You booky bastard," she screamed, "nowt but books, books, books, you bleddy dead-'ead" – and threw the book on the heaped up coals' (72). Active engagement with high culture elicits 'endless chaff' because it can be seen to represent a 'snobbish' dislocation from the community, which is both subconsciously provocative to peers and families, and profoundly vexing to working-class writers.

Greenwood elucidates this dislocating trajectory away from the working class in the educated, politically-engaged Larry Meath in *Love on the Dole*: 'his quality of studiousness … elevated him to a plane beyond that of ordinary folk' (22), and it is rendered as a more explicit sense of defection by Dermod Flynn in McGill's novel when, as a journalist, he is asked to cover a coal strike: 'I felt that in going I would be betraying my own class, the workers' (296). Ellen Wilkinson's narrator remarks that 'the feared poison was beginning to work. Already influential London was 'we' in Joan's mind' (154), identifying the gravitational pull away from their milieu that is exerted on organic intellectuals, one that is often all but imperceptible.

James Joll noted in his study *Gramsci*: 'as time goes on, intellectual groups which once performed an organic function, lose their links with a particular class' (92). That this dissipation is so often inevitable is perhaps best illustrated by Alan Sillitoe's later disavowal of his own 1958 novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*'s status as working-class literature: 'The greatest inaccuracy was ever to call the book a "working-class novel" for it is really nothing of the sort. It is simply a novel' (Sillitoe, qtd. in Marwick 141). This is a particularly interesting statement when viewed in the context of our previous discussion, specifically that surrounding Walter Benn Michaels' argument that inequality is elided by turning 'working-class literature' into a cultural artefact to be respected and maintained. In one sense, then, Sillitoe is right: *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* in fact *should* really be seen as 'simply a novel'. However, in the context of the immediate discussion, Sillitoe's statement could be seen as a manifestation of the eventual atrophy of his connection to his class origin.

Consider Sillitoe's plainly self-referential short story "The Decline and Fall of Frankie Buller". The narrator describes the books in his Majorcan house as the 'foliage that has grown to conceal the bare stem of my real personality' (152); and on a return to his native Nottinghamshire estate, he meets his childhood friend, the eponymous Frankie Buller:[21]

> Coming from the same class and, one might say, from the same childhood, there should have been some tree-root of recognition between us … But there was no contact and I, being possessed of what the world I had moved into often termed "heightened consciousness", I knew that it was due as much to something in Frankie as in me…. And I with my books have not seen him since. It was like saying goodbye to a big part of me, for ever. (150-2)

Similarly, the literary critic Raymond Williams' own semi-autobiographical debut novel, *Border Country* (1960), depicts a lecturer returning to his South Wales roots: 'The personal meaning is evident in every shape in this country, every sound of the loved voices, but the public meaning is elsewhere, in a different negotiation and another voice' (382-3). Ian Haywood also notes an explicit awareness of the threat of just this form of displacement and 'loss of self' in Jim Phelan: 'On his release from prison [Phelan] was courted by the literary establishment, but refused the offer of a salaried job in favour of tramping: "they

[21] Plainly self-referential as Sillitoe was himself from a working-class Nottinghamshire background, and spent six years writing in Majorca (Taylor).

could keep their job, and I would keep Jim Phelan'" (79).

The character of this literary displacement, then, is subtle, less obviously material or political; the price of intellect is here measured in sociocultural metrics, as, increasingly, has been the notion of class itself today. However, I have also argued for the separation of political values from the original sin of class, and against their conflation with so-called cultural values. This would seem to offer a route out of the organic/traditional distinction as being quite such rigid, siloed, reified states: put simply, if it is possible for bourgeois authors like Orwell to adopt and hold political values antithetical to their class interests, is it also equally possible for working-class authors to *retain* such values even when their personal economic conditions are ameliorated to middle- or upper-class levels? I have no simple answer to this question, precisely because any answer must refer individually to circumstances that are unique, evanescent, and volatile: in other words, human life. I have earlier alluded, though, that what is likely to be a significant factor is whether one has the courage of such convictions when push comes to shove, as it were. Here is an example of why literature and art in general are, and remain, important: they can represent to us complex imprecisions like these in a way that nevertheless leaves us in no doubt as to the truth of the matter.

'The fine shades between class and class.'

Wilkinson demonstrates this in the way that she has Tony Dacre exit the novel, subtly exposing him as a dilettante in the truest sense of the word. In the novel's climactic scene, Joan addresses a charity event for starving miners organised by Helen Dacre, and eventually, provoked by the superciliousness of the attending grandees, repudiates her own links with the Bloomsbury milieu (and by extension her dalliance with Tony) with a bridge-burning speech in which she brands them 'selfish, idle people' whose charity is little more than 'grudging almsgiving' (188). Amid the ensuing outrage Joan exits stage left, but rather than pursue her 'Tony leapt to the platform. He was popular. He was a celebrity. He had a good voice. Joan heard him appealing for order as the door swung behind her' (ibid.). This is literally the last time Tony is seen. The arc of this major character (strictly speaking, he is the antagonist) is given no closure to speak of, rather Tony Dacre is simply dissolved back into the bourgeois world from whence he came. The inference is clear: in the final

analysis, when the titular 'clash' of classes is unambiguously articulated, when hard – and, crucially, overt and undisguised – choices are there to be made, Tony (and traditional intellectuals like him) will always revert to type and prioritise the offended sensibilities of his own milieu. The political values that Tony apparently shared with Joan are in fact shown to be largely meaningless to him and incidental to his own ends, his seemingly sincere interest exposed as so much cant. He is a bourgeois shill, the quintessential traditional intellectual, and – in answer to his own question – in this sense he is unequivocally 'Bloomsbury "them"'.

For Joan, however, the politics that inform and incite her ire constitute a directing influence with regard to her life choices; she consciously rejects Tony, and the life he could offer her, on behalf of her politics:

> "It's difficult when you get to the fine shades between class and class, but the big broad issue is there. It's the issue that this century will be occupied in fighting out. We don't want to face it, but it's there."
>
> "It's there all right," answered Gerry quietly.
>
> There was silence for a time, and then Joan said in a low tone:
>
> "I'm sorry about dishing Helen's show, but this afternoon showed me where I had been drifting. I've got to stick with my crowd, Gerry, and work with them. I've got to be in this fight. You were right. One can't live in luxury and pretend one is working with them just the same. I'm in the ring from now on. No more trips to the stalls," and she smiled at him. (189)

All of which though seems to assert that moving class, geographically and economically, is irreconcilable with participation in a socialist political project – the compromise equilibrium simply works too well. Perhaps it is infallible in its neutering function for those who inhabit 'the fine shades between class and class'?

Ellen Wilkinson herself provides perhaps the most compelling evidence to the contrary. In 1925, she took a flat in Bloomsbury, right amongst the literary and cultural intelligentsia: Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster, John Maynard Keynes, alongside *Plebs* alumni Winifred and J. F. Horrabin to add a little radical socialist flavour (Beers 159). The area itself, what Matt Perry dubs 'the Montparnasse of London' (268), was in Wilkinson's own words 'a muddled, down-at-heel, rather slummy, rack-rented district' (qtd. in Perry 268), evoking a 'shabby chic' vibe which doubtless functioned in much the same way as Ravelston's clothes. She also found it 'a colourful area the more so since the most interesting of refugees tend to gravitate there' (ibid.). It is perhaps somewhat of an *ad hominem* to wonder whether the well-documented efforts of Wilkinson

and the journalist, novelist and translator Margaret Goldsmith for that small colony of refugees would have been quite so enthusiastic were the refugees wholly less interesting than the likes of Berthold Brecht. Laura Beers argues that 'this was literary territory, and Ellen's decision to move there says much about her self-conception as a "modern" young intellectual' (160), which must be weighed against Ellen's narrator in *Clash*, who acidly describes the same coterie as an 'exclusive Bloomsbury circle who bestowed fame on themselves by reviewing each other's books' (159).

All of which might seem like a picture of someone who did indeed drift into 'the stalls' rather than 'get in the ring', were it not for the testament of her well-documented political achievements prior to her untimely death in 1947 at the age of 55. One need only consult the final chapter of Betty Vernon's biography for a litany of tributes from a myriad of people; I will not reproduce them all here, rather extract the pertinent tenor from the aggregate. Dame Margaret Cole suggested that she was 'too ready to accept undigested ideas without letting them simmer' (qtd. in Vernon 236), which Vernon extrapolates to a tendency 'to assume that the Left was right just because it was the Left' (236). Susan Lawrence, though, remembered of Wilkinson that 'action followed thought with a lightness and swiftness, without a shadow of calculation as to whether this or that would be to her own personal advancement' (qtd. in Vernon 236); Harold Laski that 'pride in her own achievement was always set in the perspective of the Movement's victory' (qtd. in Vernon 237).

In short, Wilkinson was no more immune to the attractions of glamour and status than anyone else, and no less immune to the pitfalls of dogma. Nevertheless, her governing motive was always, or at least far more often than not, the advancement of collective justice as she believed it to be, which she placed above individual enrichment or aggrandisement. Ultimately, none of us are invulnerable to our more selfish urges, and succumbing to or indulging them occasionally is as inevitable as the sun rising in the east. However, we must strive and aspire to subordinate those impulses in favour of privileging a set of political values not endemic to one or other class but available to all and thus *chosen*, and more especially to do so in the moments when we are consciously aware that a meaningful choice is there to be made. If we can do that, then culture can be left to its own devices. For Joan Craig and Gerry Blain, for Ellen Wilkinson and any one of us, it is the wholehearted, constant personal endeavour to cleave to those values that really separates 'Socialist "us"' from "Bloomsbury "them"'.

Lionel Britton

'You don't believe that? – You would not be the same man if you did.'

It is a curious anomaly that despite the 1930s being a much-surveyed 'golden age' of working-class writing, the name of Lionel Britton (1887-1971) barely figures anywhere. Biographical information is scarce to say the least, and serious attention to his literary work all but non-existent.[22] I say curious because although he published only one novel (along with three plays), that novel – *Hunger and Love* (1931) – was (and is) surely one of the most idiosyncratic novels of the era: over 700 pages long, with a scope and ambition commensurate with its length, it is an immense, excursive opus without obvious precursor or relation amongst its contemporaries in working-class writing. Its obscurity is doubly curious given Britton's relative renown at the time of its publication:

> Before *Hunger and Love* was finally published, Britton had also written at least a first draft of his three published plays [*Brain* (1930), *Spacetime Inn* (1932), and *Animal Ideas* (1935)], and it is an indication of his strong powers of persuasion that [his first] play would possibly not have been published without the assistance of Bernard Shaw, into whose hands he contrived to thrust a copy; Shaw passed it on to Sir Barry Jackson, which the press reported with great enthusiasm. … *Brain* ensured that Britton was already relatively well known when *Hunger and Love* was published the following February, and after this his short-lived fame began in earnest and he was in great demand for a brief few years. (Shaw, 11)

In the case of *Hunger and Love*, and in the context of the pressures bearing on working-class authors with regard to literary publication that I have previously discussed at length, it is just as notable that Britton

> refused to allow any cuts to be made to the content. It is a measure of his self-confidence and his powers of persuasion that he secured Bertrand Russell's five-page Introduction to the novel, and that Constant Huntington of Putnam not only did not insist that he make cuts, but also allowed him to write the final amendments to it more or less as he wished. (10)

[22] For the biographical information I do provide here (and indeed for one instance of serious attention to his literary work), I am greatly indebted to the exhaustive work contained within Tony Shaw's PhD thesis, *The Work of Lionel Britton* (2006).

In addition, Britton was much caricatured in the press of the time, due to a somewhat eccentric appearance that Arnold Bennett described as looking like 'he had just come from the French Riviera' (ibid.). Given all of the above, then, it is indeed a curious anomaly that both he and his work to this day remain more or less unknown and certainly uncelebrated. Were I predisposed towards cynicism and tempted to speculate, the fact that *Hunger and Love* both defies any smooth assimilation into presupposed working-class novelistic traditions of the 1930s, and in its very magnitude and complexity resists brief encapsulation and/or cursory engagement, could well have played a part in its neglect.

***

In terms of this thesis' engagement with the concept of working-class identity, it is also notable that Lionel Erskine Nimmo Britton could not reasonably be said to have been *born* working-class. At the time of his birth in 1887 in Alcester, Warwickshire, his father Richard was a practicing solicitor in the family business, Britton & Son. However, a year later in 1888 the company went bankrupt, prompting a peripatetic period for the young, expanding family, culminating in Bournemouth in 1894 when Lionel's father died of tuberculosis in significant debt, leaving behind his wife Irza and Lionel's three siblings, Ivy, Percy, and Cyril. The children were then moved to Redditch, near Birmingham, to live with their grandparents, where Lionel (by his own account) did well in school and soon 'learned all they could teach him' (8), but by age 14 Lionel had run away and almost certainly moved to London. At this point, his real life begins to converge significantly with *Hunger and Love*'s protagonist, Arthur Phelps: like Arthur, he was a grocer's errand boy, and following that

> He next found more errand work with an educational bookseller, the University Book Co. on Southampton Row, which according to Britton was the main catalyst to his intellectual curiosity, where he secretly read all he could in the firm's time, which was also when he discovered "the penny-dump on the book-barrows on Farringdon Road", "a mine of mind for empty pockets". Britton worked at the shop for about six years, when he voluntarily left to work as a shop assistant for bookseller A. H. Mayhew (on whom Sarner in *Hunger and Love* is probably based) in Charing Cross Road for nearly two years… (9)

This trajectory closely resembles the plot of *Hunger and Love*; in fact, it virtually *is* the plot.

The novel follows Arthur Phelps from around the age of sixteen, in London

somewhere around 1904, as he progresses through a career path indistinguishable from the above in all but names. There are numerous incidental encounters with prostitutes, socialists, landladies, and myriad others, but Arthur's path through life is ultimately a lonely one. He conducts a self-directed education with an astonishing level of commitment, taking any opportunity to read at work, on the street, at home in his shabby bedsit, and consuming any and all books he can lay his hands on. The novel ends around the outbreak of the First World War, with Arthur Phelps being press-ganged into enlisting for military service by both his employer and his (exceedingly narrow) social circle.

This represents a significant divergence in the semi-autobiographical context: Britton himself did not enlist, indeed he was jailed for eighteen months as a conscientious objector. In line with the hatred of capitalism evinced in the novel, by 1917 Britton had (unsuccessfully) applied for Russian citizenship; latterly, following a period of white-collar work in advertising and his subsequent brief rise to literary distinction, he eventually travelled to Russia in 1935 under the auspices of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers. However, he was deeply disillusioned by what he found there – he awoke 'from his utopian dream to find a nightmare' (13) in Russia – and his return to Britain marked the beginning of a decline which by the 40s saw his published literary career effectively over. An itinerant lifestyle ensued, with his last years spent 'as a virtual recluse in Margate' (16) until his death in 1971. He remains in obscurity to this day.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding that obscurity, *Hunger and Love* survives. It is a text that undoubtedly requires a degree of commitment; it is difficult to adequately convey the effect its seven hundred-odd pages create in tracing out its story, one that on the face of it barely seems sufficient to sustain two hundred. The extant criticism reflects the deeply awkward problem the novel presents to those who would attempt to assess or explain it.

Hunger and Love **and the critics**

George Orwell's 1931 review in *The Adelphi* tells us that 'a writer with any sense of selection would have cut this book down from 700 pages to 200, and lost nothing' (81). Indeed, Orwell goes further, telling us that 'as a novel *Hunger and Love* is almost worthless … [it] is one long digression … making no attempt to be readable' (ibid.). However, in the course of the following chapter on form, I will attempt to evince the way in which Britton's

insistent repetition of various tropes and literary techniques begin to 'pile up' across its breadth, how its ceaseless, consistent narrative digressions along with its sustained narratorial ambiguity eventually create what I can only describe as a kind of rhythmic emptiness which induces an almost dissociative reading experience – what Orwell called a 'curious style … thoughts recur and recur – a sort of mental eczema, a perpetual restless irritation over mean things' (ibid.). If this sounds exaggerated or even overwrought, in the final analysis I can only direct you to the text itself. For now, however, we might perhaps note that even Orwell, notwithstanding his ostensibly well-founded criticisms in terms of editing, nevertheless could not help closing his review with a kind of puzzled-yet-affected qualifying statement which belies *Hunger and Love*'s sedulous and inescapable impact: '[a judiciously edited] *Hunger and Love* might have been a first-rate book instead of merely an unusual one. Still, it *is* unusual' (ibid., his emphasis).

Let us first attend to the most obvious aspect of that 'curious style'; that is, the book's apparently deficient ratio of plot – of story – to its sheer scope and length. As noted above, Orwell claimed that 'a writer with any sense of *selection* would have cut this book down', a first impression obviously shared by many: J. F. Horrabin, reviewing in *The Plebs* (also in 1931), mirrors Orwell in imagining that 'Mr. Britton writes down every blessed thing that comes into his head. … Well, there is such a thing as *selection*' (211, my emphasis). We have also noted above that Orwell found it almost worthless as a novel; he further bemoans that it failed to turn its content 'into a memorable story' (81). This is also reflected in other contemporary reviews from 1931: Arnold Bennett suggests that Britton 'frequently forgets that he is telling a story' (qtd. in Shaw 30), while Geoffrey West in the *Times Literary Supplement* claims that 'Mr. Britton is frankly contemptuous of the novel as story' (131). However, West does seem aware of a distinction that, while perhaps ambiguous, remains important:

> *Nevertheless, the book is truly a novel*, its point of view, if intellectual, rendered imaginatively – often indeed with a passionate exaltation or indignation – and its ideas consonant with the character and experiences described. The literary quality of the writing is, moreover, frequently remarkable. The associative method of the bare, telegraphic, colloquial prose may owe something to Mr. James Joyce… (ibid., my emphasis)

The sense of 'novel' and 'story' as being discrete terms or concepts would appear to be significant, then; perhaps even more so given *Hunger and Love*'s arrival during the nascence

of what we commonly call 'literary modernism' (of which Joyce is of course regarded as a key figure, especially stylistically).

Even leaving aside the specificities of modernism, it is worth posthumously reminding Orwell *et al* that the premise on which the generic term 'novel' rests is not easily defined. For example, Chris Baldick's definition of novel in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* tells us that 'some do not even tell a story', and indeed that the genre 'acknowledges no obligatory structure, style, or subject-matter' ("novel"). Terry Eagleton puts it more succinctly in *The English Novel*: 'It is less a genre than an anti-genre' (1); he further notes, aptly for my purposes, that '[the novel] can investigate a single human consciousness for eight hundred pages' (ibid.), which is in fact some hundred pages more than Britton takes to do precisely that. Moreover, in an unpublished "Caution to the Reader", Britton himself 'freely admits that the book has "not strictly speaking, a story"' (qtd. in Shaw 26). Adam Daly, in one of the few current treatments of Britton, expands on this:

> It doesn't have a narrative plot exactly, in the conventional sense of telling a story that builds step-by-step to its climax. Instead, it has a mounting and tumbling rhythm, in which the development happens as much in the mind of the protagonist – and in a chaotically cyclical fashion – as it does in the settings, and in the events going on around him. And in a sense that makes it easier 'to force one's own way into the written work' as Edmond Jabès would say, as one can plunge into the pages at random and find oneself swept along on a tide of currents that carry the essence of the book just as much as any of the preceding detail one has missed. (55)

And so, from all these responses, we can begin to divine a sense of the kind of work *Hunger and Love* is: not a huge amount actually *happens*, but this is not a novel chiefly concerned with story, plotting, pace. One is reminded of Flaubert: when setting out to write the hugely influential *Madame Bovary* (1857), he wrote that he aspired to produce 'a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the internal strength of its style' (154).

Hunger and Love is a novel concerned with the inner world not just of the protagonist, but also of the narrator, and, as Daly rightly notes, of the reader themselves: he invokes the French-Egyptian poet Jabès, a writer who 'want[ed] his reader to be the one who writes and who is written' (Del Nevo 418). This is achieved in *Hunger and Love*, as we will see, by a sustained blurring of the boundary between the authority of the protagonist, the narrator, and the reader, and also by a constant switching of register from a focus on the quotidian and the (ostensibly) insignificant, to the scientific and indeed the cosmic. It is in no small

part the very scale of the repetition and duration of these effects/techniques that grant them their potency, and enables them to displace the reader from their customary neutral position and confound the usual grounds for judgment. Just as Orwell could not help but conclude of *Hunger and Love* that despite all his reservations 'it *is* unusual', similarly Geoffrey West cannot help but acknowledge that it has an undeniable *something*: 'the cumulative effect is impressive, but of grandeur rather than beauty. Yet it *has* a beauty…' (131, his emphasis).

As for specific comparisons with Joyce, in 1935 Philip Henderson claims that such comparisons are somewhat redundant given that 'it is patent that Britton has neither the consummate artistry, nor the intellectual power of Joyce' (144): while *Hunger and Love* is 'a work of undisciplined, elemental power' it nevertheless 'make[s] pretty terrible reading' (143). Where Henderson *does* praise the book, though, is from a very defined Marxist perspective, i.e. for its elucidation of class antagonism: its 'unclouded vision of the forces at work in contemporary society' (ibid.). I note this to illustrate that the preoccupations with *story* evinced by much of the response to *Hunger and Love*, as well as Henderson's very specific and qualified plaudit, reveal more about (as I've described elsewhere) the assumptions governing social realism as a genre – which in turn generate tacit expectations that bear heavily on working-class writers – than they do about any inherent formal or aesthetic errors of the text. *Hunger and Love* cannot be understood as being part of any realist tradition that would be approved by Lukács and/or Marxist critics of a similar ilk – it is without question a modernist text, broadly understood. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising to find Joyce's *Ulysses* bear criticisms in its own time very redolent of those aimed at Britton's novel. For example, Edmund Wilson in a 1922 review for *The New Republic* found that

> It seems to me great rather for the things that are in it than for its success as a whole. It is almost as if in distending the story to ten times its natural size he had finally managed to burst it and leave it partially deflated. There must be something wrong with a design which involves so much that is dull – and I doubt whether anyone will defend parts of *Ulysses* against the charge of extreme dullness. … I cannot but feel that Mr. Joyce made a mistake to have the whole plan of his story depend on the structure of the *Odyssey* rather than on the natural demands of the situation. … Yet for all its appalling longueurs, *Ulysses* is a work of high genius. ("From the Stacks")

Again that perplexed, almost vexed 'yet'; always that sense of an inexplicable yet undeniable quality, one that defies and transcends the most ostensibly straightforward and

seemingly obvious and fundamental flaws. So, when Philip Henderson claims that 'It is to the credit of Arnold Bennett that he also had the courage to hail [*Hunger and Love*] as a work of genius, though he showed a considerable want of discrimination in stating that it was a better book than Joyce's *Ulysses*' (144), what is it that lies beyond the 'yet', so to speak, and underpins his distinction between the two?

It is not primarily a formal or story-based judgment; after all, both novels are undeniably extravagantly long and could hardly be considered gripping narratives. Rather, it is a question of aesthetic and intellectual *content*: i.e. 'consummate artistry' and 'intellectual power' are the qualities that Bennett failed to account for in his (erroneous, according to Henderson) assessment of Britton's genius. One could imagine John Carey swooping in at this juncture to glibly remind us of modernism's hostile scheme to make literature too difficult for the masses, pointing to (among other things) Joyce's densely allusive style, replete with references to Homer, Shakespeare, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, Wilde, and countless others. However, even the most cursory scrutiny of Britton's novel reveals a novel positively brimming with esoteric subjects – could Carey seriously uphold Lionel Britton as some kind of literary gatekeeper? Or, as discussed in the previous chapter, isn't it more accurate to see such an imputation as a red herring, whether the author is working-class or not? It is true of *Hunger and Love* that any specifically *literary* allusions are comparatively rare: Shakespeare, for instance, comes up often; however, when he appears he does so as the subject of straightforward veneration, as opposed to oblique, knowing allusions to his works:

> That is why you study in the night, why Shakespeare, Newton stir you. Towering giant figures against the storm sunset of the past, those ages which were the day of the world where now it is the night of time, stretch out a great hand from behind the sunset, to you, a mighty hand which gathers in for you all the sunsets of all the souls of the world, for you. For you. Snotty-Nose! for you, Shirt-Hanger-Out! — for all the You's of the world — to be Great, like them, to be human, like them, like you. Does that not stir you till you burst? Arthur Phelps, say Sir! (614)

Nevertheless, although *Hunger and Love* is in this sense more direct than allusive, its range of reference is equally enormous, if perhaps better characterised as 'para-literary':

> …quite 400 of his 700 closely-printed pages are filled with generalisations and fantasias on molecular changes, the Invariance of the Interval, space-time, osmotic pressure, Atlantis, Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, galactic diameters, Euclid, puberal immaturity, Fallopian tubes, protozoa, the failure of education, zygotes,

> morphology, Henry VIII—and, lots and lots of things. And these, though often witty and challenging and unorthodox — if you happen to know anything of the abstruse subject round about which Mr. Britton's fancy is playing, which I most often don't — are not so interesting as his direct descriptions of, and comments upon, actual life. (Horrabin 210)

So, leaving aside for the moment the deeply subjective question of 'consummate artistry', given that Britton's novel is as unashamedly recondite as Joyce's, of what breed is the 'intellectual power' by which Joyce exceeds Britton?

I am here reminded of Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, in which he makes the argument that canonical writers are canonical by virtue of, among other things, their 'cognitive power'. For Bloom, 'one breaks into the canon only by aesthetic strength, which is constituted primarily of an amalgam: mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction' (27-8). If we were to employ this template to what we have just discussed, then we might conclude that both Britton and Joyce display knowledge in abundance, as evidenced by the extent of their esoteric allusions and digressions. Further, we might conclude that their originality is beyond reasonable doubt, given the confounded reaction of critics who cannot quite seem to square the circle of apparently long and boring books which nevertheless have a unique 'X factor' that cannot be ignored. As to mastery of figurative language and exuberance of diction – well, these are very much matters of taste, but it is worth noting Bloom's claim that Joyce's genius resides primarily elsewhere: '*Ulysses* has enough verbal splendor to furnish a legion of novels, yet we sense that the book's central position in the Canon transcends Joyce's styles, masterful as all of them are' (388). So, we are left with cognitive power, of which Bloom has this to say:

> Cognitive power is generally not a quality we consciously seek in a novelist, or in a lyric poet or dramatist. George Eliot, like Emily Dickinson and Blake, and like Shakespeare, rethought everything through for herself. She is the novelist as thinker (not as philosopher)… (300)

These are rarefied heights, and such definitions stubbornly resist precision in application. But, crudely put, Bloom is asserting that we sense a truly independent mind at work. As such, the explicit distinction here between thinker and philosopher is crucial. My sense (or perhaps more accurately my unsurprising interpretation) is that Bloom is distinguishing between two things: one, a kind of *sui generis*, self-created 'thinker'; and two, a sense of 'philosopher' as someone who is concerned with their position as such, and who claims

either the authority to be didactic or cleaves to a particular school of thought (or both).

Here I would wager that the admittedly pompous and slightly irascible Bloom is referring to what he sees as the usurpation of the academy by 'all six branches of the School of Resentment: Feminists, Marxists, Lacanians, New Historicists, Deconstructionists, Semioticians' (492), for whom (in Bloom's opinion) aesthetic value is subordinated and reduced to a function of ideology. It would be easy to dismiss Bloom's paroxysms as the death throes of an old elitism, but one must be careful. While he admits that for the Yale professors of the world, 'the leisure for meditation must be purchased from the community' (23) – in other words, one can never be wholly removed from the conflict of social and economic class – nevertheless, he asserts that 'the freedom to apprehend aesthetic value may rise from class conflict, but the value is not identical with the freedom' (23). As such, 'the strongest poetry is cognitively and imaginatively too difficult to be read deeply by more than a relative few *of any social class*, gender, race, or ethnic origin' (485, my emphasis), an assertion that places him at odds with John Carey's tale of upper-class mystification, and more in line with Ortega y Gasset's supra-class cultural aristocrats as previously discussed. And again, these formulations, whether you agree with them or not, have important insights with regards to the conflation of class and culture that is my primary concern. Bloom argues that:

> Either there were aesthetic values, or there are only the overdeterminations of race, class, and gender. You must choose, for if you believe that all value ascribed to poems or plays or novels and stories is only a mystification in the service of the ruling class, then why should you read at all rather than go forth to serve the desperate needs of the exploited classes? The idea that you benefit the insulted and injured by reading someone of their own origins rather than reading Shakespeare is one of the oddest illusions ever promoted by or in our schools. (487)

Quite so. Here we might return to Lionel Britton, and his inferiority to Joyce as asserted by Henderson. I am not going to argue either author's merit relative to the other; rather I am going to question the grounds on which Henderson's judgment was made.

What does Henderson really want from an author like Lionel Britton? Probably something similar to J. F. Horrabin above, for whom Britton's esoteric riffing could never be 'so interesting as his direct descriptions of, and comments upon, actual life'. Henderson asserts that 'typical' working-class authors like Britton (and James Hanley and Walter Greenwood) provide 'signs of a more revolutionary protest against the existing economic

order … from those who have suffered most directly from it…. the voice of the emergent working class' (143). Whereas nothing is really expected of the middle-class Joyce other than to exercise his consummate artistry. Working-class authors like Britton, though, are expected to present aesthetics commensurate with their class. Henderson, however, is not even happy with that: the 'defeatism and despair' of *Hunger and Love* apparently marks Britton out as 'an anarchist rather than a socialist' (145) – not quite the perfect revolutionary protest required, then.

However, while defeatism and despair may indeed be present at times, it is a gross misrepresentation to suggest that they define the book – passionate anger and hope are *at least* as much in evidence, probably far more so:

> Look at the landscape, look at the stars: the molecules of the landscape shift about and change their places like the molecules in the changing shapes of the clouds, only in centuries instead of minutes, like the immense kinetic spacetime gas molecules which we call the stars. What is the time-world to them? – in thousands of billions of years their places change to one another, starlights that existed dissolve into night – the night-sky of the times of Arthur Phelps becomes the night-sky in which there is no earth and in which there shines no sun inside the consciousness of a watcher who is not here now. Look backwards to the earliest life-sea and forwards to the great immensity of dark, Arthur Phelps, your cell energies hold together, draw breath and stand up starkly to space and time, clench fist and determine to be human. (540)

As further evidence of the pitfalls of reading with a predetermined agenda, Henderson claims that 'Arthur Phelps, though ignorant and uneducated, wants to lead a full life like everyone else, but having no money he is condemned to sordidness and humiliation' (144). This much is prosaically true, but Henderson completely misunderstands what 'a full life' in fact means to Arthur. Citing a passage where Arthur muses that it perhaps 'wouldn't be so bad' to have a house, or even a gramophone, bookcases or a writing-desk, Henderson claims that 'Arthur Phelps always keeps before him the vision of the suburban villa: the goal of petit-bourgeois success' (145). This is an egregious distortion. Arthur *despises* the goal of petit-bourgeois success, repeatedly and vehemently; a full life to him means to 'be human', and the bourgeois life for him is quite explicitly anti-human:

> Can you be human – you, yourself? In spite of all the bourgeoisie can do? In spite of all?
>
> The difficulties under which the human has to struggle are so far beyond belief that even while we struggle under them we find them incredible. There are many who will find this book as a plain statement of fact absolutely incredible. They struggle, and bend under the struggle, until the struggle seems

> natural and the incredibilities non-existent and they cease to try to be human. The bourgeoisie conquer. But not always, and not altogether. (458)

Arthur strenuously pits himself against capitulation to and conformity with the ex-nominated, natural-seeming struggle for bourgeois goals in a bourgeois world – from page one to page seven hundred, *Hunger and Love* is a chronicle of Arthur's interior resistance to exactly this, under severe material duress.

That this resistance is ultimately futile precisely because of that duress is not disputed though; Arthur is acidly aware of the forces that are stacked against him:

> That is the human – that further stage beyond. Men, and then man. Men are already beginning to think of man. In isolated minds all over the earth in the darkness of their separation there is a dawn, and it is the dawn of the human idea.
>
> And in five more weeks you will be out of work. (595)

Being human, for Arthur, is continually precluded by the enforced precarity which was and is one of the defining principles of the bourgeois world, as evinced by the ironically juxtaposed paragraphs in this example: the denial of leisure, the scarcity mentality engendered by the continuous struggle for work and survival – all prevent the realisation of the human in those at the bottom of the pile. This is of course not a recent phenomenon: e.g. for Hardy's Jude Fawley, 'necessary meditations on the actual, including the mean bread-and-cheese question, dissipated the phantasmal for a while, and compelled Jude to smother high thinkings under immediate needs' (83). But while the reality of class is fully acknowledged and the struggle presented as all too real, the escape and/or material comfort offered by successfully clawing one's way up and into 'petit-bourgeois success' is only ever considered half-heartedly and in desperation, contrary to Henderson's claim. Bertrand Russell, in his introduction to *Hunger and Love*, is far more accurate (and mordant!):

> There has, it is true, been an organised effort to secure that the ablest boys born among the proletariat shall rise to a position where they profit by injustice instead of suffering from it, but viewed from the standpoint of Arthur Phelps, who for various not uncommon reasons has been unable to avail himself of this system, the scheme by which the abler proletarians are led to side with the bourgeoisie has a sinister rather than a philanthropic air. (ix)

Arthur's resistance and motivation in fact appeals to values implacably opposed to those

that underpin 'petit-bourgeois success'.

As such, we are presented with a novel whose identity is as evasive of categorisation and aggregation as its writer, its protagonist, its narrator (or narratorial presence), and its reader. And this of course in literature, as in life, is just as it should be.

Form

Form and genre: the former (no pun intended) may often be considered in Helen Vendler's words to be simply 'content-as-arranged' (14), the latter to be Waterstones' problem. However, both are crucial analytical categories with which to make sense of a novel like *Hunger and Love*. Genre we will get to in the following chapter. First, though, we will consider aspects of the novel's form and their significance; chiefly, its narratorial strategy, its juxtaposition of the cosmic and the quotidian, and its use of the second person.

Narrative Tropes

Right from the novel's first couple of pages, some major themes and devices which are subsequently considered, elaborated, emphasised, and developed across its seven hundred-plus pages become apparent. It opens as follows:

> ARTHUR PHELPS was just beginning to think about it. Here he is, ladies and gentlemen, on the earth. Life, you will observe, has different forms, in worms, and crabs, and men. … A living thing – it might be a maggot or it might be a man; this one here is Arthur Phelps. He is the young of the species, zoologically known as man.
>
> Considered zoologically in this way our definition of man would be a wide one, and that is probably how Arthur Phelps managed to creep in; it would include men with black skins, brown skins, yellow skins, red skins, Cro-Magnon man, Neanderthal man, Java man. It would even include the youth of the working class. Get out of it, you dirty little devil! (1)

From page one Britton begins asserting a sense of equality between narrator, protagonist, and reader which in many ways figures and reflects an equality that is more broadly true. This is achieved in part via a narratorial presence that immediately begins working to collapse any presumed primacy on its own part, creating a novel that remains persistently inconclusive on all such fronts: i.e. narrator, protagonist, reader, whose voice is speaking, who is narrating, who is being addressed at any given moment.

I will expand on this relationship at much more length henceforth, but the first seeds of this are already apparent in the above quotation. The book's first line, 'ARTHUR PHELPS was just beginning to think about it', is straightforwardly omniscient narration (and simultaneously establishes a major theme of the novel, Arthur's intellectual

development). Directly following, the use of the common salutation 'ladies and gentlemen' immediately ensures that there will be no smooth submergence into a narrative in which the presence of the narrator and the narratee is effaced. We do not yet know whether the narrator is intra- or extradiegetic (present within the story or not); nevertheless, the narratorial presence is clearly signalled. But its nature will never be fully clear (as we will see), and while it at first certainly appears omniscient it cannot ultimately be described as such: although its free-ranging eye takes in not only the thoughts of the characters, the entire universe from microbe to planetary system, and all of recorded time and history, including the future, there will nevertheless be instances in which it appears unable even to locate the protagonist (as we will also see). The receiving, reading presence is also clearly foregrounded firstly by the second-person: 'you will observe' (however as the novel progresses it is also frequently unclear whether 'you' refers to the reader or Arthur himself). Moreover, the possessive determiner of first-person plural – 'our definition' – also immediately establishes a dialogic relationship.

In narratological terms, following Gérard Genette, there are five possible functions of the narrator. We already have evidence of the 'narrative function', which is fundamental inasmuch as any time there is a narrative this role is fulfilled. There is also evidence of the 'directing function', when the narrator overtly comments on the construction or articulation of his text, and the 'communication function', where the narratee is addressed directly in order to create or maintain contact with them (Genette 255-6). Then there is the 'testimonial function', where the narrator asserts the truth of the story, the 'degree of precision of his own memories' (256), i.e. certainty regarding the events, the affective relationship he has to the story, etc. This also becomes apparent early on in the novel:

> THIS chapter contains events of cardinal importance. It describes how Arthur lost a sixpence, found a sixpence, saw somebody else find a sixpence; it tells of bus tickets and Miss Wyman's legs (up to the knee). How Arthur got a reputation for learning and tried to live up to it, will have to come into the next chapter; but meanwhile this one tells of Arthur's first shave. (60)

Finally, there is the 'ideological function', a 'more didactic form of an authorised commentary on the action', an 'explanatory and justificatory discourse' (Genette 256). This is also abundantly present throughout:

> Foreigners, of course, include people like Homer and Virgil and Dante, Michelangelo, Beethoven, Galileo, Kepler, Lavoisier, Laplace, Leibnitz. I don't

> say these people are any good; many of them are no doubt a lot of bunk; but do you know anything about that? You do not. (60)

The ideological function is in fact paramount in *Hunger and Love*, and is just as important in terms of genre as we will see in the following chapter. Furthermore, in this quotation it is unclear whether the speaking voice is the narrator or Arthur, and indeed whether the intended recipient is the reader or Arthur. The frequency of this ambiguity cannot be overstated, and I will also expand on its significance forthwith.

The overall point is to illustrate that the narrative mood is a sophisticated and deeply ambiguous one, necessitating a constant evaluation of the narrative information being presented. As evidenced by the above quotes, 'none of the [narrative] categories is completely unadulterated and free of complicity with the others' (Genette 257), and indeed in *Hunger and Love* neither the narrator, protagonist, nor reader is completely unadulterated and free of complicity with the other.

Furthermore, another crucial formal trope is also established in those opening words from page one: that is, situating the quotidian within a 'cosmic' context (and vice versa), juxtaposing the immensities of science, nature, space, time, etc, against the (supposed) mundanities of working-class life, speech, thought. This, by virtue of the contrast drawn, works towards collapsing the hierarchies of (supposed) 'identities' into one capacious definition of 'man(kind)' in order to better assert a basic, foundational equality. This juxtaposition of the quotidian and the cosmic is mirrored in Britton's diction. He employs a narratorial tone and register that fluctuates between (usually) short bursts of vernacular, juxtaposed or mixed with lengthy use of the objective register of the natural sciences – zoology, anthropology, archaeology in the opening example, but also astronomy, cosmology, geology, etc. For instance, when he writes: 'Air molecules fly about outside you, ping ping ping on your tympanum, ordered individual sequence and group succession; but what's it all about? What *is* this Tariff Reform stuff? I *say*! – "Oh! go back to your cradle!"' (56), the effect is to keep the reader constantly aware of the great indifferent cosmos, and thus constantly aware of the great irony of the futile affairs of organised society.

This technique is further embodied formally. Repeatedly, as I've hinted above, the sheer word count of the two registers is very obviously contrasted, with prolix paragraphs succeeded with paragraphs of just a few words:

> Sunday followed after Sunday, round the orbit of the earth's revolution, the earth's axis wobbled precessed nutated, but on the whole kept fairly true, pointing in, pointing out; now outward to the stars, now inward to the sun. Now, slowly again, inward to the sun. Living sunshine. Osmotic pressure in the trees. Life. Good stuff, life….
>
> The life on Putney Hill. (216-7)

These short paragraphs serve to highlight the quotidian, the particular, against the vastness of the context that precedes it. This technique is so frequent and sustained that it begins in and of itself to call into question any lazily implicit hierarchy in discursive terms. The vernacular's lively, concise, but (supposedly) vulgar discourse might be deemed to constitute a less authoritative register than the air of lofty, educated esoterica. However, this is complicated by the obvious fact that the latter's lengthy descriptive function would be inscrutable – and, to be frank, often tedious – without the former's punchy economy to qualify it and illuminate its purpose. Put another way, (as the axiom goes) the plural of anecdote is not data, but anecdote humanises and gives meaning to data. This, broadly, is indeed one of the main functions of literature: narrative can capture and clarify kernels of meaning that we might otherwise perceive only subconsciously in the incoherent welter of our collective existence.

Second Person

This relationship of literature to the ineffable is nevertheless necessarily imperfect, and this is in a way embodied by another major formal element of *Hunger and Love*: that is, the use of the second person. The specific formal capacities of second-person narration are discussed at length in Evgenia Iliopoulou's *Because of You: Understanding Second-Person Storytelling*. She is at pains to make clear that her project will not attempt to 'culminate in a strict definition of what the second-person narrative technique is' (14), precisely because (according to Iliopoulou) there is not and cannot be one – such is the elusive quality of the form. Nevertheless, she describes 'the second-person enigma as a liminal technique that reflects liminal narrative circumstances while always engaging the reader in a role that's not merely passive' (7). The role of the reader in second-person narratives is indeed crucial. However, in "In Their Own Words: On Writing in Second Person", Joshua Parker notes that most studies of the form have focused 'on its effects on readers, rather than

inquired into why authors themselves choose the form', the reasons for which 'were consistently enigmatic' ("In Their Own Words"). An enigma, then, whichever way one looks at it. Ultimately, as the writer and filmmaker Georges Perec says, employing the second person 'mixes the reader, the character and the author' (qtd. in Parker). While both Iliopolou and Parker's respective perspectives are relevant and instructive, in the final analysis perhaps Perec's summation is the most germane to the ambiguity created by Britton's deployment of the form.

Turning first to Iliopoulou's study, underpinning her arguments concerning the specificities of the second person's capacities we find a pleasing sense of uncertainty, one which strengthens rather than weakens the force of her claims. A primary source text is Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1979) (Italian: *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*), of which suffice to say that there are two very clear 'you's: the reader and the protagonist. Calvino foregrounds the reading process, exposing it via his novel's self-reflexive nature, and 'establishes [a] unique reader-author relationship that the author treats as a major theme of the book' (Iliopoulou 16), a characteristic also common to *Hunger and Love*. Although *Hunger and Love*'s implied reader is not as much a central character within the novel as Calvino's is, nevertheless in both novels there is a double emphasis where the reader is both aware of himself, and also of the concept of address in itself. For example, the first lines of Calvino's book are 'You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, If on a winter's night a traveller. Relax.' (3); the last lines of Britton's book are 'Farewell to the past. That is all over now. Good-bye, reader! It is the end of the book.' (705). In short, in both Britton's novel and, as Iliopoulou insists, Calvino's, the 'second-person technique presupposes, or demands, *active* readers who continually accept or reject their involvement in the story' (17, her emphasis).

Iliopoulou further notes Monika Fludernik's attempts to classify second-person fiction according to functions of address, an incredibly complex formulation which is not directly relevant here other than to note that Fludernik ultimately refuses any analysis of the second-person pronoun that presupposes 'a situation of verisimilar identity between the addressed *you* and the protagonist *you*' (28). This is an observation particularly pertinent to *Hunger and Love*, in that it is never clear which 'you' is being addressed, let alone the extent to which they are the same. Iliopoulou also addresses major narrative theorists, such as Gérard Genette and Franz Karl Stanzel, finding them to gloss over the second-person narrative as it fails to neatly fit the dichotomies of their theories (e.g. Genette's

hetero- and *homodiegesis*) (22, 24). Iliopoulou for her part concludes that second-person narratives, by virtue of their refusal to conform to the neat categorisations of theory, can – from the standpoint of narratology – only ever really be approached on a 'case-by-case basis' (24), being as it is 'an extremely protean form, and its very essence is to eschew a fixed essence' (31).

A literary form whose 'very essence' demonstrates an irreconcilability with the concept of fixed essences perhaps sounds somewhat paradoxical. But that very paradox makes it significant in terms of any search for an effective representation of the relationship between individual and collective, and in particular how a collective voice might most successfully be expressed. The key to second-person's efficacy in this context is precisely because it first expresses something universal while maintaining a necessary resistance to *subsequent* prescription and categorisation. It embodies what we might deem a 'first principle' of writing: in *If on a winter's night a traveller*, Calvino writes that

> It is only through the confining act of writing that the immensity of the nonwritten becomes legible, that is, through the uncertainties of spelling, the occasional lapses, oversights, unchecked leaps of the word and pen. (183)

We endeavour through writing to make legible the immensity of our common human condition. We are all in a sense confined – as David Foster Wallace once put it, we are 'uniquely, completely, imperially alone … lords of our tiny skull-sized kingdoms, alone at the centre of all creation ("This Is Water") – and through language we attempt to simultaneously share our unique solitude and interpret the infinite diversity of others' experience of that same solitude, in search of the universal. But the conduit of language, and especially its confined form – writing – remains unable to convey to meaning as an absolute, its imperfections and misinterpretations cannot be contained.

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This inherent ambiguity contained within the second-person form is exemplified in the dialogue (or more accurately, trialogue) between the narrator, Arthur Phelps, and the reader. Consider the following paragraph opening: 'You didn't know at that time what scepticism was.' (241) The specificity of the knowledge expressed – the narrator knows what the referent of 'you' knew or didn't know at a given point in the past – ostensibly

denotes the narrator referring to Arthur in omniscient mode. While this is not *certain*, we can derive it from the context of the prose with some degree of confidence. The next sentences, though, read as follows:

> Hume seems a great advance upon Pyrrho, but you won't respect yourself as a human until you come to study scientific method. You will find that philosophy is not enough. And if you confine yourself to that, you will *never* be human. (ibid.)

There are in fact *four* ways to read these sentences as dialogue, enabled by the unique capacity of the pronominal 'you'.

One, as a continuation of the omniscient narration, where the narrator is not only able to perceive Arthur's thoughts on Hume and Pyrrho, but also already knows his future, i.e. that his self-respect will not flourish until he advances his studies, and that he will eventually discover where philosophy is found wanting. To continue reading this as omniscient mode here, however, one must accept that in effect the narrator is omnisciently relating the story *to the character of Arthur*: the final sentence especially seems either like advice spoken directly to him, or at the very least the narrator in reflective mode conducting an inner dialogue with Arthur as the implied interlocutor – in any case, the reader just happens to be there, as it were: this is a dialogue between the narrative voice and the protagonist where the reader is merely 'listening in'.

Two, as a shift between omniscient narration and free indirect discourse, where Arthur begins talking to himself about Hume and Pyrrho, and indirectly advises himself to study scientific method, speculates that he will find philosophy wanting, and hypothesises that he must break its confines in order to fulfil his humanity. So, in which case, a slip into an inner dialogue within the character of Arthur.

Three, in a similar fashion, as the narrator remaining in omniscient mode but talking to *himself*, ruminating digressively. This is a potentially troublesome reading, as it opens up the possibility that this could be the case in every instance where 'Arthur' is not explicitly used; or indeed that the narrator *is* Arthur and the entire 700-page novel is his own memories, where the use of 'Arthur Phelps' is in fact illeism, that is, referring to himself in the third person.

Finally, four, as a yet further change in the referent of 'you': whereas in the first sentence 'You didn't know at that time what scepticism was' the 'you' refers to Arthur, the following sentences can change or expand the reference of that 'you' – the narrative

voice could now be addressing the reader, or the reader *and* Arthur. Here, the reference to Hume and Pyrrho becomes an opening discursive gambit as a prelude to more general advice to one and all. Of course, furthermore, the ambiguity surrounding the precise attribution of voices to the narrator and Arthur begs a further and related question; i.e. to what extent are either/both the ventriloquised voice of Lionel Britton, in dialogue with himself, the reader, and indeed the world. Suffice to say that it seems clear to me that Britton is inarguably present at various points in the novel, attempting to write his own preferred destiny into reality:

> …he jostled forward at a good pace among London's teeming millions, mind full of ambitions and dreams, keeping his place in the Winter's Tale with a grimy index finger destined to leave its mark in literature. (34)

The reader of *Hunger and Love* is thus constantly and actively engaged in this form of deliberation. This technique, replicated over and over again across such a large tract, makes definitively discerning the identity of the narrative voice at any given moment very difficult – and this, I would argue, is the point. Ultimate narratorial authority becomes so dissipated, and the possibilities so numerous, that the reader is left in a position that anticipates my discussion of ideologically-bound education in the chapter to come on ideas; for now, suffice to place an "NB" here, and to notice the assertion of the necessity of self-direction and independent judgment in educating oneself. When the reader is presented with

> conflicting and incompatible opinions, readings, constructions, interpretations, that interest comes into your consciousness, and with it the first glimmerings of self-respect. … For I'll tell you what, where there are more opinions than one, you … Arthur Phelps, shop-boy … will have to decide. Yourself. (25)

I would push further here: what Britton is creating in the protagonist Arthur Phelps, as a voice often indistinguishable from any standard authoritative narrative voice, and also in a seemingly constant dialogic relationship with the reader, everyone, and no one, is a kind of personification of the ideal emancipatory subjectivity in a working-class context. Through him, he points towards a philosophical understanding of intellectual equality much like Rancière's – that is, an approach to thinking and knowing that brooks no limitations, an equality that does not *need* to be given nor claimed: it is practiced, it is verified, in each conscious engagement.

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In concluding her study of second person, Iliopoulou is unashamedly philosophical about the conundrums such deep ambiguity poses for the critic:

> Witnessing infinity in the limits of language and representation, the second-person technique reclaims its enigma each time an aspect of it is brought into focus and explained. This may be quite a challenge for academic research, but it is fascinating for literature itself and for what it stands for in our lives, our positioning in the world, our self-perception and the opening of infinite possibilities in the process of writing in terms of creation, re-creation and representation. … *Because of You* the limits of telling are never reached, and the same holds true for the reading experience. (248)

I am reminded of Tom Leonard's question:

> How can you own something if it is constantly changing and extending itself beyond your "grasp"? … Enter the critics: possession is irretrievably bound up with categorisation, and the function of the critic is to categorise, that the bourgeoisie might safely possess. ("Mince Pie" 66)

Furthermore, Rancière throughout his work (most especially in *Proletarian Nights*) sets much store by the creative misuse of literature by autodidacts for similar reasons, in that the practice is inherently resistant to predetermined prescriptions, categorisations, and conclusions. The second person's formal resistance, then, is indeed a challenge for academic research; and it certainly is for literary criticism that seeks (presumes) to prove or pronounce rather than speculate or persuade.

Joshua Parker's brief exploration of authorial intent in the use of second person is illustrative in this sense, finding a 'surprising dissonance between what theorists often tend to assume about the form and what authors themselves experience in creating it' ("In Their Own Words"). He notes (with the subtlest of barbs) that even though apparently '*l'auteur* has been effectively dead for nearly half a century' (ibid.) there nevertheless remain very-much-alive writers who are perfectly happy to explain their very real intentions concerning their use of the second person. The critical discussion, as outlined by Parker, that orbits around this authorial point of focus broadly centres around the author's conception of an 'other' in its purely technical sense; meaning an 'other' inasmuch as a cave painter fifteen thousand years ago 'conceived of an experiencing point of view other than his own' (ibid.), as opposed to the prevailing use of the word in today's critical theory

to describe a socially subordinate category within oppressive power relations. He then expands, quoting American writer Pam Houston, who describes her use of second person as being a way of othering *herself* when the material is too close to her own fear and pain, 'even though (and also because) second person is the most transparent disguise' (qtd. in Parker). This form of effacement strategy is shown to be quite common; Parker cites various authors who testify to a similar intent.

A couple of further points are very relevant to *Hunger and Love*: Parker discusses Eric A. De Haard's proposal (which cites Tolstoy) that an intermittent deployment of second person narration as opposed to consistent or 'true second person' is in fact 'more powerful in provoking a reader's identification with the figure created through its use' (qtd. in Parker). Furthermore, according to Phillipe Lejeune, second person seems to offer a form of middle ground that stands between 'the "owning" of an experience by writing in first person, and the stance of complete alterity from it implied by third person' (Parker). To reiterate – Parker presents these as conscious strategies, a product of *intent* as opposed to mere effect. In terms of *Hunger and Love*, this opens up important possibilities regarding the 'voice' Britton is deliberately striving for, as it were. Britton's use of second person is perhaps not so much intermittent as ambiguous: as I've said, one can never be fully certain which 'you' is being addressed, and this is crucial to accommodating a voice that is at once individual and collective, neither owned nor effaced by the author, neither claimed by nor estranged from the reader. Ultimately, this is simply to reassert that while it may be true that the text is the primary source of meaning, and the reader's active role inarguable, this does not preclude the relevance of authorial intent. Alas, unlike Pam Houston, Lionel Britton himself is unavailable for comment; nevertheless, in *Hunger and Love*'s case, its very genre in itself constitutes a compelling case that authorial intent cannot be ignored.

'Towards Infinity'

To wrap up the point regarding the challenges posed for academic research acknowledged by Iliopoulou, her conclusion's deeply ambivalent, philosophical note recalls to me the Leavisite 'critic as critic', whose arguments ultimately amount to saying: 'This is so, isn't it?'. Her admission that her chosen subject consistently evades her own explanations is refreshingly frank. It is also redolent of Leavis's articulation of the heuristic

nature of language, which could as well be applied to criticism:

> A product of collaborative creativity, it makes continued and advancing collaborative thought possible – and it will hardly be forgotten that such collaboration entails, vitally and essentially, disagreements. Finality is unattainable. (17)

This is not to imply that other critics in general feel unequivocally certain of their verdicts, far from it: I know – at least anecdotally – that this is not so. It might also seem so self-evident as to be something of a redundant point. However, I would say that this is all too rarely explicitly acknowledged: there is at least a tacit sense that academics' arguments must never openly and unashamedly admit doubt regarding their own conclusions, and certainly not that, notwithstanding all their diligent research, in the final analysis no authoritative 'answer' was there to be found.

Not that Iliopolou goes quite that far; nevertheless, she 'witnesses infinity' in our apprehension of human culture, the enigma that will always reclaim itself. In his final chapter "Towards Infinity", a cognate principle underlies Britton's witnessing of the infinite paradox of human equality:

> …and still we say to ourselves our consciousness is our own, we are We. We shall always be We. Whatever years go by or what changes occur in our own bodies or what changes occur in the world, however our consciousness of things changes we shall always look upon our consciousness as our own and no man from any other man will be able to tell the difference, he will be He, I shall be I, we shall be We, ourselves.
>
> …
>
> Every one of us in that respect feels exactly alike. Newton, who despised stone dolls, Michelangelo the sculptor, Keats with his human dust-hole, the riff-raff in the slum – the things we think about differ and the objects which are present to our consciousness differ, our hopes memories ideals aspirations desires differ, but in every one of us the ego is the same; and no man can tell the difference. You are you. And that applies to all. (695-6)

Britton's assertion here of the nonidentity of 'our hopes memories ideals aspirations desires' is reminiscent of Mark Fisher's grounds for rejecting identitarianism: 'there are no identities, only desires, interests and identifications' ("Vampire Castle"). If nothing about the content of our character is immanent, to be 'identical' is impossible.

Of course, some *influences* upon our characters *are* inescapable: e.g. biology – large, muscular people cannot really fail to be aware of the asymmetry of their physical power. Other influences are extraordinarily powerful if not quite totally inescapable: e.g. class

position – 'the riff-raff in the slum' can be shown to be measurably affected by scarcity mentality, for instance. However, the manifestation of such factors (and countless others) in the formation of individuals' characters and intellects must inevitably proliferate infinitely, precisely because our consciousness is our own.

This very infinity means that asymmetries of power and position are unavoidable; certainly no sociopolitical regime in the (known) history of planet Earth has shown itself able to function without them. However, just as such asymmetries need not be wielded coercively, at the level of consciousness neither must they be responded to impotently. This is one of the key insights Rancière recognised in Jacotot – 'his *madness*' (134, his emphasis) – and that Rancière put as follows: 'One must choose between making an unequal society out of equal men and making an equal society out of unequal men' (133), an insight which finds analogy with my above points on literary criticism. That is, that *in*equality must and shall proceed from the bedrock of a human equality that is understood to be basic, foundational, *a priori* – put simply, universal – but that also *presumes no further identity*. However, asymmetries that are *preceded* by equality are nothing to fear (and indeed could never be). Analogously, orthodoxy cannot proceed from emancipated intellects. If grounded in a kind of organising 'first principle' of universal humanity which underpins our consequent, inevitable, infinite difference, a difference that will always 'reclaim its enigma' in the face of crude categorisation, then inequality and heterodoxy will always be preferable to the kind of equality and orthodoxy enforced by omnipotent moral busybodies.

Which is to say that equality cannot be engineered, cannot be *produced by* strategies that place identification, ascription, equivalence, synonymy, at their heart. Quite the opposite: equality will always *produce* and *amplify* difference, heterodoxy, asymmetry, dissensus. As Rancière asserts, anyone who has 'some taste for equality' (ibid.) should not hesitate to choose an unequal society of equal men. The kind of 'equality' that is hewn from efforts (well-meaning or otherwise) that emanate from an assumption that inequality is something that might be *rationalised* as a property of categories or group 'identities' and thus ameliorated on the same terms, is no kind of equality at all and cannot be understood as emancipation. Rather, equality must first be simply *recognised*, it must be understood to already precede any efforts towards its establishment: it is 'a presupposition, an initial axiom – or it is nothing'. To reiterate: *nothing*.

'What brings *people* together, what unites them, is nonaggregation'. Consensus, such

as it may be, can only proceed from emancipated dissensus, and can only ever be imperfect, even evanescent. Only from axiomatically equal players can free, meaningful, but always contingent consent be obtained. Not least among these being solidarity, in essence a provisional identi*fication*: this must, though, be fully voluntary, as opposed to assumed or even required on the basis of identi*ty*, or it is also nothing.

Furthermore, in documenting Arthur's tribulations and obstacles Britton gestures strongly towards those who adopt such an emancipatory mindset and yet still fail to reach a full expression of their human potential (whatever the natural limits of that may be – outcomes are necessarily unequal even in perfect circumstances). We may then deduce that such an outcome is likely due to the material conditions into which individuals were born (or fell, perhaps, due to bad luck): lack of leisure, money, and so on. *This* is a locus of injustice. But a failure to adopt such a mindset in the first place, to deny oneself self-actualisation, is not a question of injustice but a question of inertia, in either its concrete form – "I can't be bothered" – or its more pernicious anti-intellectual manifestation: "I can't". The latter can only be learned or imposed, as Britton knows:

> What on earth would you say if the manager — or perhaps the principal! — came up behind you and caught you getting yourself a mind? You know very well it's against the rules. You're working class. Your life belongs to trade. Didn't you get an education at school? Wasn't that good enough for you? What do you think you are — one of Us? (48)

But, as I will go on to argue more fully later, one cannot simply blame the spectre of the bourgeois for the imposition of debilitating humility. To encourage a retreat into, and even to bask in, a 'working-class identity' that entails a rejection, conscious or otherwise, of an approach to thinking and knowing that brooks no limitations, of education in its self-actualising form, is far the more execrable imposition. By this I do not mean, for example, that a parent's job is to teach their children ludicrous saccharine platitudes like "you're special" or "you can do anything if you work hard enough/put your mind to it". Rather it is a parent's job not just to instruct but *demand* of their children that they value, respect, and accept responsibility for themselves and their unknown capacities, for this is the wellspring of emancipation.

If this is not embraced, chance may well still intervene positively on occasion, but certainly material conditions are very unlikely to be altered or overcome, whether personally or collectively. Leavis believed that any kind of creative life is 'inseparable from

an acceptance of responsibility' (*The Living Principle* 18-9). Britton echoes the powerful simplicity of this message with the powerful simplicity of clipped diction: 'The Great Minds thought. You think. The Great Minds searched. You search. Infinities. Immensities. You. Why not?' (242) He emphasises the requirement for a personal acceptance of the responsibility of creative equality, as it were, via the sheer repetition of that insistent pronoun: you, you, you, you.

We might finally remind ourselves here of Gramsci's assertion that 'all men are intellectuals' by virtue of living and thinking within society, and how in doing so everyone constantly 'modifies [their] environment, understanding by environment the ensemble of relations which each of us enters to take part in' (90). We can then resituate it in the context of the concept of emancipation in Rancière's writing. In doing so, Gramsci's insight is amplified anew, for what is Britton creating if not the 'ensemble of relations' in its most basic iteration, that of mind meets mind, or indeed mind meets art? And how can we 'learn how to be equal men in an unequal society'? By assuming the responsibility of asserting equality as an embodied state of mind, in the knowledge that, as Britton writes: 'There is no difference between the genius and the common man except in the general idea habit of mind' (627). When Rancière writes that 'what brings *people* together, what unites them, is nonaggregation' his insight is sound – agendas or political movements that submerge or even efface the powerful motivating forces of individual will and aspiration and *difference* in favour of conformity to priorities dictated by group identities (and their self-appointed administrators) are necessarily the opposite of emancipatory. Self-directed, emancipated individuals *seek* common ground and the recognition of their own equality in others; directed, unemancipated individuals remain in motiveless stasis, bound by identities fabricated and supervised by others. A 'working-class identity', certainly, is nothing less than a vehicle of subordination that inscribes poverty in people's characters, and an instrument of elision: as Leavis wrote: 'Life is not a force like electricity: it is in the concrete actuality always an individual, and if treated as if it could be made general, ceases to be there' (*Thought, Words and Creativity* 26).

Genre

The question of genre in a work as idiosyncratic as *Hunger and Love* merits some close attention; or, at least, closer than simply assigning it to flabby categories like 'modernism' or 'realism' which all too often collapse under their own indeterminate weight. The first more specific genre which seems to fit well with the novel is the *Bildungsroman.* The OED defines *Bildungsroman* as 'a novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person' ("Bildungsroman, n."), and even a stricter interpretation of the term specifically entailing beginnings in childhood or adolescence would still seem to neatly encapsulate the story of the young Arthur Phelps. However, *Hunger and Love* is not a *Bildungsroman*, even though it perhaps may appear so at a cursory level, as I will go on to argue firstly. Following that, there are two relatively obscure genres I will put forward as more illuminating in respect of how the novel functions: namely, the 'encyclopedic narrative' and the '*roman à thèse*'. An outline of the encyclopedic narrative as a genre serves as a useful compendium of numerous facets of the novel that are significant but perhaps not quite so central to the arguments contained in this thesis – nevertheless, a brief appraisal will give a sense of the novel's sheer scope. A consideration of *roman à thèse*, though, will begin to return the discussion to points already discussed previously: the role of the reader, narrative mode, and the second-person form. From there, the questions and issues raised both by and through form and genre can be interrogated further.

Bildungsroman

Franco Moretti has traced what he sees as the *Bildungsroman*'s defining element in the European tradition: that is, simply, youth in general, and as its 'material sign', youth's equivalence with modernity. The form internalises and reconciles contradictions like 'restlessness and the "sense of an ending"' (6), in a formal mechanism which Michal Ginsburg argues 'facilitates socialisation by teaching us … how to compromise' (80). In short, precisely because youth itself cannot last indefinitely, the *Bildungsroman* takes restive youths and demonstrates that certain compromises lead naturally to maturity: an ending, but not the end, so to speak.

If we briefly cast our minds back to Philip Henderson's assessment of *Hunger and Love*, this need for the 'sense of an ending' is perhaps a significant contributing factor in his lazy characterisation of Arthur's 'petit bourgeois' motivations. That is to say, I can only conclude that Henderson simply defaults to a presumption that because the novel is not offering a fully realised, appropriate, and Henderson-endorsed 'socialist ending' (bad, and hence its 'defeatism and despair'), it must therefore be depicting the desire for petit-bourgeois success thwarted by material poverty (a qualified good). The implicit expectation of ideological conformity betrayed by such a judgment is obviously what prompts Henderson to declare that 'Britton is an anarchist rather than a socialist'. I have already discussed at length how such conformity is used to elide or deny heterogeneity of thought and expression in the working class by those who claim the right to do the thinking for them; which is where Bertrand Russell gets it right again on *Hunger and Love*: 'In considerable detail the author shows how education, morality, literature, art, and so on, as they exist at present, are dominated, not by any human purpose, but by the wish to make the dispossessed subservient to their masters' (viii). But in a larger sense, the identity of those masters is not always as obvious as simply the bourgeoisie.

As the novel progresses, Arthur's relationship to politics, and *especially* socialist politics, is characterised by an enduring sense of its mystification by its proponents:

> Politics you felt, in a kind of way, had something to do with how you lived, even affected and determined the national life, even, by affecting nations, had something to do with the life of the race.
>
> You don't know what politics is.
>
> Nobody tells you. (141)

> In Socialism, somewhere or other, there did seem to be a theory. It was hidden, it was dark, it was masked, it was cloaked, but somewhere or other at the back of it all there was a theory, and it was theory that you were after. You wanted to understand.
>
> But it was difficult to understand. (142)

> You were just beginning to think you were a Socialist, and to accept it, and now apparently, according to him, that wasn't Socialism at all. There's a hell of a lot of controversy about Socialism, but the difficulty is to find out what the controversy is about. The Socialists won't tell you, and the Anti-Socialists boast that they don't know. (375)

> What the devil the difference is between industrial unionism, trade unionism, syndicalism, One Big Union, I.W.W., nihilism, anarchism, communism, socialism, S.P.G.B., I.L.P., S.L.P., B.S.P.—you don't know and you can't find out. … But what you feel is, that somewhere, if only you could get at it, there is an IDEA:— behind it all…. (378)

The irony is of course that while one well-meaning People's Front of Judea (and its hierarchy) competes for primacy with another equally high-minded Judean People's Front (and its theorists), nonconformity is often diminished or denounced within these supposedly emancipatory circles.[23] The anarchist (or latterly 'communalist') Murray Bookchin amusingly encapsulates this point in the documentary *Anarchism in America* (1983):

> The basic problem I really have is that whenever I meet leftists in the socialist and Marxist movements, I'm called a petit-bourgeois individualist. I'm supposed to shrink after this. Usually I'm called petit-bourgeois individualist by students, and by academicians, who've never done a days work life [sic] in their entire biography, whereas I have spent years in factories and the trade unions, in foundries and auto plants. So after I have to swallow the word petit-bourgeois, I don't mind the word individualist at all!
>
> I believe in individual freedom; that's my primary and complete commitment—individual liberty. That's what it's all about. And that's what socialism was supposed to be about, or anarchism was supposed to be about, and tragically has been betrayed. (qtd. in Fischler et al.)

It is true that Britton is an individual, but he is not an individual*ist*; and neither are the two things mutually inclusive. Equally, while the novel's ending is individual – idiosyncratic, even – it does not therefore constitute a representation of the failure of individualism (in the sense of the pursuit of goals without reference to others).

Returning to the subject of *Bildungsroman*, the conclusion of *Hunger and Love* has Arthur simply disappear from the narrative, both literally and formally (as we will see), and in this respect is perhaps as good an example of Moretti's argument concerning the working-class *Bildungsroman* as you are likely to encounter. Moretti argues that working-class *Bildungsromane* were 'difficult to write, because [they were] difficult to imagine' (x). For a 'youth *without the right to dream*' (ibid.), aspirational trajectories result in exclusion: 'no longer at home among his old fellow workers, but never accepted by the new bourgeois milieu, the hero suddenly sees the impossibility of his position' (ibid.). This recalls the dilemma of the organic intellectuals, whose options are curbed and circumscribed by the compromise equilibrium: the dominant hegemony offers up a range of advancements or 'endings', all of which serve to neuter any possibility of effective insurrection by requiring

[23] I pay due deference here to Monty Python's famous satire of the narcissism of small differences as displayed in 1970s British left-wing politics.

capitulation to the norms governing bourgeois success (petit- or upwards).

Arthur's values are incommensurable with such resolutions, which is why Henderson sees only defeatism and despair in *Hunger and Love*, 'the helplessness of the lonely individual in revolt against the forces of the whole of organised society' (Henderson 145). Young Arthur Phelps is certainly lonely and in revolt, but is only helpless if one holds that resistance cannot be a primary and fundamental function of individual thought and action.

***

To illustrate my point here, we can briefly consider Arthur alongside another lonely young man: Alan Sillitoe's borstal boy, Smith, in the short story "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" (1959). Only ever named in dialogue by the authorities who address him, Smith agrees to try to win the governor the Borstal Blue Ribbon Prize Cup but ultimately stops short of the line and refuses to win. However, running has given him space to think, and the real story is his reflections on what it means to be honest – a concern that is also deeply and symbolically meaningful to Arthur Phelps. Furthermore, that it is a short story may be in no small measure significant: Franco Moretti argues that the modern *Bildungsroman* novel 'created a taxonomic paradox' (235), because formally-speaking its preponderance of 'traumas and kernels' (ibid.) brought it into the generic orbit of the short story. I would venture, then, that given Moretti's convictions pertaining to the (im)possibilities of the working-class *Bildungsroman*, that "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" effects a kind of symbolic but condensed or even deformed *Bildungsroman* via the short story form.

As a protagonist, Sillitoe's Smith advances these symbolic possibilities yet further. Firstly, he is incarcerated, and thus sealed off from society. The complacent, lifeless society outside the borstal walls automatically includes readers, as implied in a pointed use of pronouns: 'In-law blokes like you and them, all on the watch for Out-law blokes like me and us' (10). This also posits a distinct, antagonistic collective subjectivity ('me and us') interjecting into the cultural terrain of literature, a sense of transgression reinforced at the story's conclusion when Smith reveals that he intends to pass his manuscript (the story as told) to a pal who can 'try and get it put into a book or something', but that if the governor (or 'you and them') came across it, 'I don't think he'd know what it was all about' (48) –

its meaning is in a way discrete.

Secondly (and relatedly), he is barely conventionally literate:

> I'm a human being and I've got thoughts and secrets and bloody life inside me that [the governor] doesn't know is there, and he'll never know what's there because he's stupid. I suppose you'll laugh at this, me saying the governor's a stupid bastard when I know hardly how to write and he can write and read and add-up like a professor. But what I say is true right enough. He's stupid, and I'm not, because I can see further into the likes of him than he can see into the likes of me. (12)

The governor is stupid precisely because he cannot brook the antithetical values by which Smith chooses to live his life, whereas Smith understands completely the values by which the governor lives – they have been repeated in culture countless times. However, the governor cannot know Smith because the borstal boy's version of truth has never been represented: 'He's read a thousand books I suppose, and for all I know he might even have written a few, but I know for a dead cert, as sure as I'm sitting here, that what I'm scribbling down is worth a million to what he could ever scribble down' (13).

Thirdly, in contrast to the expanding leisure granted to 1950s working-class youth, solitary leisure has always been severely circumscribed for Smith: 'I've had no time and peace in all my bandit life' (41). But running grants brief windows of meditation, and the loneliness of the long-distance runner is for Smith 'the only honesty and realness there was in the world' (39) – it is in essence his existential moment.

The very paucity of time afforded to Smith seems to release a distilled philosophical force in the boy that cuts to the heart of the inscriptions ideology and hegemony make on words like 'honesty'. The governor's sort of honesty 'amounted to: win the race' (40), and the metaphor is clear: to be an honest person, one must conform to the prescribed definitions of success in life. The governor asserts that 'it pays to be honest and try to gain the prizes I offer to my lads, and they know it, have known it all along. They'll always be honest now, because I made them so' (44); this offer of prizes echoes the compromise equilibrium: the governor and the social hegemony he represents entices, absorbs and then moulds dissenters into conformity.

But the governor's concept of honesty/order is intolerable to Smith: it is utterly antithetical, fundamentally irreconcilable, no matter the inducements offered up:

> …when the governor told me to be honest it was meant to be in his way not

> mine, and if I kept on being honest in the way he wanted and won my race for him he'd see I got the cushiest six months still left to run; but in my own way, well, it's not allowed. (41)

The very grounds for comprehension are, for Smith, mutually exclusive: 'I'm sure he'll never understand it because if he and all them like him did it'd mean they'd be on my side which is impossible' (46).

Contemporary criticism of the story reveals the real-world influence of the bourgeois assumptions underpinning the governor's worldview: John D. Hurrell asserts in 1960 that Smith lives 'according to a "code" that denies him any joy in life, a "code" that consists, in fact, of the denial of *ordinary human pleasures*' (12, my emphasis), which suggests that bourgeois society's understanding of what pleasure entails is somehow equivalent to a universal human metric. Furthermore, Allen Penner in 1969 remarked that 'the theme of rebellion is at best somewhat muddled for a "working-class" novelist … in a country with a Socialist Labour government during a time of comparative prosperity' (255). This statement neatly summarises the belief that the working class should have been mollified by the limited sacrifices made by the dominant hegemony. After all, the 'the suburban villa: the goal of petit-bourgeois success' that Philip Henderson spoke of in 1935 was now supposedly available to all.

And yet:

> Honesty. Be honest. … It's like saying: Be dead, like me … Be honest and settle down in a cosy six pounds a week job. Well, even with all this long-distance running I haven't yet been able to decide what [the governor] means by this, although I'm just about beginning to – and I don't like what it means. Because after all my thinking I found that it adds up to something that can't be true about me, being born and brought up as I was. Because another thing people like the governor will never understand is that I am honest, that I've never been anything else but honest, and that I'll always be honest. Sounds funny. But it's true because I know what honest means according to me and he only knows what it means according to him: I think my honesty is the only sort in the world, and he thinks his is the only sort in the world as well. (13-4)

In short, Smith refuses to accept the societal bargain because its rewards are to him valueless, and for this he must be understood as congenitally outside the realm of society. He refuses to win the race because he will not ratify what it and the governor represents, and he will continue to refuse. Smith, as Colin Wilson once declared of the existential 'Outsider', cannot and will not 'accept a concept of order and live by it; that is cowardice, and such cowardice cannot result in freedom' (Wilson 55). This is deeply redolent of

Rancière's conception of the ultimate contingency upon which 'politics proper', so to speak, rests. I will discuss this conception in a little more depth later, but for now suffice to say that any truly democratic social order requires the voluntary consent of equals: 'to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it' (Rancière, *Disagreement* 16). In Smith's case, his act of refusal valorises the principle of dissent by which he lives, and functions as a kind of anti-*Bildungsroman* in his resistance to the kind of formally prescribed conclusions they promote. As Smith concludes of the few books he has read: they were 'useless though because all of them ended on a winning post and didn't teach me a thing' (48).

***

For Arthur Phelps, especially in the early part of the novel when he is a book delivery boy, flitting between printers, publishers, and shops with a sack of books on his back, a similar relationship to time exists as expressed by Sillitoe's Smith: Arthur 'steals' time from his employer, hungrily grabbing every unsupervised moment available to read, often while walking:

> When you were out (sunshine, bitter wind, what did it matter: freedom) you stilled the craving with a book, quieted your rebellion, the work got done. Giving free play to brain energies loosened the bonds on the energies of your body. The people crawling about the streets got in your way. What interest had they in life: cradle, bed, grave? Is there anywhere a purpose which can stir up the energies of men?—the power that is in mankind?
>
> Anyhow, Arthur Phelps, he shoots along main streets, sack on back, dawdles in back streets with book; and it's tiring to go upstairs less than two at a time. If sack heavy, what hell matter? hump it on back! even silly damn brasses—not worth doing at all, but you made them shine. When shop to be swept nip down for broom, nip up again, nip round, get it done. Tires you move slow. Ferment in brain. Want after new ideas.—So long as they don't shut your brain up in this dungeon of trade, so long as the great width of world idea is yours to move freely in, your muscles have to move explosively to keep pace. Interest in life, —so long as they don't rob you of that.
>
> But the ordinary shopboy gets robbed of all excuse for wanting to live, long before he starts work at all. In the school. Education Act, 1870. In the home. Englishman's home is castle, family foundation of State; authority, parent foundation authority Government employer. Do this, he doeth it. Why? *I* don't know! (78)

This quotation raises two important points, the second of which we will explore fully later: firstly, the sense of stolen time, and its relation to the nature of work (and leisure); and

secondly (and relatedly) to the nature of education and what that word really *means*. These points are deeply intertwined in working-class experience, primarily for structural and economic reasons.

As to the first point, it is perhaps worth briefly noting Tom Leonard's wry observation that

> isn't it a bit odd that a Literature Department in a university should create a situation whereby, at a given time and place in an exam hall, you could find yourself sitting in the only place in the whole Universe where you could be *accused* of looking at a book of poetry? ("Mince Pie" 66)

This could obviously also relate to the second point, the nature of education, but one might also note that this accusation would apply to most workplaces nowadays, only for a different reason. Which is that in a post-industrial world, your *time* as well as your labour belongs to your employer. E.P. Thompson observes that '[post-industrial] workers begin to fight, not against time, but about it. … They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them. They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well' ("Time" 85-6). When one of Arthur's employers discovers that he has been reading books on company time, he declares: 'You have been stealing time. I don't say you would steal anything else, but you have been stealing time' (569); or as anthropologist David Graeber put it in 2018's *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*: 'by this moral logic, it's not that idleness is dangerous. Idleness is theft' (88). In such a world, the categories 'work', 'leisure', and 'education' are increasingly circumscribed and alienated from each other, and their meanings subtly distorted because, according to Britton's narrator, 'The employer must have workers just intelligent enough to earn his living. The ideal has no place. Arthur Phelps – you dare to look inside the book! – you'll get the sack!' (638).

'The sack', indeed, is the eventuality against which honesty is assessed for Arthur. In a sense, it is the other side of the coin by which Smith assesses his relation to honesty. In Smith's case, already in a borstal and with little to lose, he is offered inducements to recalibrate what honesty means to him: 'he'd see I got the cushiest six months still left to run'. Whereas for Arthur, unemployment is the sword of Damocles which applies the pressure to conform to (what he sees as) the bourgeois breed of honesty:

> You have to be honest circumspectly. By god, if they catch you being honest they'll take away your living altogether—character and all—for rest of life. Never, never, never get another job. They'll see to that. It's a big risk, Arthur.

But—it makes you clean. The soul is clean again.' (67)

Arthur's conception of honesty, though, seems relatively prosaic early in the novel: after being paid an extra sovereign in error, Arthur automatically, without thinking, makes the necessary amends:

> Mr. Skillick took the sovereign without protest, it is true, but also without thanks. He had to remember his position as a representative of trade, and his responsibility for working-class morality,—bad policy to let workers suspect they could steal in safety. "I was wondering," he said, "whether you would give it back."
>
> You felt done. You knew he was lying.
>
> That is the example set by your superiors.
>
> Trade showed you the way. They're so mean they even try to do you out of the credit of being honest! (163)

The first thing to notice is the parallel with Mr. Skillick's 'responsibility for working-class morality' and the paternal – indeed patrician – attitude of the borstal governor (and indeed the deeply ironic way in which the very concept of 'working-class morality' is referred to in itself). Secondly, though, it would appear that Arthur is aggrieved only by being denied the credit for acting in a way that displayed a straightforward and doubtless bourgeois-approved version of honesty; i.e. by declining to accept more than his labour was ostensibly worth. However, immediately afterwards Arthur steals a Chamber's Dictionary. The words Britton chooses to describe Arthur's feelings regarding this act are subtly chosen, and begin to reveal a nuance in his conception of honesty not hitherto obvious: '[The dictionary m]ight slip down your trouser-leg and give the show away—and then, you see, you would no longer be an honest man, according to bourgeois standards' (163). The ironic tone implies that it is in fact the *being caught stealing* that contradicts bourgeois standards of honesty; or, in other words, that being furtive about stealing alters the tenor of the act in the moment, and recasts it as dishonest, as opposed to unabashedly taking something because it is your right to take.

In Arthur's estimation the actual act of theft itself is in fact one of the governing principles of 'bourgeois standards', it is simply enacted in structural form: 'There is, I suppose, a difference between stealing by income and stealing by theft' (164-5). For Arthur, the appropriation of the dictionary is more accurately understood as an act of reparation:

> In return for your degradation, your humiliation, your subjection to the lie and sham and foulness of authority, to the baser mind, you unbuttoned your waistcoat and lugged out your prize from where it lay cold against your belly. You did not feel like a sneak. Sneaking is low and contemptible,—to pinch what you haven't earned. Judges must feel like that when they pinch their five thousand. But *you* had been degraded. You pinched merely as an act of justice; to console the hurt. It punished the firm with a loss; but it enriched and ennobled your mind, for it was human treasure. (164)

What, though, do the bourgeois steal? It is not simply a question of unearned remuneration: the bourgeois structure society in order to ensure working-class docility via the theft of leisure, time, education, *life*:

> You get a job in bookshop—that's just for Them to steal your life—and you see words—"Racine" and "Corneille," trig, physics—repeated so often you get curious and look them up. Could They help that? Why, they made you carry the books that held the knowledge—how else could they pinch your life? (257)

I claimed above that the categories 'work', 'leisure', and 'education' are increasingly circumscribed and alienated from each other; here we can see *Hunger and Love* begin to illustrate why and how.

The 'why' is simple: to protect, perpetuate, and enforce material inequality. This is, certainly in Britton's estimation (and my own), what 'bourgeois ideology' *is*, if anything, it is its singular purpose. Here and throughout, my argument is that this simple ideological purpose can be effaced by a process of mystification, or perhaps more accurately misdirection, by asserting that there is such a thing as 'working-class morality' – and therefore a counterpart but incommensurable 'bourgeois morality' – or a 'working-class identity' and therefore an opposing bourgeois identity. Because if this can be established, the dichotomy can then be assimilated into the logic of identity politics, whereby the bogus working-class identity can become something to be respected, protected, even celebrated, while glossing over the fact that it is predicated on the presence of exploitation and poverty as a fundamental constituent of that 'identity'.

Arthur/the narrator, though, clearly recognises that it is one's relation to material wealth that produces the categories of bourgeois and working-class, and his conception of honesty finds its locus in actions. This is most obviously manifested in the oh-so-English iteration of the petit-bourgeois, the shopkeeper, by virtue of their relative

closeness to (and often previous experience of) the absence of material wealth:[24]

> But the shopkeeper conscience lives far too close to reality ever to be comfortable for long—the reality being that no wealth can be produced without work. Productive work is against the tribal honour, it offends the tradition of the caste. It is the shopkeeper privilege to steal the wealth after it is produced. He may work at that as hard as he likes. The moment he does anything useful — anything honest — he becomes a worker: he loses caste. (268)

It is important to note here, as discussed at length in the chapter on Ellen Wilkinson, that this caste is not fixed – one can become a worker or a bourgeois regardless of origin, and indeed can in theory fluctuate infinitely between the two, based on your current relation to material wealth. And an honest relation to material wealth, in Arthur/the narrator's estimation, is one in which reward is exactly proportionate to labour; it is perhaps fair to say that this is a very rigid, even militant conception, which certainly belies Britton's early sympathy towards communism:

> Honesty; in a civilisation, is to produce more than you consume, and to hand over the surplus to society, not keep it to yourself.
>
> That is the minimum condition on which man can be civilised at all. (596)

Nevertheless, these are the grounds upon which the theft of the dictionary is an act of justice; and indeed in *Hunger and Love*, the metaphysical dimension of this material formula is the real concern: the theft of profit is the handmaiden of the theft of, as I've noted above, leisure, time, education, *life*.

This is the equally simple 'how' of bourgeois ideology: when people must work harder and longer to obviate the perpetual threat of precarity, then leisure – literally, the time to think – is increasingly effaced and atrophied. The very etymology of the word 'leisure' contains the crux of its significance: (from the *OED*) 'representing Latin *licēre* to be permitted' ("leisure, *n.*"). Licence, permission, 'opportunity afforded by freedom from occupations' (ibid.), the enforced removal of which is the surest way to crush the human

[24] By which I refer to the famous phrase referring pejoratively to England as 'a nation of shopkeepers', often attributed to Napoleon. However, it first appeared in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776): 'To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers may at first sight appear a project fit only for a nation of shopkeepers. It is, however, a project altogether unfit for a nation of shopkeepers; but extremely fit for a nation whose government is influenced by shopkeepers' (A. Smith). In any case, the point is that the phrase refers to what *Hunger and Love* calls the 'trade civilisation' (163, and *passim*), the gradual expansion of the privilege of extracting profit by virtue of ownership.

soul. Leisure, time, education (*especially* in its non-institutional form) are the truly emancipatory forces, they are the *enablers* of life. 'Honesty', in *Hunger and Love*'s terms, is the recognition of this:

> Here is a simple little word. Honesty. Simple enough, isn't it ? What is it? What's it mean? Give me a lever long enough, and thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls. (313)

Arthur is indeed, in Franco Moretti's terms, a youth without the right – or perhaps more accurately the *time* – to dream.

And so, *Hunger and Love* could not be a *Bildungsroman*, ultimately, in Moretti's terms. Moretti goes on:

> Just think of how social mobility, which is such an essential trait of the *Bildungsroman*, literally vanishes in the presence of manual labourers … it seems to defy narrative imagination. … one remembers the relentless repression of pleasure that poverty forces onto Jude and the others: the nights at their desks, studying, fighting off sleep; the erotic frustrations; hunger, loneliness, cold… (x)

Erotic frustrations and hunger – hunger and love. The austere commitment of the autodidact, ultimately futile in the face of material privation. Furthermore, as we have seen with Sillitoe's borstal boy, social mobility as a *Bildungsroman* narrative only works in the first place if one's protagonist desires or even just accepts the version of that on offer. But even Arthur's equivocal aspirations – whether 'petit bourgeois' or not, Mr. Henderson – seem doomed in the absence of some form of *deus ex machina*.

That neatly realised outcomes seem to 'defy narrative imagination' is never more apparent than towards the novel's end, where in a chapter appropriately titled "Lost", the narrating presence begins to quite literally lose Arthur: 'Arthur Phelps, where are you – answer me now!'; 'Arthur Phelps! Arthur Phelps! I saw somebody in the flame, there was a form for a moment…'; '…for there is profit on every life, Arthur Phelps, ARTHUR PHELPS, where are you now?' (698-700). But among the final few paragraphs of the novel comes perhaps the most poignant summary of the fundamental incompatibility of a life like Arthur's and the formal and generic priorities of the *Bildungsroman*:

> Well, Arthur my boy, I don't know where you are, but I think it is the end. You lived your life, and you looked out at the stars, you lived your life and you gloried in the sun. Round you there was the eternal universe, there was the mysterious beckoning in the eyes of girls, there were the wonder and promise

> of sex, there was the majestic dream of a humanity to come, there was sublimity in your human desire. Who knows – you that were one of the race – in the stupendous unfolding of the race future, had you come through the darkness, had you come through the blood typhoon, had you been with man in his rise, in his emancipation, in the upheaval of mankind, what part you might have played, one of the units of man?
>
> The process of spacetime goes on, but you, Arthur Phelps, the human race knows you no more. (703)

A narrating presence as lost as his protagonist, a reader denied closure, resolution, a novel denied the structural harmony of a neat arc – Arthur is never 'rediscovered' by the text, he is simply obscured by war, and the novel simply … ends. As for Arthur – well, being working-class did not preclude intellect, aesthetics, and so on; he gloried in the sun, he had majestic dreams, etc. These things come free. But while he experienced the mysterious beckoning in the eyes of girls, he was denied consummation due to the very fact of his lack of upward mobility (I will discuss this failure in a little more depth in the following section). And even while bearing an emancipatory mindset that Rancière himself would approve of – Arthur's hunger (and respect) for intellectual consummation remained unquenchable to the last – any possibility of a *Bildungsroman* was stunted and destined never to flower, the part he might have played was ultimately so precluded by the material realities of class as to defy narrative imagination.

Encyclopedic Narrative

The encyclopedic narrative, according to David Letzler, is

> probably most associated in literary studies with Edward Mendelson's 1976 essays "Gravity's Encyclopedia" and "Encyclopedic Narrative," [and] has been used over the past six decades to categorize a genre of large, complex novels, particularly those that incorporate substantial specialized information from the sciences, the arts, and history. (304)

As we have already seen, *Hunger and Love* certainly fulfils the broad rubric of this particular formulation. However, Mendelson's "Encyclopedic Narrative" attends to a far more specific set of criteria. To begin with, he asserts that he knows of only seven authentic encyclopedic narratives (including *Ulysses*), and that all seven pertain to different national

cultures (in the west):[25]

> Each major national culture in the west, as it becomes aware of itself as a separate entity, produces an *encyclopedic author*, one whose work attends to the whole social and linguistic range of his nation, who makes use of all the literary styles and conventions known to his countrymen, whose dialect often becomes established as the national language, who takes his place as national poet or national classic, and who becomes the focus of a large and persistent exegetic and textual industry comparable to the industry founded upon the Bible. (1268, his emphasis)

This is a grand claim indeed, and the first thing to note is the emphasis on one singular author per culture; for example he claims that 'Melville already occupies the American seat in the encyclopedic pantheon' (1271). Mendelson further notes that for example in England and Russia 'the encyclopedic role' is fulfilled 'mainly' by Shakespeare and Pushkin respectively, however both produced 'a cluster of relatively small masterpieces rather than a single dominating masterwork' (1268). So, the encyclopedic author is discrete from the encyclopedic role: for Mendelson (at the time of writing in 1976) Shakespeare fulfilled the role as a kind of placeholder, but England was still awaiting its true encyclopedic author, precisely because the author is nominated and ordained retroactively by the anatomy of a single narrative they produce. Mendelson also asserts that 'only after an encyclopedic narrative has taken its place as a literary monument, surrounded by curators and guides, can it be recognised as a member of its small and exclusive genre' (1268). This is an important point, inasmuch as this implicitly admits the possibility that England's encyclopedic urtext may simply remain undiscovered by the nation's critical arbiters.

Mendelson goes on to be more specific about the genre's characteristics, and one can make the case that *Hunger and Love* certainly fulfils a great many of them. First, encyclopedic narratives, according to Mendelson, 'all attempt to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture, while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge' (1269). Ideological perspectives in 1930s England were defined by the clash between Marxism/Communism/Socialism and capitalism/bourgeois liberalism, and this is obviously one of the central concerns of Britton's novel.

Second, given that they cannot *literally* represent the world's knowledge in its

[25] According to Mendelson: 'Dante's *Commedia*, Rabelais' five books of Gargantua and Pantagruel, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and now, I believe, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*' (1267).

entirety, they 'necessarily make extensive use of synecdoche' (1269); Mendelson's example is the invocation of one or two sciences to represent science as a whole. Britton, as already outlined, discusses various sciences liberally, but there is a way to consider this which is more pertinent to my argument. That is, that more or less all discussions and/or representations of class and/or identity, including Britton's (and this thesis), usually employ synecdoche to some extent in assuming varying degrees of equivalence between individuals and groups: e.g. Arthur Phelps as a synecdoche for the working class, or discussing 'black culture' as if it were equivalent to the cultural experience of all people of that colour. The point being that this is absolutely fine and indeed necessary to make coherent sense of broad issues, as long as it is acknowledged and borne in mind that *these are rhetorical strategies not expressions of empirical fact* – once again, the plural of anecdote is not data.

Third, encyclopedic narratives 'are set *near* the present, although not in it. The main action of most of them occurs some twenty years before the time of writing' (1269, his emphasis), and in so doing they achieve

> the double function of prophecy and satire: it predicts events that are, in reference to the book's action, in the unpredictable future, yet the action itself is close enough to the moment of publication to allow the book to refer to the immediate conditions of its readers' lives. (1270)

Hunger and Love's plot and date of publication fulfil this virtually to the letter.

Fourth, they are also 'encyclopedia[s] *of* narrative', incorporating (but never limited to) numerous conventions; for example, Mendelson cites *Bildungsromane* among others (1270). Furthermore, most encyclopedic works 'include characters who try unsuccessfully to live according to the conventions of another genre' (ibid.). Mendelson proposes examples, such as Don Quixote who 'tr[ies] to turn the book into a romance', or similarly that Molly Bloom tries to turn *Ulysses* into a novel (ibid.). However, these attempts run aground on 'the intolerance of encyclopedic form for the small claims of personal expectation and perspective' (ibid.). Mendelson's argument here is unfortunately free of actual textual examples in order to elucidate this somewhat woolly point; however, I have already discussed in detail Arthur's incommensurability with the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*.

Fifth, 'all encyclopedias attend to the complexities of statecraft, and … they proclaim a new dispensation on earth' (1271) (Mendelson cites, for example, Rabelais'

Abbey of Thélème among others). Britton certainly attends to statecraft, and his form of new dispensation is heralded by 'the beginning of a collective objective external will of the race. Very faint as yet. But it will grow' (538). Communism is rarely mentioned explicitly, but when he professes ideals of civilisation where 'honesty' means 'to produce more than you consume, and to hand over the surplus to society, not keep it to yourself' (596), it is hard not to detect an echo of the famous Marxist slogan 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'.

As an addendum to the statecraft point, Mendelson further notes that all seven of his canonical encyclopedic narratives 'identify the City … the range of roles and actions that the City provides … [and] name vast numbers of jobs and professions, all the varieties of work and labor' (1271). Britton's London certainly fulfils such a role frequently and throughout; for example:

> Here is London, on the face of the globe. Here are its streets —the stink of them satisfies the Lord Mayor. Here are the people walking about: born and buried, born and buried: what do they do with life? Lousy, they are, some of them; fag-end picking, match selling, buy buy buy, company promoting Rolls-Roycing, would you like a bayonet in your guts, this cheque requires endorsement, seven years penal, birthday honours list, do it on the pavement if you haven't got a penny, the greatest statesman of our time, buried in Westminster Abbey. Here is London, the people in the streets. (384)

Sixth, 'none of their narratives culminates in a completed relation of sexual love. … Encyclopedic narratives find it exceptionally difficult to integrate their women characters at any level more quotidian or humane than the levels of archetype or myth' (1272). This is most certainly true of *Hunger and Love*; indeed, its very title prefigures it. Arthur's quest for a completed relation of sexual love is in effect a synecdoche for human fulfilment in general: 'WHAT is it all about, life? Mating and hunting, hunger and love; continuance of the individual, continuance of the race' (541), the novel's world is a world where 'Hunger and love are prime elements' (560). This metaphorical extension chimes with Mendelson's claim that encyclopedic narrative 'strains outwards from the brief moments of personal love toward the wider expanses of national and mythical history, and also toward the history of its own medium' (1272).

Nods towards its own medium (if not its history *per se*) are also frequently evident in *Hunger and Love*: a brief exchange with a waitress is rendered thus:

> You go into Lyons one day; "hunger and love" you say to the waitress; but what you really mean is, Pineapple and cream. I suppose you must just have been reading somewhere about hunger and love being the mainspring of human activities; she doesn't quite get the idea; you have to explain. (667)

As for completed relations of sexual love, when it *is* 'completed' – with a prostitute – the narrative is clear that this is very definitely not *love* – 'what will you get in the end, I wonder? – ersatz again?' (363). Even though the prostitute in question is mercifully euphemistic about the matter, leaving the confirmatory question till after the fact – "'Would you like to give me my little present before I go?'" (365) – the transactional nature of the encounter is equated with the incursion of the bourgeois 'trade civilisation' into even Arthur's free time: '[you] pay for your packet of love. F.o.b., owner's risk, Bourgeois Brand' (ibid.).

His other 'love interests' are certainly archetypes of a sort, never completed, and certainly not complexly rendered: Miss Wyman, a coquettish cashier at Arthur's first bookshop, and Doreen Montague, a dull upper-middle-class caricature. In both cases, they are always just beyond his reach, and it is never left in any doubt that this is a class issue. First with Miss Wyman:

> You feel you are probably doomed to a wasted life. Shirt hanging out and 12s. a week . . . you can't hope to be taken seriously by any so dainty and delightful a person as Miss Wyman. Cashiers belonged to another class. Dainty and delightful, washing-to-laundry class. May-I-introduce-you-to-my-sister class. You wanted dainty and delightful girls, and no other kind would ever really satisfy you: the hunger that was in your soul. (45)

And secondly, with Doreen, whose own appearance is foreshadowed in the above quote, nearly 350 pages previous to her arrival, by 'May-I-introduce-you-to-my-sister class': Doreen is the sister of an acquaintance of Arthur's, a 'young art chap from the Mary Ward—you know, that "lit'ry" blighter—the one you showed your stuff to' (392). The narrative is always painfully aware of the ultimate necessity of upward mobility if Arthur is to have success with young Doreen:

> I suppose the galaxy must weigh somewhere about a hundred sextillion tons.
>
> You are going to see Doreen. You would like to be a member of the bourgeoisie. If you were a member of the bourgeoisie, some day perhaps you would marry Doreen. Have a bearskin rug. Invite her friends to dinner. Play whist. (417-8)

In this instance, the point is only amplified in that the segue from (apparently apropos of

nothing) cosmic musing is marked by a surely deliberate use of the word *sex*tillion(!). In the case of Doreen, the class issue is increasingly marked by another 'nod towards the medium', as Arthur's literary pretensions begin to grow. He is fully aware of the fiscal necessities at play in the romantic marketplace:

> Your wages are working-class. You would never do much with girls on working-class wages, any girls at all, let alone Doreen. … If you could settle down to business like old Brereton – put your *mind* on it – you might get eight pounds a week. Then there would be Doreen. The bourgeoisie have rewards. Tell story. Bow knee. (418-9)

In the use of 'Tell story' a possible literary career is subtly suggested as an alternative vehicle for material advancement; however, presented as a couplet – 'Tell story. Bow knee.' – we are reminded that in a working-class context this comes with the kind of conditions I have discussed at length previously in this thesis:

> Pencil and paper, now, nip it out of pocket; it means Doreen: can it be done? You go out week-end in sunshine and try think something suitable for article. *Something please editor. Something they say public want.* A shadow seems to come over your soul, in spite of the sunshine. There is something sinister and evil in life, the taint of a disease, the smell of a decay. Write an article. Go on; have a go! It means Doreen. . . . (421, my emphasis)

Which leads us nicely to a seventh and final characteristic of Mendelson's criteria for encyclopedic narratives; namely that they 'usually enter their cultures from a position of exile or illegality … originat[ing] in opposition to the cultures they later come to symbolize' (1274). Mendelson again gives appropriate examples, such as Dante writing in exile from Florence and *Moby-Dick* first being recognised in England. We might similarly assert that *Hunger and Love* originates from a position of class exile, in opposition to a literary culture falsely conflated with the bourgeois *qua* class, and its associated right to dream, to imagine, to create. Whereas it is the denial of leisure, of *life*, of which love and romance is obviously a facet, that is in fact the decisive factor in perpetuating this illusory division; a fact Britton's writing is constantly aware of:

> The Great Ones look round the earth. Sex hunger has always been the great weapon. Sex starved and belly starved – and they won't worry about the mysteries of space and time. Touch your cap to the Mayor! That's a good boy! Here's a penny for you. Buy yourself a bun,— and a copy of Photo Bits. . . .
>
> Two thousand million; and you're one. (360)

But in the short paragraph 'Two thousand million; and you're one', there is a defiant message conveyed in literary form: once again, in the incessant use of the pronoun 'you', and the necessary ambiguity surrounding its referent (Arthur? The reader? The narrator?), Britton seeks to engage an understanding of equality that requires individual as well as collective agency.

Moreover, to return to the point at hand, one might justifiably point out that *Hunger and Love* has not 'later come to symbolize' the culture against which it originated. A cogent rejoinder could be that it simply remains undiscovered; or further, that the very reason for its continued obscurity may be that a literary culture – perhaps even a culture at large – has not and still does not exist into which its ideas and philosophy can be easily assimilated, be that Britton's implied Communist world or indeed – to bring us right up to date – any other as yet unrealised iteration of a classless future beyond the era of 'late Capitalism'.

***

As a final note in this discussion of encyclopedic narrative, it is worth noting that Mendelson also noted of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) that its 'ambition is essential to its design. No one could suppose that any encyclopedic narrative is an attractive or comfortable work' (1272).[26] David Letzler (writing 36 years later and not wedded to Mendelson's rigid seven-book pantheon) argues that the encyclopedic nature of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) and its copious digressive footnotes requires 'something most critics are loathe to admit in their reading processes: modulation in the rhythm of one's reading between focused attention and different levels of skimming' (310). Both these quotations could just as easily be referring to *Hunger and Love* and the dissociative, rhythmic emptiness I have previously described as being a product of its form. Indeed, Britton himself comes closest to explaining his own method, albeit obliquely. When discussing form in nature, we are told that everything is the same inasmuch as everything is particles in motion, but that 'qualities differ by the arrangements of the motions' (594). What follows is in many ways a neat metaphor of *Hunger and Love*'s formal effect:

[26] Given that *Moby-Dick* occupies the 'American spot' in Mendelson's encyclopedic pantheon, he is making the case that Pynchon is the representative of a 'newly-forming international culture' (1271).

> Quality exists in form. Arrangement is a matter of association. Quality, therefore, comes down to that, and the qualities by which things differ are differences in the arrangement and association of motion … A cloud is a colloid collection of water particles condensing round ions in the air and holding together with unstable and changing shape in the flurry and scurry and welter of the great air; mankind – the race – holds together much about like that in the stormy turbulence of spacetime. (ibid.)

Robert J. Griffin argues that Laurence Sterne's famously digressive novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767) interrogates the manner in which we construct what we know of ourselves and our world (via John Locke's theories of empiricism and association of ideas, according to Griffin). He argues that Sterne 'speaks of the necessity of divagations and narrative complexity in order to get across his true and affective story, for experience and meaningful discourse naturally work in that way … He would use tropes or figures of language to try to accommodate more meaning than mere logical or straight scientific discourse' (110). Griffin takes Locke's argument that the construction of 'knowledge by words is clearly the problem of inter-human communication', i.e. given that we cannot see within others (and vice versa) then the 'imperfections and abuses' of language necessarily stand between perfection in communication, and connects it to Sterne's work arguing that in his case it is precisely this problem 'that dictates the autobiographer's depending on digressions, gestures, piling up of apparent trivia in the effort to get at the truth' (111). This argument seems to me a convincing elucidation of the motive behind Lionel Britton's divagations and piling up of apparent trivia, and Britton all but restates it through a recurrent trope concerning 'apperception'.

Apperception is discussed specifically on thirteen occasions across the entirety of the novel,[27] the word's uncommon nature creating a conspicuous touchstone with which to loosely tether together sustained and wide-ranging musings on the nature of education. The word is defined by the *OED* as in a metaphorical sense 'the mind's perception of itself as a conscious agent; self-consciousness', and in a psychological sense

> the action or fact of becoming conscious by subsequent reflection of a perception already experienced; any act or process by which the mind unites and assimilates a particular idea (esp. one newly presented) to a larger set or mass of ideas (already possessed), so as to comprehend it as part of the whole. ("apperception, n.")

[27] On pp. 28(twice), 29, 45, 108-9, 138, 139, 248, 250, 254-5, 311, 601, 636-7.

The latter sense of a kind of aggregating process facilitating a more particular comprehension seems very redolent of Griffin's take on Sterne, and indeed seems to be the basis on which Britton first addresses apperception:

> …it is a wonderful discovery to you. And that is, that the repetition of the unknown makes it somehow more intimate to your understanding. What is apperception? You do not know.
>
> But you have made the discovery; and it is supported from other sides. You stuck at that Penny Cyclopædia, grinding on through it, ABC; and when you started you knew nothing; and you learned as you went on. The unfamiliarities heaped themselves up into greater intimacy of idea. Hard work it was, and damned hard work it was too. But the intimacy of idea was worth it. You don't know much, and you didn't get much out of the Penny Cyclopædia, and you didn't get much out of the introductions to Le Cid; but—there is not quite the same rawness in your mind that there was before. (28)

Here, Britton's formulation 'the unfamiliarities heaped themselves up into greater intimacy of idea' is uncannily similar to the 'piling up of apparent trivia in the effort to get at the truth' in Griffin's terms. What seems to coalesce here is a sense that the more times an idea is communicated, the more ways in which it is communicated, the better it might be understood. This ungoverned method also, crucially, mitigates didacticism in its most stultifying, codified form, where ideas are presented for consumption, supposedly fully-formed, all questions asked and answered as if on tablets of stone.

> Apperception—you don't know a thing about that; not even how it's spelt. *But* … here is a welter of conflicting ideas: here, in Rolfe's[28] notes are the Mighty Minds, undecided among themselves. If they don't know, themselves, they can't decide for you; and *you* haven't got an understanding. The rich men's sons, they went to college and got understanding automatically. You: trade livestock. Your job is work. (28)

Is there an echo here of Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster? Throughout *Hunger and Love* there is a powerful awareness of a truth being hidden: that the truly great minds were always aware of their fallibility, their uncertainty, their participation in a constant process, in dialogue with the world. The novel asserts that this fact is deliberately concealed by an educative structure which, as Rancière also argues, relies on the existence in perpetuity of a strata of society which can be considered inadequate and thus either force-fed or

[28] Presumably William James Rolfe.

excluded: 'incapacity provides the structuring fiction of the explicative conception of the world. It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way round; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such' (*IS* 6). Britton explicitly expresses this sense of vested interest in the educative structure, writing:

> Look at this Pitt Press edited edition stuff, dull as hell, notes as dull as ditchwater, good for teachers, never get that stuff down you on your own, gives the teacher a job: helps him to live. No good to you. (25)[29]
>
> …
>
> If Hall and Knight dispensed with the teachers, what chance would they have of the teachers recommending the book? What schoolmaster will buy his scholars a book that doesn't force them into his school? (75-6)

I will return to these ideas surrounding education opened up by this discussion of encyclopedic narratives a little later. For now though, suffice to note that the generic notion of an encyclopedic narrative is a useful tool to make sense of numerous ways in which a novel as compendious and unwieldy as *Hunger and Love* functions. In a sense, it is a framework of 'how's. However, unless one imagines that Lionel Britton was consciously seeking to enter Edward Mendelson's as yet non-existent pantheon of national representatives, to understand better the 'why' we must turn to the priorities of another genre.

Roman à thèse

The term *roman à thèse*, while not fully naturalised in English can be loosely translated as 'thesis novel', and as such conveys its essential characteristic: that it is a novel that 'seeks to further a viewpoint or expound a theory' ("roman à thèse, n."). Susan Suleiman, discussing *roman à thèse*, begins by noting Wayne Booth's equation of all fictional technique with rhetoric, in that all works constantly solicit 'the reader's *assent* to the norms that are everywhere implied in it' (162, her emphasis). This assent can be demanded both formally – Suleiman refers to what she calls the 'abstract' strand in literature which solicits delight in the 'interplay of "pure" forms' while seeking to diminish referential meanings (ibid.) – but also in ways now most associated with the 'Great Tradition' in Western literature and

[29] *The Pitt Press Series for Schools*, launched by the University of Cambridge in 1874.

what she calls its 'realistic' nature: i.e. the assent sought is 'social, political, ethical, philosophical – to use a catch-all term, ideological' (163).

Entailed in this transaction is also the role of the readers themselves, who 'accept to be ourselves re-created by the text for the duration of our reading, for every fictional text creates, together with its characters, the image of its implied reader' (164). The question Suleiman is asking is what occurs when a reader finds the content "'biased," "tendentious," "out to prove something'" (166), or in other words ideologically objectionable. Broadly stated, she argues that when a reader (in her paper's case, herself) reads *against* a text rather than *with* it (in terms of its ideology) it becomes easier to identify certain literary devices which exist independently of whichever doctrine they are employed in service of (174) – this is in itself an interesting argument.

However, the insight that is directly relevant to *Hunger and Love* is her identification of the role of narrative authority. What Suleiman dubs the 'code of authoritative narration' (166) includes all 'objective' utterances (e.g. events, description, transcribed speech). She goes on, though:

> That is not all, however; for the code of authoritative narration carries with it such a weight of persuasion that it tends to assimilate another code (Benveniste's *discours*) used by the omniscient narrator, a code characterized by the subjective nature of its utterances, be they in the form of interpretations concerning a character's motives or personality, didactic generalizations, judgments either explicitly stated or implied by means of metaphors, comparisons, strongly connotative words, etc. The result of this assimilation is that as a reader I am willing to assent to almost anything the narrator tells me, no matter how obviously subjective. (167)

The subconscious elision of this distinction between objectivity and subjectivity on the part of the narrator is unsurprisingly very important to the *roman à thèse*, as the primary purpose of the genre is to garner assent to its subjective propositions. What Suleiman is basically pointing out is that if one is reading a novel whose propositions one already agrees with, this elision goes unnoticed; whereas if the opposite is true, the reader is more likely to find the implicit propaganda conspicuous.

However, Britton never allows this elision to occur; the narrative is always too protean for the reader to relax their critical faculty. This is crucial if considered in light of Rancière and Jacotot: *Hunger and Love* as *roman à thèse* does not merely explicate. In this light, the purpose is emancipation not stultification, and as such a didactic voice which induces blind assent would be supremely inappropriate. Rather a kind of democratised

conversation is established by evacuating the text of 'authority' altogether; this is achieved in a number of ways as I've previously discussed.

To further expand on and augment these points, an obvious starting point would be the notion of unreliability, and this is certainly present, most obviously in explicitly foregrounded limits to narrative omniscience. Sometimes, the narrator confers with the protagonist: 'What would you say the date is now, Arthur—somewhere about 1912 I should think?' (308). At others, the narrator appears to both know and not know Arthur's interiority: 'How much of [Arthur's ideals of beauty were] really contained in Lily, and how much was due to the lost image of that other girl, which the sight of her re-woke by implication, I couldn't tell you; and you, Arthur, can't tell me, because you don't know' (228). Sometimes, the narrator appears to both see and not see the future: he sees the outcome of the coming war – 'Thirty million bodies must be mangled because this Duke was killed' (687) – but not, apparently, Arthur's future:

> The airship goes away again. That banging's over. The profit has been earned. The bodies have been mangled. And you live on. Life is interesting. How much longer you are to live, I do not know. Back they come again, aeroplanes, moonless nights, every moonless night back they come again, bang bang bang bang, go out and watch, watch the drama of the world, how long it will last, your consciousness, I do not know. (690)

So, there are obvious limits to the narrator's vision. But furthermore, the use of the pronominal 'you' is again crucial here and throughout the novel – with whom is the narrator conversing here?

Investigating the significance of the use of second-person in this context requires an appreciation of the notion of unreliability that is more complex than mere questions of omniscience. Without delving too deeply into the surrounding critical debate, the term 'unreliable narrator' was coined by the aforementioned Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, in which he argues that a narrator is '*reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not' (158-9). This raises the immediate (and prior) question of correlation between the author (i.e. the real-life Britton) and the implied author, or in other words the version of Britton implied by the articulations of the narrative voice.

Such a correlation often appears explicit, especially in relation to literary ambition. For example, Arthur's nascent engagement with literature comes via his first job as a 'collector' for a bookshop, and the time afforded to dip into a variety of books

> had inspired him with something close to a veneration for great men. He felt these were really people trying to do a job. Chandos Classics, Everyman. Some day perhaps somebody will write a preface about you. I wonder what it must feel like to be great. (59)

The pronominal 'you' here is again crucial. Arthur is referred to as 'him', 'he', and so suddenly we must question the identity of the 'you' who follows. Might 'you' be Lionel Britton (about whom Bertrand Russell has written a preface in the very book we are holding) talking to himself? Or has the narrator been narrating Arthur to us, the readers, but then segued into addressing Arthur intradiegetically as 'you'? Later comes a passage in which the correlation between Britton and the implied author seems even more explicit, and also further demonstrates the ambiguity of the second-person:

> As I write these words I use up energy. The energy of brain and muscle and breath is used up in altering the form of an external system of motions by adding graphite molecules to the surface of a sheet of paper. I did this lying on my belly in Green Park in shirtsleeves in 1930, revising a manuscript written nearly four years before. These new molecular constructions remain as a permanent result of the energy I was using, though I myself may now be dead. Because of them light falling on the surface of the paper is rearranged into new constructions, and here it is now – changed through the printing press – energy coming from outside space, coming from sun or power-house into your brain and affecting its motions. It is new energy coming into you. You change its form. You think. (492)

The location and date, firstly, seem so plainly self-referential as to be inarguable. So, given that this kind of very plain agreement between the narrative voice and Britton occurs throughout the novel, both autobiographically but also politically for that matter, we may be tempted to conclude that we are indeed dealing with a reliable narrator (in terms of Booth's formulation) who is in a sense an avatar of Britton.

However, secondly, the 'you' in the above example is just as inarguably now the reader. Susan Suleiman has told us that we as readers 'accept to be ourselves re-created by the text', to become 'the image of its implied reader'. Not for Britton, though, asserting (and amplifying with clipped, imperative diction): 'You change its form. You think'. Passive assent is neither sought nor permitted, and the reader is never allowed to be anything other than an active participant. For Booth, one of the characteristics of *unreliable* narrators is that 'all of them make stronger demands on the reader's powers of inference than do reliable narrators' in terms of assessing the veracity and extent of the agreement

between author and narrative voice, so by this token we might conclude that the narrating presence in *Hunger and Love* is indeed unreliable.

Furthermore, in Booth's formulation unreliability is not always a simple case of lying, rather that the narrator 'is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him' (159). However, *Hunger and Love*'s narrating presence neither mistakes nor believes in his own omniscience; rather, as previously discussed, he appears to cycle constantly between knowing and not knowing rather than being consistently one or the other. This is never more apparent than towards the novel's end when, as noted previously, the narrating presence begins to quite literally lose Arthur. Suddenly, what was always a protean, ambiguous narrating presence is revealed to be as lost as Arthur, as all of us. The chapter entitled "Lost" closes with that presence musing on the nature of existence, as he so often has, invoking again that contrast between the cosmic and the quotidian, but now he appears to be talking more to himself than Arthur or the reader. As a result, in the chapter's final lines, the narrator effectively loses his protagonist:

> In space, in which the light-years go on, in time in which even galaxies fade away, like the sweat gleams which glisten and vanish in the sun, the dew-drop which shines a moment in the morning air, the cloud of last night's sunset – your soul or starspark in the galaxy, century or sextillion centuries, cow-track your feet follow or star-drift in spacetime – when there were you, or was the sun, or the galaxy whose stars or suns melted away like molecules of the mist – where are you, Arthur Phelps, two-thousandth-millionth of a greater soul – when were you who feel spacetime behind your forehead, and what is now your name?
>
> Hi! Where's that Arthur Phelps?
> I've lost the blighter. (648)

The narrating presence asks 'where are *you*, Arthur Phelps, two-thousand-millionth of a greater soul … what is now *your* name?'; but immediately following, he seems to jolt out of his reverie with 'Hi! Where's *that* Arthur Phelps?' Here, that jolting shift of register combined with the use of 'that' implies *another* Arthur Phelps than the one whose whereabouts he has just been musing upon: that is, the Arthur Phelps who is the 'concrete' subject of the novel, of the narrative.

The novel, however, has been busy creating another possible Arthur Phelps. 'Arthur Phelps, look back into the immensities!' commands the narrating presence on page 644. He then goes on to discuss the ultimate, indivisible singularity of particles; that only their motion, not their substance, can be affected or changed, and then only by other particles.

And so, for any single particle

> the resulting change [in motion, brought about by other particles] would be their meaning, the change in them *its* meaning. The meaning of the particle itself – the meaning of *you*, one of the two thousand million as you are – exists outside you in the reciprocal effect upon changing motion. (645, his emphases)

This, as the narrating presence immediately acknowledges, is 'all very abstract … and yet it is the only reality' (ibid.). It is, nevertheless, a metaphor for humanity: the narrating presence is speculating that as we move forward towards an idealised future, what were once isolated sparks of humanity – 'sporadically here and there in a Galileo or a Newton' (ibid.) – will tend towards a universal condition wherein 'Arthur Phelpses – more and more of them – you – will become human too' (ibid.). The way in which this is to be realised is in the development of work as a *meaningful* pursuit and the concomitant increasing proliferation of leisure:

> Every year the number of human labour minutes which it is possible on any conception to count as human work increases, even to-day some men – few relatively to the mass but enormously many compared with the past dark aeons of the earth – spend their whole life doing a human job, there are increasingly more a minute or so of whose day is of use to humanity. (ibid.)

All this points towards an evolutionary step, described as 'the age of the mind, the age of the general idea', where man no longer eats up 'the whole of his mind with hunger and sex' – the struggle that names the novel – where previously 'he had to travel a thousand miles at danger of life and limb to university he now lies in the sunshine at the top of a hill with a book'. In such a future, as communications and travel shrink the earth, 'in book and radio the miles and the centuries close up and open out, till all men can hear and think the same things together' (647). This is, obviously, a profoundly Communist vision – perhaps even totalitarian at first glance – however, in the

> objective darkness [of the brain] the spirit of the general idea broods upon its interfaces. It is sol, it is gel, it is surface action, it is electron shift, varying potential and inductance. It is you, it is I, it is the consciousness of the world. (ibid.)

It is redeemed in this sense by its firm grip of the fact that this vision is predicated first upon the necessity of the emancipated individual, 'it is you, it is I', in all their unique potential and difference.

The end of "Lost", in literary terms, is a pivot of the novel; henceforth the reader's true role, potential, and inescapable responsibility is revealed. From the outset of the following chapter, entitled "The Relativity of the Ego", the import of the use of pronouns is magnified from mere ambiguity to a statement on the arbitrary nature of our relative existences:

> LOOK here, Arthur Phelps, you can get it out of your head that you are of any consequence, anyhow! What are you to the thousand million years of life's evolution, the six thousand trillion tons of the earth, its two thousand million lives, the fifty thousand million stars of the galaxy? Out of the two thousand million people on the earth you are one, out of the thousand million years of life this is one: if either were any other how could you tell?
>
> Out of the two thousand million living souls on the earth what does any one of them know – they are they, we are we, I am I, you are you? Every consciousness knows nothing but itself, every moment that it lives it is always now. A thousand years ago it was "now" to everyone alive. It is just as much now to us. We are just as much our individual selves as they were in the past. In a thousand years, a thousand million years it will be just as much now to every man alive. He will be just as much himself. He will say to himself, I am I. Generation to generation, individual to individual, time present or space present, time past or to come – if there is a consciousness at all it is a consciousness of a present, it is a consciousness of a self. What is its name, or what is its date? It makes no difference. I call it Arthur Phelps. It is you.
>
> A man is born does he know his name? John Smith, it might be, it might be Shakespeare. When they tell you who you are, you know: The date – you'll find it if you look in the newspaper, you'll find it on the calendar on the wall. Christian era, Hejira – it is all one; twentieth century, twentymillionth century – it is all one. Now, now, now. I, I, I. You, you, you. In the year 2,000,000,000 it will be interesting to see what is going on. Look at the changes of the last twenty years. *I* shall be interested. (649)

Arthur Phelps can now no longer be understood as *only* the named protagonist, although he may still be at times – but this is the reader's decision. Pronouns, repeated insistently, are stripped back to their 'state of nature', as it were, in that they are shown to rest on assumptions of stable, fixed identities. However, they are in fact at once infinitely relative but ultimately subjectively isolate; indeed there is a whiff of the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum* in the above quotation. What the narrating 'I' calls 'Arthur Phelps' and asserts is 'you' is not, and cannot be, fully perceived – or perhaps more accurately fully *shared* – by a reading 'I' (or 'we'). We, as readers, can ultimately never be sure which Arthur Phelps that Britton, the author, is addressing through his narrating presence. Neither though can we fully know *how he understands him*, and this is as true for stable, conventional narratives as much as it is for *Hunger and Love* which foregrounds this erroneous assumption of correlation. Neither can we be sure if 'you' refers to the author (in dialogue with himself), the narrating

presence (in dialogue with itself), Arthur (spoken to within the narrative), or the reader (implied or actual). 'Arthur Phelps' and 'you' are in a sense always contingent negotiations, not stable, fixed referents. The narrating presence is no more reliable or unreliable than any of us – the reader can never consciously or unconsciously settle upon one or the other. Hence, the reader's participation in the narrative experience is a curious paradox: on the one hand, constantly engaged and aware of their role; on the other, in combination with the digressive style, perhaps less 'active' (in the sense of dynamic, energetic) participants in a narrative, than fellow sharers of a commonly accessible state of rumination.

'And you don't suspect your ignorance'

Ultimately, I want to argue that Britton purposefully entails such a reader, one who is both dialogically engaged and personally ruminant, because this is analogous to the ideal form of working-class political actor – indeed, *any* form of political actor, regardless of class. What is so in terms of a *roman à thèse*, because the genre's very purpose is to persuade, sometimes even to manipulate, is also so in terms of ideas and ideology in general: a passive imbiber is not only useless but pernicious. It results not in equal, autonomous actors, but in phlegmatic, uncritical acolytes. The passive imbiber is not invited to *think*, and hence the allure of wilfully ignorant anti-intellectualism looms large.

Susan Suleiman makes the point that in the *roman à thèse*, implicit ideological manipulation and/or persuasion is 'magnified to a point where it becomes a distinctive generic feature' (165). This is so abundantly and clearly the case across *Hunger and Love*'s 700-odd pages it seems almost redundant to pick a representative example; from virtually the first page to the last, its ideological purpose is certainly distinct. Nevertheless, to at least representatively establish this, let us consider two examples from either end of the novel, in order to get a sense of the novel's subtle persistence. On page 14, numerous concerns are foregrounded (furthermore, the rhetorical function is made even more conspicuous by the use of rhetorical questions):

> Still, the bourgeoisie have to make some show of earning and justifying their share of the swag, or they'd never get away with it. And it's your job to help them, Arthur my lad, and that's got to use up your life. Economics, State policy, political expediency, crowd psychology – what do you know about that? This does not worry you. You get your twelve bob a week, and you labour. The

> labour may be to destroy wealth, you know nothing about that. All you know is it is labour, all you know is you get twelve bob, why do you get your twelve bob? why do you labour? you don't know! There were men, there were Mighty Minds: they knew, they ordered society, life was ordered for you and arranged, you got your twelve bob, where it came from, how you got it, you don't know. What wealth is, you don't know. And you don't suspect your ignorance; There are rich people, there are poor people, the rich have plenty of money, the poor have not. That is wealth. God blimey! what do you know? (14)

Most obviously, we can see an unambiguous if crude representation of both the relationship between labour and wealth and the nature of the bourgeoisie. However, also implied are other more subtle social, ethical, even philosophical issues raised by class society; e.g. work at the expense of life, along with the sanctuary of wilful ignorance and its attendant myth of superior orders of intellect. (One might even detect a whiff of the concept of 'false consciousness'.)

Fast-forward to page 684, and we find a subtle reframing of similar concerns. Arthur, working at Wightman and Co. bookseller's, is called into Old Armour's office (who is the general manager or similar). He is inviting (but really instructing) Arthur to forego his position at Wightman and Co. and join the army, because the upper-class customers are 'beginning to talk' (685) regarding the young men on his staff who are seen to be shirking their duty to King and country:

> "In an establishment like this – we serve the aristocracy – we are dependent upon their patronage. It is our living. Frankly, I am in sympathy with your ideas. Quite frankly. I – I tell you this privately. But, here we are; we are in a world of a particular kind; we must accept it as the kind it is. Frankly, my views are Socialistic; but I make my living by selling books for more than they cost. It may not be right. It is the system. It is the way things are done. If I don't do it, somebody else will. It is the system; it is no use pretending it is not so. Now, you see, I am dependent – entirely dependent – upon the moneyed classes, I have to make their prejudices my prejudices. I have to seem to do so, at any rate: I have my private convictions." (684-5)

Again, a caricature of a capitalist economy, but with the same attendant issues addressed slightly differently. The former quote suggests that unfulfilling and/or extremely onerous work often comes at the expense of inner life in general – 'that's got to use up your life'. The latter quote intensifies the import of this reality: in suggesting that Arthur quit and join up, Old Armour is effectively telling Arthur to *not* work at all, entailing the likely loss of *literal* life.

In addition, the spectre of unemployment in general has loomed over Arthur

throughout the novel, and its ramifications strongly hinted at: 'Werden und Vergehen.[30] You're out of work' (325). Even though the 'option' of unemployment is not the equivalent of certain death in the trenches, the ramifications of unemployment simply mean a slower, arguably more psychologically painful route to one's demise, a death by a thousand cuts. In this way, Britton creates a spectrum of possibility, as it were, for Arthur, and sketches out the Hobson's choice that has faced the working class since time immemorial: oblivious work, or workless oblivion.[31]

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In the first quote, a pernicious form of wilful ignorance is ruthlessly satirised: 'what do you know about that? This does not worry you.' The target is the tendency amongst the dispossessed to throw up their hands, not to cry injustice but to affirm their diffidence. However, in Old Armour's words, we can see how the sanctuary of wilful ignorance is not the sole preserve of the working class, although it might be more accurate to characterise his case as a wilful rationalisation of injustice. Either way, it amounts to the same – as John Steinbeck wrote in *East of Eden* (1952): 'Sometimes a man wants to be stupid if it lets him do a thing his cleverness forbids' (285). However, one might argue that working-class fatalism is not *wilful*; that the paying of humble deference to the 'Mighty Minds', and hence justifying (and being justified by) their presumption of intellectual superiority, is underpinned by an insidious, subtly disseminated, but ultimately genuinely-held *belief* that this superiority is natural – I will discuss this working-class proclivity in more depth presently.

Old Armour, though, displays a completely conscious knowledge of the choice he is making: 'I have to make their prejudices my prejudices'. As I have discussed extensively in the chapter on Ellen Wilkinson, these are indeed choices – there is more than a whiff of Tony Dacre's final reckoning in Old Armour's words: 'I have to seem to do so, at any rate: I have my private convictions'. I argued in that chapter that our 'private convictions'

[30] Literally: 'becoming and passing away'.
[31] Charles Bukowski, writing to his publisher John Martin in 1986, elucidates the same point. Remembering his own experience of oblivious work, he writes of 'the steadily diminishing humanity of those fighting to hold jobs they don't want but fear the alternative worse. People simply empty out. They are bodies with fearful and obedient minds' ("People Simply Empty Out"). On its flip side, workless oblivion, he has this to say: 'I figured the park bench was just as good or being a barfly was just as good. Why not get there first before they put me there? Why wait?' (ibid.).

are *chosen* and thus para-class, with the caveat that no one can maintain ideological purity throughout every minute of the absurd performances that are our lives. However, in the moments when we are consciously aware that a meaningful choice is there to be made – be that to stand up for one's friends, to justly exercise power in the workplace, or to exercise one's franchise at the ballot box – we must aspire to cleave to our private convictions, such as they are, which Tony Dacre and Old Armour manifestly failed to do.

In this light, when later in the same page Britton returns to the concept that might be best understood as an example of the 'false consciousness' theory ('you don't suspect your ignorance'), it can be considered with a slightly different slant:

> All of us, in a bourgeois civilisation, we have to earn our living, even if it costs us our lives. Primarily, it is somebody else's living we earn; and what does it matter to *them* whether we live or die. He is your employer, he is your master, you work for him, you earn his living; but he is only servant, he is dependent, he has to submit, there are wills outside which impose themselves upon him — to rob, to murder, to lie, to cheat, to deceive, to be base, to be mean, to be ignoble are his freedoms, he must accept them or be slave like you. There is no freedom, in a bourgeois civilisation, except for the base who do not feel the chain, the low-souled who fit into the sordid environment. When a man cannot see limitations, subjectively he is free. A pig chained to its trough would never feel the pull of the chain until it got to the end of it. So long as it keeps its snout in the swill it can think it is free. (685)

The whiff of false consciousness from page 14 is here further fleshed out. There are 'the base who do not feel the chain' and 'cannot see limitations', and who thus live a subjective freedom which is no freedom at all. The employer, the master, are also servants, dependents, subject to the imposition of wills from further up the food chain, and who when offered the ersatz freedoms of ignobility etc. 'must accept them or be slave like you'.

That important caveat remains: Old Armour asserts that he must *choose* to 'make their prejudices my prejudices', because the alternative is to ultimately face a similar penury to Arthur. That he (and others in similar positions) 'must accept' the perverse privileges outlined above implies a degree of agency, however limited. It is in essence a moral choice, not an inevitable result of an invisible ideology against which resistance is futile (and indeed impossible). So, in the hunt for original sin, we are faced with a significant problem. We are used to being told that class war pits worker against employer, the plucky working classes against 'the bosses'. But what if Old Armour had been born working-class, which seems entirely possible? If *both* he and Arthur originated in the same churning ocean of precarity, but – by fair means or foul – one reached the beach, so to speak, and chose to

look away from the other left helpless? Or, another possible version of Old Armour might conversely have been born into the middle-class/petit bourgeois, but nevertheless acted upon his private convictions and extended a hand to Arthur by backing his continuing employment. These would both be moments of moral choice, independent of any immutable outcome dictated by a class dichotomy which confers an identity that dictates thought and action.

As an aside, perhaps we must simply chase original sin further up the ladder of class, in search of the source of 'their prejudices' – Old Armour identifies 'the aristocracy', 'the moneyed classes'. But might not an aristocrat just as easily choose to act justly or unjustly? Well, not of course if one believes that this is impossible, because to *be* an aristocrat, or a bourgeoisie, is *in itself* an act of injustice. Right-wing identity politics – in a word, fascism – is a simple affair, in that its focus sticks to basic, canonically immutable and relatively superficial aspects of a person, like their ethnicity: e.g. the Jewish 'race' (notwithstanding this being a chimera in itself). Left-wing identity politics, though, seeks also to absorb class into its formula (*qua* intersectionality). In doing so, more significant but less objectively definable dimensions like culture, education, and family background are baked into the logic of 'identity'.

Lest we forget, we need only look to history for the grim potential contained in the logic of class as an 'identity', as exemplified in Martin Latsis' justification of the Red Terror in 1918:

> We are not fighting against single individuals. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. Do not look in the file of incriminating evidence to see whether or not the accused rose up against the Soviets with arms or words. … Ask him instead to which class he belongs, what is his background, his education, his profession. These are the questions that will determine the fate of the accused. (qtd. in Albats 93)

This formula may have theoretically spared 90% of Soviet Russia's hundred million souls at the time (at least to begin with), but nevertheless, as Latsis' comrade Grigory Zinoviev asserted: 'As for the rest [i.e. the bourgeoisie], we have nothing to say to them. They must be annihilated' (qtd. in Leggett 114). Here, the extremes of the left/right horseshoe tend towards each other, deploying identity politics in its most brutally pure form.

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However, to return to the issue of wilful ignorance, as I've hinted earlier this is especially important in a working-class context, where the force of inequality often hides within the 'virtue' of humility. Rancière berates the ignorant who claim 'I can't … I am only a worker' (*IS* 40), concluding that this amounts to either in effect saying 'I can't be bothered' (which in turn amounts to an admission that you *could* if you were so inclined), or otherwise to a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy that 'the likes of us can't' along the lines of 'why bother, all my friends and/or workmates read *The Daily Express*' or words to that effect. Intellectual inferiority is thus internalised, layered into unbreachable relative positions: academic and manual worker, or even metropolitan and provincial, etc.

This has ever been so since time immemorial; for a literary example from 1895, see Hardy's carter who encounters Jude Fawley on the road to Christminster:

> "Ah, young man," he observed, "you'd have to get your head screwed on t'other way before you could read what they read there."
>
> "Why?" asked the boy.
>
> "Oh, they never look at anything that folks like we can understand," the carter continued, by way of passing the time. (24)

Poet Tom Leonard has observed that such 'constant propaganda that ['high culture'] is "of a higher plane", "of the *noblest* emotions"' begins to produce a mindset that leads people to mistrust their own free encounters with art, literature, and so on:

> For instance, the last thing that occurs to a lot of people when confronted with a work of art by somebody who's been dead a long time, and to which work they have absolutely no response whatsoever, is that this lack of response is totally justified. Maybe privately they couldn't care less, but certainly in meeting somebody who does show a liking for the thing, the person who doesn't have a response often feels obliged to show guilt of some kind. They'll use words that invalidate their non-response in some way, and the word "appreciate" is a favourite: "I'm afraid I never have been able to appreciate good music," etc. ("Mince Pie" 68-9)

I must emphasise here: critiquing this kind of humble *mea culpa* will not be a preface to claiming that judgments of value are in themselves acts of oppression – far from it, and in fact quite the opposite. To return to Rancière's argument that 'equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified', making one's own value judgment on art, both 'low' and 'high', is one way to quite literally practice and verify one's equality.

What really deserves criticism is when apparent diffidence disingenuously masks an all-too-easily indulged, lazy anti-intellectualism. Richard Hofstadter, in *Anti-intellectualism*

in American Life (1963), draws a distinction between 'intelligence' and 'intellect', where intelligence is broadly-speaking an excellence of mind that is necessarily limited in range, goal-orientated, solution-seeking (25-7), as opposed to intellect which is 'the critical, creative, and contemplative side of mind … [it] examines, ponders, wonders, theorises, criticises, imagines' (25). This argument is powerfully persuasive in itself, and establishes more fully the referent in the term 'anti-intellectualism'.

Barbara Tischler, discussing Hofstadter's book, seeks to illustrate the anti-intellectual tendency in a modern, alienated underclass context by invoking the American cartoon characters Beavis and Butt-Head whose 'one act of intentionality … is their refusal to think' (190). This is well-observed, but there is perhaps a more accurate (not to mention excoriating and controversial) contemporary rendering of the intellectual corrosion that occurs when the oppressed or disadvantaged are actively *encouraged* to think of themselves as such. That is, the American comedian Chris Rock's notorious routine from 1996's *Bring The Pain*, in which he castigates the anti-intellectualism and glorification of ignorance he sees as reinforcing negative African American stereotypes from within:

> And you know what is the worst thing about niggas, the *worst* thing about niggas? Niggas love to not know. Nothing makes a nigga happier than not knowing the answer to your question. Just ask a nigga a question. Anything! "What is the capital of Zaire?" "I don't know that shit! Keepin' it real!" Niggas love to keep it real. Real dumb. Niggas hate knowing! Shit! So – niggas'll break into your house, you want to save your money? Put it in your books. 'Cause niggas don't read! Just put the money in the books. Shit, books are like kryptonite to a nigga. (SatiricalGameReviews)

Furthermore, as an ancillary point, implied in Rock's tirade is a rejection of any monolithic 'black identity', from which the routine as a whole derives much of its force: essentially, he is mocking the use and invocation of a 'black identity' as an excuse for various failures of individual behaviour.

Of course, as we have recently observed, this kind of wilful ignorance is not reserved to the downtrodden, as José Ortega y Gasset was also at pains to point out. For him, a superabundant world produced 'vicious types of human life': the 'heir-man' or hereditary aristocrat, the 'spoiled child', and most of all, the 'mass-man' (100). The worst traits of the traditional aristocrat down the ages were reflected in the mass-man; the two types were and are in many ways related: among the traits they share, Ortega y Gasset identifies a character who 'amus[es] himself with the "intellectual," while at bottom despising him and

at times ordering his flunkeys or his bravoes to chastise him; [who has a] preference for living under an absolute authority rather than under a regime of free-discussion' (ibid.). Bearing in mind the 45th occupant of the Oval Office and the current occupant of No.10 Downing Street, it is difficult to avoid a sense of a warning from history in his words.

A similar warning from history can be found in Hannah Arendt's 1951 work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

> Intellectual, spiritual, and artistic initiative is as dangerous to totalitarianism as the gangster initiative of the mob, and both are more dangerous than mere political opposition. The consistent persecution of every higher form of intellectual activity by the new mass leaders springs from more than their natural resentment against everything they cannot understand. Total domination does not allow for free initiative in any field of life, for any activity that is not entirely predictable. Totalitarianism in power invariably replaces all first-rate talents, regardless of their sympathies, with those crackpots and fools whose lack of intelligence and creativity is still the best guarantee of their loyalty. (339)

Important to note, too, Arendt's famous formulation that totalitarianism relies on an alliance between the elite and the mob, and that that alliance is the product of atomisation, of alienation, and the consequent desire for ideologies that claim to explain everything, including that disquiet and dissatisfaction. The danger, of course, occurs when that explanation rests on blaming and then persecuting groups: Stalinism and the bourgeoisie, for example, or of course Nazism and the Jews. Arendt's other famous aphorism, 'the banality of evil', referred to Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, whose ability to dissociate from atrocity she observed was 'closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else' (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 51, her emphasis).

We can glean a number of points from the above. Firstly, that basing ideologies on essentialised group identities is never a good thing, whether they rest on inherent characteristics like ethnicity *or* extrinsic class positions *recast* as inherent – Paul Mason notes that Arendt correctly identified that pre-war German socialists 'overlooked the dangers of working-class fascism because it didn't fit into their theories of class struggle' ("Reading Arendt"). Secondly, if Eichmann's inability to think from the standpoint of someone else was a contributing factor in his crimes, we might do well to reflect on promoting the idea of discrete 'class cultures', or incommensurable forms of knowledge in general – those who support the notion of 'cultural appropriation' would do well to take note of Arendt's words. Lastly, Arendt's use of the phrase 'first-rate talents' reinforces and reminds us that

proceeding from an enacted equality does not imply equality of capacity or output.[32]

Bearing in mind this last point, Hofstadter asserted that the tendency to malign intellect 'made its way into our politics because it became associated with our passion for equality' (23). Broadly speaking, the perception that intellectuals are the modern-day legatees of a practice formerly associated with – indeed, even reserved to – the aristocracy and the priesthood makes them vulnerable to the animus of 'the democrat and the antinomian' (32-3). In short, it is considered a form of elitism. Well, on this point the erstwhile Communist Hofstadter's argument actually coincides with the classical liberal Ortega y Gasset's conception of what defines the 'mass-man': that is, a disposition whose ascendancy ensures a political landscape in which 'there are no longer protagonists; there is only the chorus' (Ortega y Gasset 13). Ortega y Gasset 'uphold[s] a radically aristocratic interpretation of history' (20) in intellectual terms, this much is clear. He further asserts that a society cannot even call itself a society *unless* it is aristocratic, i.e. not only inevitably but desirably hierarchical.

However, he does so while also explicitly condemning the hereditary or class-bound hierarchies which call themselves 'Society' with a capital 'S' – the 'people who live by inviting or not inviting one another' (20-1) (much like Ellen Wilkinson's Bloomsbury set, 'who bestowed fame on themselves by reviewing each others' books') – as being predominantly and equally 'mass'. As previously discussed, his ideal intellectual aristocracy was based not on a hermetic caste (*à la* Plato's philosophers imbued with gold) but on a positively utopian vision of a form of meritocracy where the intellectual aristocrats could in theory be drawn from any class (*à la* Gramsci's organic intellectuals). Whether this is plausible in practice is rather beside the philosophical point: where Hofstadter and Ortega y Gasset coincide is in their recognition that we cannot valorise nor nurture intellect, nor utilise it for the common good, without accepting some form of hierarchy of superior capacities, some form of distinction. Otherwise, the most radically egalitarian visions can perversely corrode into a would-be democratisation of knowledge that, as Isaac Asimov famously remarked, nurtures 'the false notion that democracy means that "my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge"' ("A Cult of Ignorance"). This is the paradox of equality; but nevertheless the reason, as previously discussed, why Rancière asserts that

[32] See Mordechai Gordon, "Arendt and Conrad on the Banality of Evil: Some Implications for Education", for a detailed discussion connecting Arendt with Conrad and Freire (among others) and the nature of learning.

anyone who has 'some taste for equality' should not hesitate to choose an unequal society of equal men.

Rancière described the emancipated as 'all those who have decided to think of themselves as people just like everyone else' (*IS* 41). In light of the above, this obviously means equal in terms of humanity and philosophical possibility, not as being the *same* as everybody else, and especially not in terms of equally licensed to surrender ourselves to the status of blind cogs in a comforting mass. He quotes Joseph Jacotot:

> There is no more beautiful spectacle, none more instructive, than the spectacle of a man speaking. But the listener must reserve the right to think about what he has just heard, and the speaker must engage with him in this. … The listener must thus verify if the speaker is actually within the bounds of reason, if he departs from it, if he returns to it. Without that authorised verification, necessitated by the very equality of intelligence, I see nothing in a conversation but a discourse between a blind man and his dog. (qtd. in Rancière, 41)

Lionel Britton's narrative voice is continually insistent on this very point:

> Once again the same feeling — remember Rolfe and the play reviews? — the leaders and controllers of human thought don't know everything. You have to rely upon your own brain. It's a fine thing to do that. It increases your self-respect. It also means increase your efforts to make your brain an instrument. If these men are great, and *do not really know*: why shouldn't *you* be great too? Why not? (239)
>
> …
>
> No man can be human so long as he accepts the dicta of the Know-Alls as the fixed limit of human knowledge. They don't tell you that.
>
> This sceptical idea (you don't know what it is yet) and the desire to apply it to the Great Men of human thought, wakes your interest up sufficiently to get through to the end of the book (beginning in the middle) and start again at the beginning with the first dawn of human speculation about the world. With this sceptical habit, if you can acquire it, *you* become an equal. You cease to be one of a public to be lectured at. You become one of *them*. The Great Minds thought. You think. The Great Minds searched. You search. Infinities. Immensities. You. Why not? (242, his emphasis)

This is in many ways a literary rejection of the kind of reflexive humility Tom Leonard outlined above. If encounters with art and knowledge are really free, characterised by dialogues between minds which consider themselves equal in human terms, then 'you cease to be one of a public to be lectured at', or as Rancière argued, it becomes 'a question of philosophy and humanity, not of recipes for children's pedagogy' (*IS* 41). Nor indeed a question of recourse to group identities: *you* think. *You* search. Why not?

Questions of philosophy and humanity are indeed where any discussions of *Hunger and Love* are bound to lead, and indeed is why *roman à thèse* is the most accurate generic category to attach to it (though in the final analysis, I would be more inclined to simply say it is *sui generis* and leave it at that). It is by virtue of its sheer scope, though, so replete with such questions that one would need multiple theses to thoroughly analyse them all. However, given that the work of Jacques Rancière has underpinned this particular thesis, it makes sense to trace a few threads in *Hunger and Love* germane to the questions raised throughout, and which can easily be placed in dialogue with Rancière's insights.

'Our own thoughts, Arthur my boy, our own ideas—can we master them?'

I have emphasised previously Rancière's conviction that 'what brings *people* together, what unites them, is nonaggregation', and it is worth at this juncture paying attention to the significance of language to his unconventional formulation of human communality. In Rancière's view (via Jacotot)

> People are united because they are people, that is to say, *distant* beings. Language doesn't unite them. On the contrary, it is the arbitrariness of language that makes them try to communicate by forcing them to translate – but also puts them in a community of intelligence. … [where] each one of us describes our parabola around the truth. No two orbits are alike. (58-9, his emphasis)

He prioritises our differences before our commonalities, which informs his politics of 'dissensus' rather than 'consensus' (both obviously pregnant with implication). This does somewhat gloss over the (self-evident) fact that consensus is the bedrock of shared language: while words and meanings are certainly nuanced in each individual articulation, general assent on the referent of any given word in a language usually pertains. Nevertheless, the arbitrariness of language refers to the fact that these reference points are not immutable.

Certainly though, from at least the dictionary onwards, a degree of control has been exerted upon language and its meanings, usually by the literary-philosophical class who, according to Rancière, are motivated by the desire to conflate 'society, its institutions, the

goal it pursues' with 'truth', and this identification is what consequently defines 'the desire with which the individual must identify in order to reach a correct perception' (58). The arbitrariness of language, then, reflects and informs the arbitrariness of truth (and by extension the very notion and meaning of 'correct'), and vice versa.

Importantly, Rancière is not saying truth does not exist, quite the contrary, rather 'it exists independently from us' (ibid.), 'it doesn't rely on philosophers who say they are its friend: it is only friends with itself' (60). Here we are of course into deeply abstract and esoteric territory (Rancière is, after all, a French philosopher), so in the name of moving swiftly on perhaps I may be permitted to crudely distil an important point: given all of the above, what becomes crucial, especially in terms of education, is *how* truth is pursued.

'Stultification', according to Rancière, is what occurs when teachers subtly induce students to conform to their interpretation of truth via a contrived coincidence, as opposed to allowing them to arrive at their own interpretation freely. This is a crux of Jacotot's insight in terms of education and teaching:

> …the student's mind arrives at a finish that couldn't even be glimpsed at the starting line. He is surprised to touch it, he turns around, he sees his guide, the surprise turns into admiration, and that admiration stultifies him. (qtd. in Rancière 59)

Concerned as it is with this process, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is deeply redolent of another radical text on education, namely Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1971) which advocated no less than the disestablishment of schools altogether (including universities) as the chief mandating institutions of education. Illich also rejects exactly the sort of stultification outlined above, describing 'the true master-disciple relationship' as one which is 'always a luxury for the teacher and a form of leisure (in Greek, "*scholè*") for him and his pupil: an activity meaningful for both, having no ulterior purpose' (102-3). Teaching *per se* is not rejected, rather the way in which it is conducted: as Debra Panizzon notes, 'critically, [Illich] was not opposed to learning and understanding but considered that the education provided by schooling devalued cultural and individual differences creating greater class division and social inequity' (81). In other words, the suffocating enforcement of 'educators' own perceived truths in fact *diminishes and devalues* the very difference and dissent they simultaneously claim to valorise.

This is all the more pernicious when conducted obliquely under the guise of supposed emancipation, as Rancière argues:

> The Old Master knows what he wants – stultification – and he works to that end. The progressives, on the other hand, want to liberate minds and promote the abilities of the masses. But what they propose is to perfect stultification by perfecting explications. (121)

In the former case, at least one knows where one stands with the Old Master – like C. S. Lewis's robber barons the motives are unambiguous. What Rancière means by the latter, though, is simply that the kind of liberation progressive educators purport to champion would negate the very need for progressive educators, a potential outcome that 'meets the most impenetrable resistance' (129). Their prestige is predicated on cultivating and maintaining belief in the 'incapacity of the people on which their priesthood is based' (ibid.). Such language recalls Gramsci's definition of traditional intellectuals as a 'caste, or a priesthood'; a further similarity is their sense of being somehow beyond the fray – Rancière describes the progressives dignification of their power as being 'purified of any mixture with the material forms of traditional authority' (ibid.). In practice, this prestige is maintained by 'perfecting explications', or in other words by pedagogicizing society: e.g. methods, tests, commissions, reports, all administered and monitored by appropriately licensed personnel. In this way, the 'improvisations of incompetents' can be avoided; 'minds formed by chance' more effectively excluded from the enterprise of education (121). As such, the progressives' predominance is ultimately as much the Old Master's victory as theirs.

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No better contemporary example of such covert stultification exists in our present-day humanities than the very existence of the term 'learning outcomes'. For instance, the University of Toronto cites Mark Battersby's paper "So, What's a Learning Outcome Anyway?", which defines the concept as one where faculty

> always think first about what is essential that students know or be able to do after the course or program – what students need to know and could make powerful use of to enhance their lives and more effectively contribute to society. (qtd. in "What Are Learning Outcomes?")

Two things are notable about this statement. Firstly, the distinction between 'know' and

'be able to do', a distinction that is relevant to this discussion and which Illich also addresses:

> The deschooling of society implies a recognition of the two-faced nature of learning. An insistence on skill drill alone could be a disaster; equal emphasis must be placed on other kinds of learning. But if schools are the wrong places for learning a skill, they are even worse places for getting an education. School does both tasks badly, partly because it does not distinguish between them. (*Deschooling Society* 24)

This is relevant to my discussion because I am concerned with one of those two faces; i.e. the interpretive, critical, speculative disciplines – the humanities, broadly understood – of which literature is obviously one. It goes without saying that I will have little credibility as regards 'skill drill' pedagogic methods pertaining to empirical subjects (although I do know that I had to be shown how to size a slate, or to make a palatable whisky sour, and that these both quickened and improved with repetition). Ensuring people are professionally capable, as it were, is quite a different endeavour to the purpose of studying literature or philosophy as embodied nowadays by the hackneyed phrase 'teaching students *how* to think not *what* to think'. On this point, suffice to say that I am sceptical, and when in university environments/circles frequently (and silently) recall Noam Chomsky's words:

> The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum – even encourage the more critical and dissident views. That gives people the sense that there's free thinking going on, while all the time the presuppositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of the debate. (*The Common Good* 43)

Which leads us, secondly, to Battersby making plain what an 'outcome' entails: what a student should know, *after* the teaching occurs. This is nothing if not stultification codified.

Illich rejects this form of 'schooling', whereby students confuse 'fluency with the ability to say something new' (*Deschooling Society* 9) and, anticipating Chomsky's words, where the limits of learning are 'set by budgets and taboos' creating 'a bundle of planned meanings' (ibid. 46). In Illich's view

> the modern university has forfeited its chance to provide a simple setting for encounters which are both autonomous and anarchic, focused yet unplanned and ebullient, and has chosen instead to manage the process by which so-called research and instruction are produced. (ibid. 40-1)

Alas, nearly fifty years after these words were written, the modern university appears to have embraced education-as-management yet closer. So, it should not be surprising to find an environment where, as Battersby openly attests, the goal of education is to transfer predetermined knowledge that enables an 'enhancement of life' which is inseparable from (or at least conflated with) 'effective societal contribution'. As Illich noted elsewhere (in *Shadow Work*) and with diction that echoes Rancière's 'stultification', the student might do well to ask whether 'they are in school to learn or to collaborate in their own stupefaction' (31).

Illich rails against an education that is less an emancipatory practice than a preparatory process for participation in the modern economy. Here he intersects with Leavis: even though Leavis (like Ortega y Gasset) saw the production of a truly educated elite as not only the inevitable but also the desirable result of proper teaching, learning, and research – an outcome presumably Illich would baulk at – Leavis also saw that elite as not just vital to resisting the 'blind drive onward of material and mechanical development' (*Education and the University* 16) but also as a catalyst for the revivification of an educated public, an outcome Illich would no doubt welcome. (One can imagine an illuminating debate along this axis: Illich with 'This is so, isn't it?' inviting Leavis's 'Yes, but–') In Rancière's words, an emancipatory education cannot, by definition, 'specialise in the production of a set kind of social actor' (*IS* 103). For what is required in order for this predefined social actor to be produced is an act of suppression that both Illich and Rancière saw clearly: Illich contends that 'educators want to avoid the ignorant meeting the ignorant around a text which they may not understand and which they read only because they are interested in it' (*Deschooling Society* 28) ('ignorant' in the literal sense of uninformed or unaware, rather than the pejorative sense of wilfully uncultivated). Rancière claims that 'what had to be prevented above all was letting the poor know that they could educate themselves by their own abilities, that they had *abilities*' (129, his emphasis). The suppression of the possibility (indeed, even the reality) 'that most learning requires no teaching' (Illich, *DS* 52) serves only to buttress the fiction that schools and universities are the only sites of learning available, and in fact

> discourages and disables the poor from taking control of their own learning. All over the world the school has an anti-educational effect on society: school is recognised as the institution which specialises in education. The failures of school are taken by most people as a proof that education is a very costly, very complex, always arcane and frequently almost impossible task. (ibid. 15)

Radical visions like Illich's (and Jacotot's, as we have previously noted) of course invite virtually unlimited 'whataboutery', as did Leavis's similar visions of critical exchange. In an institutional sense they often prove 'not to be scalable' in practice, as Steven Cranfield noted of Leavis's endeavours to enact an analogous model at Cambridge, and indeed in general critics aver that such autonomous exchanges in today's higher education 'at the level assumed by Leavis [are] simply not a going concern' (6, 35). Nevertheless, given I am not here in the business of policy proposal, I still find Illich's critique of the assumptions underpinning pedagogy in general to be pertinent and persuasive. To convince people that the emancipatory potential of their own education does not lie originally and foundationally with themselves, but with a 'facilitator' or similar, is to cut them off at the knees. There is a resonance in Illich's assertion that 'each of us is personally responsible for his or her own deschooling, and only we have the power to do it' (*Deschooling Society* 52) that I feel articulates a foundational truth, however inchoate, and that draws its power from the same source as Rancière's assertion that we can 'learn how to be equal men in an unequal society. That is what *being emancipated* means'. In other words (to paraphrase and affirm Rancière) to understand education as something that must be given by or claimed from pedagogues or institutions is the opposite of emancipation. Rather, a person must be antecedently 'conscious of his nature as an intellectual subject' (*IS* 35) (again redolent of Gramsci), must personify '*a will served by an intelligence*' (51-2, his emphasis), and thus practice and verify their own capacity for education – only then can true emancipation occur.

In a class context, it is important to acknowledge however that non-institutional, personally-directed education is largely dependent upon leisure – or, perhaps, more accurately it is dependent on the quality of that leisure, which is directly impacted by the pressures of work and time (and consequently, money). Important to note that this is not merely a blithe philosophical claim: much research has been done in the field of psychology into a term I have mentioned briefly previously: 'scarcity mentality'. Princeton University psychology and public affairs professor Eldar Shafir, who co-authored *Scarcity: Why having too little means so much* (2013) with Harvard University economist Sendhil Mullainathan, finds that lack of money and time (or even calories or companionship) consumes 'mental bandwidth', so to speak, producing diminished cognitive ability. Put simply, the consequences of relative poverty can reduce IQ by as much as the loss of a

night's sleep. But, according to Shafir and Mullainathan, this creates an 'elephant in the room', so to speak: i.e. these facts are ignored because it appears ostensibly disrespectful to the poor to identify lowered IQ as if it were a kind of character flaw. But this diminished cognitive function is a *consequence* of poverty, not the *cause* of it. Acknowledging the resulting short-term thinking and poor decision making should not be considered an affront to some phantom 'working-class identity' and thus tiptoed around in the name of respect; if anything, it is a finding that deserves to be more widely promulgated.

Furthermore, and again crucial in a class context, a verification of one's own capacities as described above is not just a responsibility but also a source of autonomous agency. Here lies a crux of the 'class as cultural identity' trap for the working class: only those who have been encouraged to wallow in an ascriptive class identity that indelibly inscribes them as a powerless victim on the wrong end of an oppressive educational apartheid could ever find solace in a *valorisation* of such an identity. Such a valorisation is nothing but a consolatory bromide (usually offered by those progressives who simultaneously lament its effect) and in fact offers little but a tacit encouragement of the anti-intellectualism that masquerades as a constituent of that identity, the kind of distorted, shoulder-shrugging, 'not for the likes of us' breed of humility that I have already discussed.

This is an apposite juncture to return to *Hunger and Love*, and its engagement with this anti-intellectual phenomenon – i.e. the estrangement from and suspicion of intellectual pursuits. Working as assistant to the cataloguer for an upmarket book merchant, Arthur one day asks abstract epistemological questions on the nature of mathematics of both the head packer and a 'B.Sc. chap' (406). Arthur is seeking to establish 'whether geometry really was intuitive', and 'supposing you didn't know how to do it, how would you find out that's the proper way [to convert a vulgar fraction]?' (ibid.). In both cases, his thrust is to expose whether concepts are actually understood rather than accepted uncritically. However, neither of his interlocutors can even grasp the nature of the question, and react fractiously:

> After that [the B.Sc. chap]'s hostile. They're both hostile, he and the head packer. The packer feels that you have in some way got something out of him he didn't know was there – and can't miss; and the B.Sc. has a hazy suspicion that you've put something into him he didn't know existed – and he can't tell what it is. The serene B.Sc. faith and confidence are shaken. There has crept into the B.Sc. world a suspicion that after all there was a time when there *were no text-books*. I think he shuts his mind to that; rigorously. And the packer hunts round for what he's lost. And both of them are hostile to you. (407, his

emphasis)

On the one hand, the B.Sc. reacts against his own subconscious recognition of the nature of his education, that he is one of those who 'have all this learning pumped into them systematically, like air into a motor tire. They don't have to want it, they just get it stuffed into them like geese with a foie gras' (81). Whereas, on the other hand, in the packer's case Arthur begins by asking 'Do you think … that a whole can be greater than its parts?' (406), inviting the packer to recognise his own freedom to act in this field of inquiry, to reject the opposition of 'manual knowledge, the knowledge of the people, the intelligence of the tool and the worker, to the science of schools or the rhetoric of the elite' (Rancière, *IS* 36).

Class identity only reinforces and reifies such an opposition, as in this example. The packer reacts with a distrustful recalcitrance to the very nature of the question – ""'Ere! wassa game? Tryin' it on, ain-cher?"" (406), recalling Rancière's beration of the pseudo-humble discussed previously: 'I can't … I am only a worker'. Approached at the outset with what *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* holds to be the key to emancipatory universal teaching, i.e. that which is 'summed up in the question: what do you think about it?' (36), the packer instinctively responds antagonistically to an invitation to engage with a discourse he automatically considers to be outwith the province of his station.

The General Idea

Hunger and Love's engagement with the idea of education is indeed considerably more than a mere depiction of autodidacticism; it simultaneously reflects the insights of Illich and Rancière with regard to the transmutation of education *per se* into an externally administered, explicative process. In fact, many passages might have been lifted straight out of *Deschooling Society* or *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*:

> Bit spasmodic, perhaps, this diving into learning and out again, in between publishers and shop, dips into and nibblings at knowledge. But, colleges universities rich men's sons, regular disciplined study – I wonder: do they know what they are doing and why? Possibly, dipping and dabbling, in these desultory attempts to get a survey of the field and content of man's activity and mind, you may reach to something the rich men's sons lack. Something they will live and die without. Just as out of the notes of Rolfe's Shakespeare, you begin to feel – passing from one book to another, observing different ways of approach, entering into different outlooks – that after all, Professor this Professor that,

> the teachers and instructors of mankind, do not know everything.
> That realisation is the beginning of wisdom. (81)

Britton is as explicit as Illich on education as a preparatory process for participation in the modern economy. He describes 'guttersnipes' who study completely without direction, follow their noses and respect no taboos: 'Educate them, and they compete for the jobs; don't educate them, and the fever in their blood educates itself all wrong, choosing their own subjects, learning in the darkness, growing up unaware that they have to respect – us, who are the Great Ones!' (402). To be educated 'all wrong' presupposes that one can be educated 'all right', i.e. in (and by) approved institutional sites of learning. That they should come to be considered the *only* sites of learning is why, as Britton writes, 'most men now finish their education and their learning and their life without ever coming to it' (632) – then as now.

Britton's manifesto/solution as expressed in *Hunger and Love* is that 'the education of the future must start with the general idea' (632). What is meant by the 'general idea' is most fully explained in the novel via a discussion of the 'devilish cunning' (443) of Plato, another point where Britton is astonishingly redolent of Rancière – this time, however, of *The Philosopher and His Poor*'s opening section: "Plato's Lie". According to *Hunger and Love*, the bourgeoisie 'have always looked up to the Greek slave civilisation as the ideal of freedom' (442), and their worldview is inherited from Platonic philosophy. Having understood that 'the less you know, the easier it is for the bourgeoisie not to be found out', they invoke Platonism's 'first principle', which is to 'cut out the search bunk' (ibid.). This is done by insisting that 'you've got all the knowledge you want *inside* your head' (ibid., his emphasis), i.e. that knowledge is in a sense immanent to varying degrees from person to person, thus rendering the *seeking* of further knowledge redundant. This is in effect a cognate of the suppression of undirected learning described above: how better to ensure 'effective societal contribution' than to ensure that a person's educational pursuits will never accidentally extend to an unguided interrogation of the organising principles that underpin that society.

The need to suppress the instinct to inquire was where 'Plato was so cunning' (443), proposing to himself the problem of creating 'the illusion of knowledge without its actual attainment' (ibid.); the logic being that if people can be persuaded that all the work in attaining any knowledge worth having has already been done (by philosophers, in Plato's case), they will tend to take the easy option and accept it uncritically. Furthermore, as

Rancière reproaches frequently in *The Philosopher and his Poor*, this uncritical attitude is bolstered by Plato's commensurate propagation of an ideal that pertains in a similar sense today in the eulogising of the 'job for life': the worker must have only one occupation, not only to ensure that that duty is discharged when required, but also especially to ensure that they do not presume the freedom to act in any other sphere that might produce philosophical counter-narratives: 'There is only one principle of exclusion' (*PP* 8). Plato understands perfectly well that there is no essential difference of *process* between the thought of the shoemaker and the philosopher, but nevertheless asserts it: this is the titular "Plato's Lie". But it is precisely the establishment of such an illusory difference – the 'order of discourse' (30, and *passim*) as an absolute division – that naturalises class domination as an inevitable phenomenon.

This is the landscape upon which Britton's concept of the 'general idea' (and its suppression) enters his discussion. In a nutshell, Britton describes the general idea as an evolutionary process, an accumulation of knowledge attained over time 'with an incredible labour of individual observation' (443-4). This can be traced back to the dawn of time as 'blind molecular motions' were repeated so often as to come to a 'general effect' (444). Even the body's cells and tissues have a 'primitive sense of generalisation': when the mouth waters, for example, this is not because the cells have tasted the food nor the mind willed saliva forth, it is an 'unconscious generalisation of the cells themselves from past tastes' (ibid.). Similarly, the agglomeration of mankind's knowledge, both concrete and abstract, forms the 'general idea' – and this is the crux – from which new inquiries and new ideas take their foundation. The general idea is a springboard, if you will: once a new idea becomes 'general', in any subsequent receiving intellect 'the idea changes from an objective to an instrument, and new results are reached with its aid' (ibid').

This is existentially dangerous for a class society, and explains Plato's antipathy towards the 'mute discourse' of writing. It is mute, writes Rancière, but 'also too loquacious. The text cannot defend itself but once unleashed, can drift all over the place: It can get into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally to those who have no business with it: it doesn't know how to address the right people and not the wrong people' (*PP* 40). This echoes Illich's description of the subversive power of 'the ignorant meeting the ignorant around a text which they may not understand and which they read only because they are interested in it'.

In *Shadow Work*, Illich discusses Antonio de Nebrija, an influential Spanish literary

figure of the Renaissance, in order to show the historical roots of preventing the wrong people reading the wrong way. In response to the first flowerings of widely-shareable print culture, Nebrija advocated 'the reduction of [Isabella I of Castile]'s subjects to an entirely new type of dependence. He presents her with a new weapon, grammar, to be wielded by a new kind of mercenary, the *letrado*' (33). In short, if the genie of writing is out of the bottle, then control writing itself.

Nebrija's production of the first Spanish grammar in 1492 (the first of any Romance language) was above all 'a weapon to suppress untutored speech' (35) and prevent 'the "waste" of leisure time made possible through the inventions of paper and movable type' (39). We now consider standardised language as a general good, a necessary prerequisite for the teaching of reading, but Nebrija's concern in 1492 was somewhat the opposite: he was 'upset because people who speak in dozens of distinct vernacular tongues have become the victims of a reading epidemic. They waste their leisure, throwing away their time on books that circulate outside of any possible bureaucratic control' (ibid.). Nebrija wants 'to prevent people from printing and reading in the various languages that, up to that time, they had only spoken. By this monopoly over an official and taught language, he proposes to suppress wild, untaught vernacular reading' (40). And why? Britton offers a succinct exposition of a motive that has pertained down the years: 'The cultured world—it was written for them, they read it; wouldn't read it unless they could understand it?' (139). In short, to establish a medium or register by which a tacit ownership of culture can be asserted by the bearers of a linguistic identity marker.

Nebrija's insight proved to have remarkable longevity, even in today's markedly different print culture. Illich, writing in 1981, notes:

> Today, we generally act on the assumption that books could not be printed and would not be read in any number if they were written in a vernacular language free from the constraints of an official grammar. Equally, we assume that people could not learn to read and write their own tongue unless they are taught in the same manner as students were traditionally taught Latin. (43)

The emergence, for example, of writers like Tom Leonard and James Kelman around the same decade was altering the literary landscape in terms of the Scottish vernacular, specifically in response to the dominance of 'Received Pronunciation' or 'RP'. Robert Crawford noted James Kelman's emphasis of the fact 'that "standard English" is simply another dialect – "the main dialect of the British rich" and "the language of Shakespia and

Docta Johnson'" (286). This is a point that Tom Leonard frequently engaged with in his poetry: in "Poetry", a juxtaposition in lines 11-12 elucidates precisely this: 'Poetry. / Poughit. rih.' The point being that 'Poetry' is a word in standard English, 'Poughit. rih.' is the sound of Received Pronunciation. However, a conflation has occurred between them, as Leonard argues in his essay "The Locust Tree in Flower": 'prescriptive grammar … becomes the sound made flesh of prescriptive pronunciation' (95). The ultimate effect of this conflation is to associate the authority claimed by written Standard English with RP's mode of speech, embedding it by reification: 'That was my education / – and nothing to do with me.' ("Poetry" lines 13-14). Standard English, then, is merely the mode that has attained dominance rather than an inherently superior object in and of itself. It is that dominance alone which has established it at the pinnacle of the taxonomical hierarchy of the English language and classified all other expressions of English as ancillary vernaculars.

The lineage of this logic is indeed ancient. Illich quotes Nebrija's appeal to his queen directly: 'Presently, they waste their leisure on novels and fancy stories full of lies. I have decided, therefore, that my most urgent task is to transform Castilian speech into an artifact so that whatever henceforth shall be written in this language may be of one standard tenor' (43). One standard tenor, just like one standard English.

Furthermore, the conviction that leisure can be 'wasted' by the vernacular classes can surely trace its logic back to the tenets of Platonism central to this discussion: for Plato, there could be no greater danger than those who are good at creating illusions being allowed the space to start their own alluring counter myths. They need careful management, as Nebrija also evidently saw, and must certainly be prevented from accessing the springboard of Britton's general idea. However, the subversive power of writers like Kelman and Leonard ultimately resides in the fact that their writing refuses to be marginal precisely because it does not recognise any linguistic margin: the equality it embodies is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified.

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What is not addressed here, however, is the problem of attributing relative value to the ideas that spring from the countless millions of individual intellects at work. Knowledge cannot become 'general' – or, one might say, 'common knowledge' – without ultimately *some* form of arbitration. Britton glosses over this problem, or at least seems to

assume that this will take care of itself in a similar organic manner as cell organisation. However, for my money the scenario rather implies some form of inevitable hierarchisation, either of subject (thinker), object (idea), or both, in order to arrive at any useful and practical 'general idea'. Without some form of discernment, there is only a chaotic welter of competing notions and an endless sea of relativism; in many ways, the postmodernist position, with its attendant hostility to the notion of general or universal truths. This is of course uncertain territory: one would not suggest that hierarchies should not be subject to challenge and revision, they most certainly should; furthermore, there is of course a fine line between discernment and reification, explication, and ultimately stultification. Nevertheless, the negotiation entailed in establishing any 'general idea' can hardly be collectively avoided, even more especially if one wishes to believe that any other organising principle other than the exercising of power is possible.

In many ways, the predicament is analogous to literary canon formation; on which Frank Kermode offers a succinct summation:

> Absolute justice and perfection of conscience are unlikely to be more available under [any] new dispensation than they are now. … Some workable notion of canon, some examined idea of history, though like most human arrangements they may be represented as unjust and self-serving, are necessary to any concept of past value with the least chance of survival, necessary even to the desired rehabilitation of the unfairly neglected. (126-7)

Put yet more simply, 'out of the indeterminate, disject facts of history, a core of canonical memory; out of history, value' (146). There can be no such thing as 'unfairly neglected' without such a process; unfair neglect is predicated on erroneous discernment.

Nevertheless, this unaddressed point does not necessarily invalidate Britton's critique of Plato, but casts a little complicating shadow on his conclusion. Which is that the Platonic conception enables a narrow stratum of society to create a close counterfeit of genuine knowledge: genuine knowledge being that which is reached by independent exercise of intellectual capacity, extending the common stock by standing on the shoulders of giants, so to speak; its Platonic counterfeit being knowledge which is presented as derived hermetically via the unique capacities of natural thinkers and then accepted wholly uncritically:

> This Platonic conception, that knowledge can be got out from the inside, additionally specially harmonises with bourgeois civilisation, because it suggests

> that there are special supermen, out of whose lucky head the knowledge and results of the race are drawn, and upon whom the race is therefore dependent. Such supermen are entitled to privilege and cannot be questioned by intellects too much beneath their scope. This is the Great Man theory. The bourgeois state could not exist without the delusion that there are Great Men who produce the great results by reason of their greatness, and therefore are entitled to gobble up the results of everybody else. (445)

The complicating shadow is of course that Britton does not dismiss the notion that Great Men do indeed exist; for example: 'The finer the kind of individual mind, the finer the race. Shakespeare, Newton, Darwin – men like that, finer men: race like that, finer race' (143). His veneration of such figures is copious and profuse, and so we must conclude that distinguishing between 'good Great Men' and 'bad Great Men' is a question of evaluation, and therefore subject to Kermode's argument as detailed above.

Britton, as we have seen, often implies that those who possess genuine greatness are identifiable by their open, equivocal attitudes to their own knowledge. This is certainly a constructive qualification, implying as it does a certain kinship with the ideal Leavisite critic who acknowledges that their critical judgment necessarily amounts to asking 'This is so, isn't it?' I have often speculated that perhaps therein lies the root of Leavis's relegation to an almost parodic figure in modern literary studies. For a critic like Leavis, the purpose of critical debate is the cultivation and maturation of personal judgment, the development and evolution of the individual sensibility, which is in itself of little use without the constant presence of the expected rejoinder 'yes, but…'

Entailed in such an endeavour, in my view, is the unavoidable questioning, modification, and refinement of one's own value system. This is hardly compatible with a mindset which is convinced of its own righteousness at the outset, one which has inherited its starting position from the kind of Great Man condemned in *Hunger and Love*; one whose concern, like Plato, is to safeguard their own claims to intellectual prowess. Following "Plato's Lie", Rancière went on to discuss "Marx's Labor" in section two of *The Philosopher and His Poor*. In a nutshell, Marx saw the hope of the proletariat as contained in their potential solidarity. But for Rancière, solidarity of action without the emancipation of thinking he outlines will ultimately be directed by the inheritors of "Plato's Lie", endlessly deferring the apparent benefits of their theories into an ideal future. I often feel that we might replace 'philosophy' with the word 'theory' today, for what are 'theories of literature' (and indeed any other theory dealing with the non-empirical realities of life) if not pre-packaged Platonic knowledge in another guise?

Which is not to say that learning cannot take place in universities, or that no thought/writing/etc. of superior value exists, rather what is at stake is the climate in which learning (and appreciation of value) occurs. In crude terms, we might say that certainly in literature (and the humanities in general) a presumption that one's worldview governs correct interpretation and indeed constitutes a qualification to 'teach' literature is pernicious. This is of course, as ever, not a failing that is the exclusive domain of capitalist shills.

Let us revisit our friend J. P. M. Millar, erstwhile editor of *The Plebs*. In 1932, he was asking the general question "Must Education Impose Views", confidently (and rightly) asserting that 'there never has been an education that was unbiased' (217), and (again rightly) concluding that any teacher failing to frankly acknowledge this fact necessarily clothes their own prejudice in the garb of universal truth (ibid.). However, he counsels care when addressing the word 'bias', inasmuch as he does not mean the actual falsification of facts. Rather, he means that 'each education has been evolved to fit the needs of some form of society or some social class' (218). Furthermore, 'in a period when social conditions are changing with great rapidity, an education that is in line with the needs of the times must take great care not to suppress critical capacity' (ibid.). What were the needs of the times, in Millar's estimation? Simply, given that 'the purpose of the public school in capitalism is to educate the child into being a good citizen of capitalism', but given also that 'capitalism is no longer necessary and its tradition is no longer vital and consequently the vitality of its education has gone' (218-9), that ultimately an education along Millar's preferred lines is preferable. Which, given that no falsification of facts is tolerated, we must conclude means that Millar would simply rather present the facts in a *different* way – i.e. his way, not 'the capitalist way' – so as to best advance the interests of the working classes he purports to represent, *but* without suppressing their critical capacity. Already the whiff of oxymoron is strong.

So, to paraphrase Lenin, What Is To Be Done? given that the narcissism of small differences is again in evidence: not only is the more general spectre of capitalists at large to be opposed, but even the Workers' Educational Association. The W.E.A.'s provision of scholarships to universities is considered to be (as expressed in the title of another Millar article) "Creaming Labour's Brains" – in other words, hiving away organic

intellectuals from the 'working-class movement' (194) towards 'drawing larger salaries as civil servants or as technical assistants in capitalist industry' (ibid.). This of course creates traditional intellectuals, or as Ramsay Macdonald once put it, Oxford would 'inoculate the more intelligent sections of the working-classes … [Oxford] will assimilate them, not they Oxford' (qtd. in Fieldhouse 11). However, as I have previously argued in the chapter on Ellen Wilkinson, this is not a causal relationship (even though it may be as common as not), and I would argue that the desire for larger salaries has at least as much to do with either need or greed (or both) as education in and of itself. Furthermore, as Debra Panizzon observed of Ivan Illich, 'given [his] own educational background, there is a degree of irony here: *Could Illich have challenged and questioned so vociferously in the public arena without the very schooling he abhorred?*' (82, her emphasis). And after all, no lesser figures than J. P. M. Millar, Fidel Castro, and indeed Karl Marx himself were the recipients of elite educations – how did they resist the ideological brainwashing? Were they just a little bit more intellectually equal than everybody else?

An illuminating exchange in "The 'Plebs' Forum" section in 1931 sheds much light on just how thorny an issue this is. Agnes Reynolds, a W.E.A. tutor moved to defend her organisation, holds that a liberal education, broadly understood, encourages 'the healthy habit of independent thought' and enables the student 'to grasp at once the complete absurdity of the economic system under which we are at present living' (212). She writes that 'I may, and in fact I think, agree with your politics … only by ceaseless propaganda can you hope to alter the terrible injustice of the present system' (ibid.). However, she insists that '*I do not think that propaganda is the same thing as education*' (ibid., her emphasis). In response comes the editorially-authored "Our Rejoinder", which posits that all education is information conveyed to the mind, and as such 'in a sense all education is propaganda' (213). As for Reynolds' faith in the available liberal education, *The Plebs* wonders:

> How is it, then, that those who have had the advantage of this education do not in the main have the capacity of independent thought so far as social problems are concerned and do not see the complete absurdity of the present economic system but are amongst its most whole-hearted defenders? If there was anything at all … in Mrs. Reynold's argument, the universities would be the great champions of the working-class movement and of Socialism. As it is they are champions of the existing order… (ibid.)

The tendency towards generalisation in this conviction is indeed absurd in its absolute certainty. I ask again, how is it, then, that Millar, Castro, and Marx *did* see the complete

absurdity of the present economic system?

Furthermore, as far as what the universities in fact championed in 1931 I am not qualified to say, but I challenge anyone with any experience of a present-day university not to crack a wry smile at the idea of universities being champions of the existing order – or at least certainly not their teaching staff and students. And if I may be permitted to briefly submit my own subjective observation here, we should not assume that because prescribed interpretations of literature can no longer be so unashamedly imposed on pupils/students as they perhaps were in the 1930s, that it no longer happens. Indeed, the prescribed political opinion and corresponding modes of interpretation in a present-day literature department seem to me all the more pervasive and oppressive for their tacit, implied nature.

In the following issue of *The Plebs*, one John Corina contributes "The Universities and Marxism: A Further Reply to Mrs. Reynolds", and draws an intriguing distinction. He asserts that 'in the N.C.L.C.'s case the emancipation of the workers is the objective; in the case of the W.E.A. the "culture" of the workers is the objective. And, while the former may cover the latter, the latter does not entail, necessarily, the former' (237), plainly stating that 'perhaps there is room for culture – I don't challenge that – in working-class education, but pure culture is not enough' (ibid.). Therefore, according to Corina, because the W.E.A. is 'unsectarian and non-party in politics' (ibid.), its version of education is not adequate for the working class. Why? Because, given that 'the study of literature [is] largely concerned with the "meanings and messages" of books,' then 'from the point of view of emancipation of the workers it is essential that Marxism is stressed' (ibid.). From which we must deduce that Corina's position (and indeed the N.C.L.C.'S) is that working-class people cannot derive the proper meanings and messages from literature or culture without the guiding influence of doctrine. Once again we encounter that conviction which holds that the working class cannot emancipate themselves or participate in culture without being told how to do so. The great irony being, as I will stress one final time here, that those who claim to possess the intellectual autonomy required to do the telling more often than not developed their liberated intellects within precisely the educational tradition they reject wholesale. To give Mr. Corina his due, though, he does finally concede that 'Mrs. Reynolds is one of us, and, as she is concerned with stimulating independent thought, and as our Editor has certainly shown by his action that the *Plebs* is not suppressing such thought, let us hope that her connection with the *Plebs* is long continued' (237). This is

indeed so – that an open debate on the subject was occurring at all was most certainly a good thing.

When Lionel Britton draws a comparison with the Pitt Press edition of Shakespeare (i.e. the scholastically-endorsed opinion) with the notes he discovers in the Rolfe edition, it is specifically the multiplicity of opinion contained within that he admires and applauds:

> Now these notes (and it's interesting and pleasing to have little illustrations scattered about them) were something new. They were not teachy; there was none of the Great I-Am about them, they didn't tell you there was only one possible opinion in the world, which belonged to the editor. Rolfe's plan was rather to give samples of the different editors, and it was in seeing these conflicting and incompatible opinions, readings, constructions, interpretations, that interest comes into your consciousness, and with it the first glimmerings of self-respect. In the dark stretches of your mind interest begins to make a dawn. You have the first faint inkling of the width of time and idea, and that man's mind can cope with it; and of your kinship with that kind of mind. For I'll tell you what, where there are more opinions than one, you … Arthur Phelps, shop-boy … will have to decide. Yourself. (25)

Contained herein is, perhaps, a better answer to J. P. M. Millar's question "Must Education Impose Views" – perhaps it might be aptly rephrased as "Education Must Provide Views". That is to say, rather than deciding which views should be prioritised/dispensed with, a better teaching aim would be to neutrally make available (and visible) the thoughts of, say, Karl Marx and Friedrich Hayek, Jacques Rancière and José Ortega y Gasset, Pierre Bourdieu and Jordan Peterson, and so on, and let the student/citizen decide for themselves how they will respond to them, unimpeded by a dogmatic atmosphere. It would seem a Pyrrhic victory indeed if the battle for universal and free access to, in Matthew Arnold's famous words, 'the best that has been thought and said' was considered to be won by carving out adjuncts to that knowledge and confining students – or indeed a class – within a preferred cul-de-sac. Because what is further evidenced in the above quote, by extension, is the realisation that self-respect is borne of both the licence and responsibility to draw one's own conclusions – *truly* one's own conclusion, not a proxy conclusion that one has been led to – a point made forceful by the simplicity and brevity of the final sentence: 'Yourself'. Education begins with the individual.

This recalls a point I have discussed previously, Rancière's description of Jacotot's method as 'above all a method of the will' (12) (as Jacotot himself put it in 1836, 'man is a will served by an intelligence' [qtd. in Rancière 51-2]) where the role of teacher is only to oblige the student to fulfil their intellectual abilities, 'that every common person might

conceive his human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity, and decide how to use it' (17). At this point it is worth noting more pointedly the addendum 'and decide how to use it' – this is another crux. We will discuss presently the idea of 'independent thought' in terms of its impact on politics. However, the free decision on how one might use one's intellectual capacity begs a question that Rancière also answers: 'whoever emancipates doesn't have to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will learn what he wants, *nothing maybe*' (18, my emphasis). This is because emancipation *precedes* education, not the other way around; 'it is each man becoming conscious of his nature as an intellectual subject' (35).

We can see this insight reflected in the words of the Brazilian educator/philosopher Paulo Freire. He argues that

> no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption (54)

and that learning occurs when 'women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing' (15). In short, everyone must play a role in their own education by beginning from a standpoint where they consider themselves equal, both to others and to the task. This is why the 'models from among the oppressors' in fact refers to imposed modes of understanding, but this is equally true of right and left, capitalist and communist. Furthermore, there may of course be biological factors at play in intellectual *outcomes* – I cannot pretend to know anything about that – and furthermore, as Rancière concedes, that 'wills are unequally demanding' too (52), but in terms of emancipation these points are moot – what we are talking about is, at bottom, a state of mind from which to proceed.

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A good juncture, then, to consider the motivations of the would-be emancipator-pedagogues. In *Hunger and Love*, Arthur/the narrator has this to say when discussing the ranks of the dishonest: alongside the usual suspects – bishops, judges, and business magnates – he cites philosophers: 'Philosophers more difficult. Not quite so obvious how they assist the Foul Purpose in society' (239) (the 'Foul Purpose' for Britton being the

bourgeois regime). In short, he argues that they engage in a kind of unconscious sophistic feedback loop. While they are 'all solemnly Laying down the Law to which the universe must conform' (ibid.), any doubt is expunged by unquestioning confidence in their absolute authority in the realm of knowledge: e.g. Plato 'prove[s] by making imaginary characters agree' (ibid.), and the conclusions thus reached become true by virtue of the fact that he is Plato. Once one realises this, Britton argues, 'you may be more sympathetic to them, feel they are genuinely trying to do a job to help the understanding of the race. They may not be mentally dishonest' (ibid.). Nevertheless, he continues, they sense that the only way for their 'inner consciousness to be right is to fit in', and so

> We must all wonder a little whether the metaphysician is not really trying to produce the effect he undoubtedly does contribute to, and whether perhaps he is not, after all, an ally of the mayor-bishop-prime-minister gang. (240)

To reiterate (as discussed at length previously), the position of professional thinkers is predicated on the existence of a corresponding vernacular, 'uneducated' position. As such, it should not be surprising if many left-leaning academics must intellectually deceive themselves, and sublimate their (perfectly natural) desire for the power and status that this very dichotomy affords them. Simply put, they are not (and usually never were) organic intellectuals, but rather traditional intellectuals. Discomfort with this fact means it must be somehow effaced.

How can this be done? By creating, in effect, a cloister. To return briefly to Bourdieu, he himself freely admits that sociology is an 'esoteric science – the initiation is very slow and requires a true conversion of one's whole vision of the world' ("Landmarks" 53) – language deeply redolent of the monastic character of Gramsci's traditional intellectuals.[33] According to Rogers Brubaker, Bourdieu's sociology should not be

[33] I freely admit that I have herein invoked Bourdieu as a kind of totemic lightning rod for sociology at large, though not unreasonably in my opinion, for a number of reasons. First, I was and am responding primarily to Rancière's critique, in which he takes Bourdieu as a sociological avatar in a similar manner. If it's good enough for Rancière, it's good enough for me. Secondly, Bourdieu's position and eminence within the academy is secure, so I am definitely 'punching up', so to speak, and furthermore I myself admire his intellect, writing, and range as much as anyone else – my quarrel is with what I, via others' work (as cited), have come to see as a fundamental error of the practice itself which bears directly on my argument. Thirdly, and relatedly, his wider position as a totem of the intellectual left in general is not typically disputed, or at least certainly not fabricated by me: for example, Dylan Riley calls him 'an unavoidable point of reference for the contemporary intellectual left' ("Class Theory"), Stuart Jeffries "'the intellectual reference" for movements opposed to neo-liberalism and globalisation' (qtd. in Johnson). Furthermore, the perception that he was 'a politically engaged intellectual' (ibid.) makes him a particularly apt point of reference for my argument; however, even here, I am at pains to make clear that I take no 'holier than thou' stance, or indeed imply conscious dishonesty on Bourdieu's part – rather, I applaud honest efforts, while reserving the right

properly approached as definitive science, rather his work is designed to be proselytised and propagandised as a kind of rhetorical method of emancipation (216-8), a distinction (no pun intended) I am inclined to agree with. Nevertheless, Rancière was still correct to characterise sociology as 'a family affair', a diagnosis that Brubaker also indirectly concedes: '[Bourdieu's] point is not simply to interpret the world; it is to change the world, by changing the way in which we – *in the first instance, other social scientists* – see it' (217, my emphasis). Dylan Riley, in his penetrating critique "Bourdieu's Class Theory", extends this point: 'Correctly approached, [Bourdieu's sociology] is *a way of becoming a sociologist* rather than an explanatory framework for understanding the social world' (his emphasis). Riley argues that what this offers is an ersatz of political engagement, by offering a sense of political relevance 'to an intelligentsia with little organisational link to popular forces' (ibid.). This, in turn, both legitimises and protects the secluded privileges of academic life by assuaging 'reformist impulses' while maintaining the academy's autonomy from politics and the economy (ibid.). In an interview, Noam Chomsky pithily characterises this as a politically-dissociated but nevertheless 'more radical than thou' position ("Postmodernism").

Russell Jacoby's argument in *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) plows a similar furrow, arguing that this cloistering is also partly geographical – in short, that left intellectuals now inhabit campuses rather than urban bohemias (a little determinist for my taste) – but is primarily guided by professional ambition and the defence of the classic ivory tower where 'academic freedom mean[s] nothing more than the freedom to be academic' (119). This is a wholly more convincing point not least given the self-criticism it implies – Jacoby is obviously himself an academic and avowed 'man of the left', so to speak. (And I can almost anticipate the rejoinder here, that Jacoby is not a 'true' leftist, or words to that effect. Nevertheless.) "Yes, but so what?", I hear you say. Well, none of this would really be of any note were it not that a degree of hypocrisy is required to aggressively espouse class politics and denounce the logic of individualism, without acknowledging that one is doing so while simultaneously pursuing the personal goals that logic enshrines. Chomsky makes a similar argument towards the end of *Year 501: The Conquest Continues* (1992), arguing that while 'left intellectuals discourse polysyllabically to one another' then 'however meritorious personal motives may be, these phenomena in left intellectual circles, in my

to critique their efficacy.

opinion, reflect yet another ideological victory for the culture of the privileged, and contribute to it' (286), just as Britton outlined above. Edward Mendelson puts it succinctly:

> Although most critics surely write out of love for their subject, most critics also hope to gain some sort of profit, some sort of place for themselves, as by-products of their works of love. But how many critics can bring themselves, *in their criticism*, to acknowledge this? (1275, his emphasis)

Acknowledge it, then at the very least one can argue 'don't hate the player, hate the game'.

This cloistering impulse is of course not peculiar to the left across the spectrum of political-academic activity, but right-leaning/conservative interests at least tend to be more honest about the craving for status it derives from. But the left, as above, are certainly more inclined to create status hierarchies while simultaneously denouncing hierarchy as in itself unjust. As Bertrand Russell wrote in his introduction for *Hunger and Love*:

> … in a completely Communistic world there would still be men holding power over other men, namely, the leading officials, since power is just as delightful as wealth, the holders of power would still have a pleasanter life than other men, and I do not see how we could be sure that they would use their privileged position for the public good rather than for the advancement of their own order. Nor do I feel sure that human beings are capable of their fullest development if they have not the sense of self-direction. It is true that where individuals have the power of self-direction, there is sure to be anarchy and strife, but I am not sure that human beings can preserve their best qualities in a completely orderly world. (x)

A truly free and healthy society, Russell uncertainly concludes, is essentially a delicate balance between order and chaos. In that I am inclined to agree, and furthermore share (and indeed applaud) his uncertainty about the precise nature of that balance.

And as Russell admits elsewhere in the introduction, in a world dominated by capitalism power imbalances abound and are often abused. This is most surely true, and remains so today. What he is pointing out, though, is that – as anyone with even a cursory knowledge of history must surely concede – these power imbalances are just as inevitable and prone to abuse under ideologies which claim to renounce them. And indeed it is at the very least arguable that *these* abuses of power are even more egregious for the intellectual gymnastics performed to absolve them, using the moral justification of an as-yet-deferred future. For instance, E.P. Thompson was suspended from the Communist Party of Great Britain after starting a critical journal (*The Reasoner*) with fellow heretic John Saville (both eventually resigned following the Soviet invasion of Budapest). Jean-Paul

Sartre, to take another example from the ranks of the eminent, hardly needs mentioning where intellectual gymnastics are concerned; in 1973 he writes:

> A revolutionary regime must get rid of a number of individuals who threaten it, and I see no other way but death. You can always get out of a prison. The revolutionaries of 1973 probably did not kill enough. (qtd. in Judt 126)[34]

The list goes on, but ultimately Milan Kundera's words spring to mind:

> The criminal regimes were made not by criminals but by enthusiasts convinced they had discovered the only road to paradise. They defended that road so valiantly that they were forced to execute many people. (176)

The road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions and imperious moral certainty.

To draw a contemporary analogue, I wonder whether discomfort (or even guilt) among the intellectual/academic left about the inevitability of hierarchy in fact informs the scathing denunciations of some modern 'public intellectuals' who are at the very least sympathetic to the left but nevertheless considered to be off the reservation. Jordan Peterson is an obvious and prominent example of such a modern bête noire. His position on hierarchy, for example – in a nutshell, that adaptation to dominance hierarchies is very, very old, and influenced to some degree by biology – should hardly be considered controversial. His affirmation of competence hierarchies (as opposed to hereditary, racial, etc.) makes him more of a classical liberal than anything else.

This of course locates Peterson in a long-established philosophical tradition. For example, Ortega y Gasset also held that 'hierarchies constitute an inalienable structure of human existence' (Dobson 53), and also that the only ethical question in play was the *nature* of those hierarchies. Of course, as previously discussed, Ortega y Gasset believed that the best form of hierarchy is a kind of aristocracy of merit where 'the best (*los mejores*) have a decisive influence' (qtd. in Dobson 53). However, he also believed that capitalism could not achieve this because it produces an aristocracy based on 'a material, anonymous, quantitative power: money', and that enabling an alternative formulation of hierarchy was (or should be) socialism's mission (ibid.).

In fact, Andrew Dobson observes that there is 'hardly a harsh word to be found'

[34] Original text: 'Un régime révolutionnaire doit se débarrasser d'un certain nombre d'individus qui le ménacent, et je ne vois pas d'autre moyen que la mort. On peut toujours sortir d'une prison. Les révolutionnaires de 1973 n'ont probablement pas assez tué.'

about Socialism in Ortega y Gasset's entire oeuvre (46), and also quotes Ortega y Gasset's statement that socialism (in the early part of the century) 'provide[d] the backdrop for all our ideological combinations'. Like John Stuart Mill before him, and like Peterson after him, Ortega y Gasset showed considerable sympathy towards forms of socialism, even while rejecting Marxist tenets like class-consciousness (Dobson 46-7).

However, Ortega y Gasset was commonly branded a fascist, not least because, as Dobson observes, the prevailing polarised political climate in Spain effectively meant that any 'would-be actor in the political arena' had to be considered either a socialist or a fascist (104). Peterson is commonly caricatured as an 'alt-right troll' etc. in today's similarly polarised climate. In short (in both eras): us or them, and nothing in between. One is moved to wonder: what motivates such distortions?

The term Ortega y Gasset deploys – 'ideological combinations' – may provide a clue. Ortega y Gasset (and Peterson, for that matter) believes that collective justice is not incommensurable with individual excellence, aspiration and/or competition, etc. That belief in turn implies that equality need not and should not deny the reality that some people – and let us be blunt about it – will simply turn out to be exceptional in a great many ways, and will accrue asymmetrical power or superfluous wealth as a result. 'From each according to his abilities' would seem to admit of the former; 'to each according to his needs' seems to suggest opposition to the latter. However, as I've argued, the intellectual left might be said to be adept at simply sublimating their own troublesome desires for wealth, status, distinction (or whatever else) and burying them under dogmatic 'more radical than thou' posturing. Perhaps the very notion of ideological eclecticism, as it were, is in itself the problem the intellectual left had/has with the likes of Ortega y Gasset or Peterson: a syncretic approach to ideology has never found favour with partisans.

I hesitate to now invoke the phrase 'diversity of thought' in this context, but it is an important concept for at least related reasons: we are living through a very puritanical moment now in modern humanities departments. Multiple arguments both specifically academic – e.g. curriculum decolonisation – and more public, so to speak – e.g. on race, transgender issues, etc. – are considered as good as closed, with the competing positions conflated with left and right, and divergence on some of them considered tantamount to heresy. (NB: this is my diagnosis of a state of affairs, not an implication of my personal position on any of these debates.) The common denominator in all the aforementioned is

of course issues of identity. In 1998, Richard Rorty spoke of a 'spectatorial and retrospective' academic left which had 'permitted cultural politics to supplant real politics' (14-15), and this has only become more pronounced. In 2017, Angela Nagle writes:

> It is sometimes said that the right won the economic war and the left won the culture war. And as political theorist Walter Benn Michaels has argued, it is the recognition of identity that has triumphed over economic equality as the organising principle of the Anglo-American liberal left and of mainstream discourse more broadly. (57)

It should come as no surprise that an academic left increasingly preoccupied with group identity should tend towards groupthink. Mark Fisher, in 2013, wrote of a climate embodied by the term 'call-out culture', which is 'driven by a *priest's desire* to excommunicate and condemn, an *academic-pedant's* desire to be the first to be seen to spot a mistake, and a *hipster's desire* to be one of the in-crowd' ("Vampire Castle", his emphasis), which neatly encapsulates the elements of the left's cloistered traditional intellectual that I have tried to capture here: monastic detachment, moral *amour-propre*, and above all sublimated ambition. Britton observed the following of socialists in *Hunger and Love*, and if 'socialist' was replaced with the indefinite 'they' (as I've done here), he may as well have been referring to today's academic 'Anglo-American liberal left':

> Their ideas are all strictly preserved and you mustn't poach. … [They] want to patent their ideas. A belief in [their] ideas gives them individuality. It distinguishes them from the common ruck. It gives them power and insight, it gives them grasp of the processes of society. It is a clue, a key. While they have that — and other people have not — they feel intellectual superiority. Make the understanding common to everybody and your superiority is gone. [They] passionately wants to make converts, but [they want] them to look up a little mystified and awed. (289)

And, ultimately, this amounts to little more than the so-called 'bourgeois individualism' they so strenuously decry. This, though, is afforded ample cover by the logic and politics of group identity, legitimising as it does the formation of cloistered intellectual vanguards by the inheritors of Plato's lie.

An Idea of Politics

This, then, may draw us nearer to a response to Britton's speculation: 'Philosophers more difficult. Not quite so obvious how they assist the Foul Purpose in society'. In short, that the intellectual gatekeepers of the cloister are directly analogous in *motive* to the gatekeepers of the political economy – or here I may pointedly say *so-called* political – which *Hunger and Love* often dubs the 'trade civilisation' (163 and *passim*).

The fear of independent thought and consequent intellectual counteraction/dissent is very real, and along with the pacifying lie of bourgeois meritocracy is ironised savagely by Arthur/the narrator:

> What have the Newtons to be afraid of? Rockefeller, the supreme, captain of industry, Mond, the industrialist genius with vision – what have the Monds and the Rockefellers to be afraid of? The scum of the slum? Cheap printing, the workers talking among themselves? It's very evident they are afraid. They won their way through merit, in the teeth of competition among two thousand million lives: what *are* they afraid of – the scum of the slum? It's very plain they *are* afraid. Something is wrong somewhere. Won their way through merit? – Surely the Newtons? – Something is wrong. (593)

Orwell makes a similar point less obliquely in *Down and Out in Paris and London*: 'I believe that this instinct to perpetuate useless work is, at bottom, simply fear of the mob. The mob (the thought runs) are such low animals that they would be dangerous if they had leisure; it is safer to keep them too busy to think' (106). David Graeber echoes the sentiment 85 years down the line: 'The ruling class has figured out that a happy and productive population with free time on their hands is a mortal danger' (xvi).

Meanwhile, I have stressed 'so-called political' above advisedly, because the overarching consequence the Rockefellers and Monds fear when workers start talking among themselves is the instantiation of *actual* politics in its purest sense, as opposed to a cloistered ersatz of politics as I've described above. Let me approach an elaboration of this via Bourdieu again. In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1970, with Jean-Claude Passeron), he claims that

> Nothing is better designed than the examination to inspire universal recognition of the legitimacy of academic verdicts and of the social hierarchies they legitimate, since it leads the self-eliminated to count themselves among those who fail, while enabling those elected from among a small number of eligible candidates to see in their election the proof of a merit or "gift" which would

> have caused them to be preferred to all comers in any circumstances. (162)

So, according to Bourdieu, those privileged few granted access to the supposedly autonomous sphere of the academic world can imagine themselves to have proved their merit amid the teeth of competition among two thousand million lives, or in other words to have scaled the heights of a meritocracy. Bourdieu is correct to recognise that this impression is spurious. However, he also concomitantly claims that those denied access '*self*-eliminate', '*count themselves* among those who fail', i.e. 'the scum of the slum' inscribe their own lack of merit by default. This is a more dubious claim.

I have noted previously (in another context) the point Rancière makes in *The Philosopher and His Poor,* that one cannot be 'explained into' equality in intellectual or philosophical terms, because to even understand such a direction '[the inferior] must already be the equal of the superior' (223). This insight is even more relevant here (and perhaps best understood) in terms of Rancière's account of politics in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1995) where it is effectively restated in different words. He first argues that

> There is politics when there is a part of those who have no part, a part or party of the poor. Politics does not happen just because the poor oppose the rich. It is the other way around: politics (that is, the interruption of the simple effects of domination by the rich) causes the poor to exist as an entity. … Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part. (11)

This at first may seem esoteric, but it is in fact simply a way of approaching politics from the bottom up, so to speak. An ersatz of politics is one that points to 'the arithmetic of shopkeepers and barterers' (15), that stakes out its sphere in the organisation and (hypothetical) granting of equal rights to the satisfaction of desires. Or in modern, meritocratic parlance: a politics that is the mechanism by which it is ensured that if you play the game and work hard enough, then you have earned as much right to luxury cars, designer clothing, etc. as anyone else (and this right will be upheld).

This is not an understanding of politics that the Rockefellers and Monds fear, quite the contrary: it rather suits them. Politics becomes a problem only if the scum of the slum were to talk amongst themselves so much that they might imagine a scenario in which

> any mere shoemaker or smithie can get up and have his say on how to steer the ships and how to build the fortifications and, more to the point, on the just or unjust way to use these for the common good. The problem is not the *always*

> *more* but the *anyone at all*, the sudden revelation of the ultimate anarchy on which any hierarchy rests. (16, his emphasis)

This is penetrating: 'the ultimate anarchy on which any hierarchy rests' – might this have been what Philip Henderson sensed when deeming Lionel Britton an anarchist as opposed to a socialist? Did Henderson sense the perpetual challenge that must inevitably be posed to incumbent hierarchies – whether they be directed by Rockefellers, theorised by Bourdieus, or proxied by socialist cadres – if the scum of the slum simply had the *time* to appreciate the nature of the radical equality that actually underpins consent to such hierarchies?:

> There is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you. It is this equality that gnaws away at any natural order. Doubtless inferiors obey ninety-nine percent of the time; it remains that the social order is reduced thereby to its ultimate contingency. In the final analysis, inequality is only possible through equality. This means that politics doesn't always happen – it actually happens very little or rarely. What is usually lumped together under the name of political history or political science in fact stems more often than not from other mechanisms concerned with holding on to the exercise of majesty, the curacy of divinity, the command of armies, and the management of interests. Politics only occurs when these mechanisms are stopped in their tracks by the effect of a presupposition that is totally foreign to them yet without which none of them could ultimately function: the presupposition of the equality of anyone and everyone, or the paradoxical effectiveness of the sheer contingency of any order. (16-7)

So, politics is in a sense obedience freely given by a polity in full recognition of their fundamental equality, which is the only condition under which that obedience can ever be justly authorised. In turn, the more those charged with the prosecution of society are aware that their position is entirely arbitrary, rightfully tenuous, and by no means morally infallible, the more effective their governance will be.

The reason this obedience is granted is of course, simply and precisely, so that a hierarchy can be established in order to *prevent* the anarchy on which it indubitably rests, and a peaceful, functioning society can be maintained. Which all sounds, well, a bit conservative, does it not? Alas (for anyone who would find such a parallel distasteful), Rancière's diagnosis finds a distinct echo in the words of Roger Scruton describing "Why I became a conservative", via Edmund Burke and

> the defense of authority and obedience. Far from being the evil and obnoxious thing that my contemporaries held it to be, authority was, for Burke, the root of political order. Society, he argued, is not held together by the abstract rights of the citizen, as the French Revolutionaries supposed. It is held together by authority – by which is meant the right to obedience, rather than the mere power to compel it. And obedience, in its turn, is the prime virtue of political beings, the disposition which makes it possible to govern them, and without which societies crumble into "the dust and powder of individuality." (Scruton)

The parallel is striking, notwithstanding the fact that Scruton is one of those awkward grammar-school conservatives 'ripe for caricature by anyone left of Ken Clarke' (Baggini); and indeed one who became a 'marked man' at Birkbeck in the 80s by the dominant left after coming 'out of the closet as a conservative' and establishing *The Salisbury Review* (Dooley 46) (one wonders whether E.P. Thompson may have found a crumb of sympathy in that respect).[35]

What is at stake in terms of justice is in both cases the nature of consent, not the mere fact of authority and obedience, often reflexively considered to be evil and obnoxious in itself. What is unjust is consent required automatically and unquestioningly by those who consider authority and obedience a birthright, especially when disingenuously sweetened with the false promise of social mobility. Britton describes a mundane incident in which Arthur fails to collect cash on delivery for a book for his own reasons (largely irrelevant here and unbeknownst to Old Sarner), a failure justified by Arthur as having decided he should not wait any longer for the absent customer: i.e. by an exercising of his own judgment. Old Sarner responds:

> "Now let me tell you, my boy!" Old chap was damn serious; evidently taken it to heart. "The essential thing in business is to obey instructions. The Chief knows what he is about; you are only a private, in the army of business, remember, at present; later on possibly you will be a general, then you will appreciate what it is to feel that you can rely absolutely on your orders being carried out." (208)

The military metaphor is apt, the import of the admonishment being that Arthur should not in any circumstances be thinking about nor assessing the merit of Old Sarner's orders

[35] The 'closet' metaphor makes this an apposite point at which to include a disclaimer: I am not unaware of Scruton's frequently controversial and even distasteful positions, perhaps chief among them his statements on homosexuality. However, his philosophy of conservatism remains there to be contended with nonetheless. This is even more especially the case considering the enduring academic currency of left intellectuals – including Foucault, Sartre, Derrida, Althusser, Barthes, de Beauvoir, Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, and indeed Jacques Rancière himself – who were all signatories of a 1977 petition calling for the abolition of the sexual age of consent. Nobody's perfect, right?

on his own. Such an abdication of agency is at least in part justified by the promise that he will one day be able to exercise similar impunity himself. This is in turn a neat metaphor for the premise and transaction implied by what we might refer to as the bourgeois order.

However, Britton has already all but prefigured Rancière's argument that mere obedience and material participation in society does not constitute the presence of politics, instead a sense of one's equality via intellectual participation and resultant consent/dissent does:

> Arthur was susceptible to frowns. It was this susceptibility which made all his employers give him a good character. But for his craving for understanding, and the consequent unrest against the social necessity of denying it to members of his class, he would have been a jewel. (115)

Arthur, 'susceptible to frowns', is easily disciplined, but nevertheless the very chafing he feels between his submission and the desire to reconcile that submission on his own intellectual terms indicates the presence of what we might accurately term a 'political consciousness' that goes far beyond holding a placard or casting a vote.

Here, I would return to Rancière's maxim: that we can (and should) 'learn how to be equal men in an unequal society. That is what *being emancipated* means'. The instinctive knowledge of the very equality that underpins such a political consciousness – 'the ultimate anarchy on which any hierarchy rests' – is a marked feature, and indeed is the driver of Arthur's intellectual journey in *Hunger and Love*. Furthermore, evident very early in the text is a strong sense of how the alienation of work and culture implied in the logic of class erodes such a sense of *a priori* equality:

> It is a praiseworthy resolve not to be inferior – not to be inferior to anything on earth: why should you be inferior? But poetry is none too good a preparation for a day's work among potatoes and string bags. Equal? – you would like to be equal, of course, but how are you going to be equal? You ain't equal. Penn'orth o' pot-'erbs ma'am? Yes, ma'am. (14-5)

Poetry can have nothing to do with work: the spheres are discrete – at least, for those who are not equal, for those whose work is divorced from thought, whose work brooks no questioning as to its value. Such questions, as posited previously, would be dangerous, and must be suppressed. It is also worth reiterating at this stage that Rancière's 'instinctive knowledge' of equality was perhaps only able to be clarified, internalised, and expressed – one might say practiced and verified – by virtue of his status as an academic researcher

afforded the time to read in archives, rather than being one of the workers. Britton encapsulates this paradox well: 'Why, they made you carry the books that held the knowledge – how else could they pinch your life?' (257).

And of course, poetry in itself can be rendered unequal – 'high' and 'low' culture, 'middlebrow' and 'highbrow', 'working-class culture' and … everything else, presumably. Because what might occur were culture to be approached from the standpoint of Rancière's injunction, from that assumption of *a priori* equality? Early on *Hunger and Love*, developing the point made by Wordsworth's poetic theory (one presumes from the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*), 'that there not only need not but should not be any difference in diction between poetry and common speech' (143), Arthur/the narrator reaches a conclusion distinctly redolent of Rancière:

> This common-speech theory really goes very far. It goes further than Wordsworth himself could ever have suspected. It goes right down to the roots of the whole of our civilisation. It is dangerous to all our institutions. If it were once accepted it would revolutionise human destiny.
>
> You don't believe that? – You would not be the same man if you did. You would be different. Then you would believe it, if you were different. (144)

'You would not be the same man': indeed one would not, were one to apply this poetic principle to life in general. Simply put, were people to accept the precept that 'Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified' then not just poetry but politics would be fundamentally altered.

Conclusion: 'Yes, but–'

I epigraphed this thesis with C. S. Lewis's observation that a 'tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive', and have criticised the academic left for exhibiting similar tendencies. Lest this appear arbitrary and/or tendentious, a look at one of the many publications displaying similar misgivings from within academia shows striking parallels with the arguments I have made herein. In *Professing Feminism* (1994), Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge all but restate Lewis's aphorism: 'And since it's all supposed to be for *your own good*, you see, there's this terrible paternalism, or should we call it maternalism? "It's all for your own good"' (22, their emphasis).

They identify the monastic proclivity of the academy, first noting its tendency towards an esoteric separation from the class whose interests it claims to represent, putting it in similar terms to Dylan Riley's critique of sociology: 'the academy has become a sort of redoubt for 1960s radical politics. When you're not getting very far with the working class, the academy becomes an outlet for all your energy' (26). Secondly, they note how fields like literary criticism are often enthralled by 'exotic intellectual approaches', which may often produce legitimate insights but nevertheless 'require a lengthy initiation process into their special discourses' (119), recalling Bourdieu's own assertion of the necessity of a slow initiation into sociology's esoterica.

They also trace an ensuing tendency towards intellectual arrogance, where these approaches begin to consider themselves 'self-invented, heir to nothing', staking their claims 'so broadly as to encompass all other social and moral concerns' (180). They argue that the development of 'corps of theoreticians' inevitably tends towards orthodoxy and a 'hierarchy of persons entitled to declare and guard it' (187-9) who are less and less able to accommodate 'the diversity of views that will always surface in a group not under siege' (ibid.). Thus academia takes on the aspect of a sect – or indeed a cloister, as I characterised it.

This very inability to tolerate conflict and discord within movements that place ascriptive identities at their heart exposes their limitations as effective political vehicles; even prominent feminist thinker Judith Butler recognises this: 'the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from "women" whom feminism

claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics' (7-8). For example, the right to resolve questions like 'what *is* a woman?' is claimed as the exclusive right of the bearers of that identity based on lived experience – authentic womanhood, as it were. But in a postmodern world that brooks no normative criteria these inward-looking philosophical debates are set adrift on an endless sea of relativity. The necessary limits of identity politics are, precisely, identity itself.

Todd Gitlin, echoing Butler, asks how we may 'overcome the limits of the politics of identity' (38), noting that the left has 'the difficult but not impossible task of siding with the excluded while it is also the voice of the half-included' (40), and this is the crux of the matter. Class has no identity *per se*, though, and consequently as a political vehicle can incorporate all identities. In class-grounded politics – i.e. that of material justice – identity is theoretically irrelevant to the validity of voices; even the *class* of participants is also irrelevant.

But the politics of identity inevitably privileges the bearers of certain intrinsic characteristics, creating hierarchies based on the presupposition of discrete epistemologies. Patai and Koertge note that in feminist rubric

> the knowledge produced by those in power (typically, white European males) inevitably reflects their partisan interests and is prejudicial to all those not in power. The knowledge needed for liberation must, therefore, be generated by the oppressed themselves. (50-1)

I have argued that the pursuit of similarly autonomous, belligerent cultural identities along class lines is a fool's errand on these very grounds: the search for oppositional forms of knowledge pursuant to identities is futile. But those 'thinkers' who endlessly seek to propose identity-based emancipatory knowledge on behalf of the dispossessed in effect have a vested interest in that very dispossession. It is one thing to identify dispossession, it is quite another to valorise it; it is one thing to repudiate oppression, it is quite another to in effect cherish it.

There is, though, a better solution to dispossession (relative to the above), or at least a better starting point, that begins with the dispossessed themselves; stunningly, thuddingly simple, and stated plainly by one of Patai and Koertge's interlocutors:

> …one would think, with all of the work in Women's Studies and feminist/postmodernist theory, someone would have made the giant leap in logic that though we may not have much control or choice over the fact that we

> are oppressed, we do have autonomy and choice with respect to how we will respond to our oppression. *We do not have to act like oppressed people*. (78, their emphasis)

Quite so – as Rancière argued, the road to emancipation lies via 'the transgressive will … to act as if intellectual equality were indeed real and effectual', that we must 'learn how to be equal men in an unequal society. That is what *being emancipated* means'. Raymond Williams was 'not oppressed by the university' as institution, and neither was he oppressed by the prigs of the Cambridge teashop who equated culture with the performance of 'their trivial differences of behaviour, their trivial variations of speech habit' ("Culture is Ordinary" 93-4) – their cultural identities, as it were. Not only was he not oppressed, he was simply unimpressed and ignored them – now *that* is emancipation.

Reiterating and reinforcing an understanding of class not as an intrinsic identity but as an extrinsic economic position at least in theory (no pun intended) allows emancipated thinkers of all identities to engage with a common political priority, for the simple reason that that common goal is to *eliminate* or at least *diminish* class 'difference' – in other words, economic inequality – rather than *affirm* or *preserve* that difference understood as an oppressed identity whereby, like all the others, its vulnerability is recast as a moral virtue.

It is important to reiterate that this is not to say that concerns surrounding identity are wholly irrelevant. Rather, recalling John Guillory's observation that 'nothing explains class but class', it is to reemphasise that the difference between race, gender, etc and class is not one of degree, but of kind. This is, alas, the fundamental flaw of all identity-based theories that seek to reconcile the two fields as equivalent conditions. Ultimately, Patai and Koertge rightly caution against dogmatic adherence to *any* theory/ideology, arguing that the one thing they all have in common is

> the tyranny of politicised education by means of indoctrination, and the even more pernicious faith that someone holds the key, knows the truth, has the answers, and is empowered (whether by our will or against it) to impose them on the rest of us. (215)

In short, just as C. S. Lewis observed, a 'tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims'.

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I have contended throughout that in the absence of actual ascriptive markers of identity – skin colour, genitalia, etc. – the construction of a class identity as an equivalent field relies heavily on abstract cultural markers, not least of which being the idea of 'working-class values', and further noted the easy conflation of that idea of 'working-class values' with the idea of 'working-class morality'. An illuminating modern example of this is Channel 4's *Wife Swap*, which really may as well be called *Class Swap*: the wives from two households swap domiciles for two weeks, but what makes this irresistible (arguably!) television, of course, is that the two wives are invariably drawn from different classes.

Samantha Lyle, discussing *Wife Swap*, argues that the 'middle-class gaze [can be] challenged in self-defence by those against whom it is directed' (329), noting one working-class participant who gleefully revels in the negative perception of her smoking (327). Similarly, Pulp's girl from Saint Martin's College saw smoking as a class signifier which could be arbitrarily 'tried on', so to speak. In both cases, smoking is not revealed as a cultural practice endemic to or indeed inherent in the working class (as if that really needs stated), but rather as an instance of performative consumption which has become a shorthand to assert a class position: in the former as a show of defiant awareness that that signifier is being used to judge the participant and by extension her class; in the latter as a method by which she may attempt to self-identify with that class. Lyle concludes that *Wife Swap*'s producers, participants, and audience have 'unequal access to modes of self-narrativisation that enable individuals to present themselves as persons of equal value' (329). Indeed so: more or less everyone can afford a packet of fags; a Smeg fridge? – not so much.

However, the things that people *buy* are conflated with the things that people *think* in the context of such a formulation. Lyle argues that *Wife Swap* involves placing participants in an environment 'which is organised around *values* different from those they have previously expressed' (319, my emphasis). But what incommensurable values might the participants have espoused? 'I am working-class, so I wear tracksuits as a matter of rigid working-class patriotism', perhaps? Did the middle-class participants profess that smoking was incommensurate with their class values? Lyle states the terms of the Bourdieusian struggle for distinction as being 'the accrual of taste and *morality* via consumptive habits, all of which take time and money' (328, my emphasis). Helen Piper, also writing on *Wife Swap*, describes one wife being shown to prefer 'chilli lemon-splashed fish' in contrast to another who confesses to having 'never ate an olive' (277). But Piper

notes a peculiar circumstance: 'although the two couples have broadly comparable incomes, properties, and so on, it is not difficult to read the opposition in class terms' (278). Thus, economic status is rendered all but irrelevant when thinking about class; rather, habits of consumption become the determining factors.

Hey presto! Now the poorest families may remain poor yet attain middle-class status by adopting middle-class methods of fish preparation (when they can afford it) and turning their back on the supposedly working-class culture of not eating olives – presumably the root of Labour MP Jess Phillips' confusion when stating that 'I thought I'd met posh people before I came here, but actually I'd just met people who eat olives' (qtd. in Williams, "Jess Phillips"). And so one may self-identify as one or other class: as Walter Benn Michaels argues: 'As long as you think you're middle-class, you are middle-class; believing it makes it so' (198). Transforming class into a cultural identity that can be either rejected or adopted is dangerous ground, precisely because it relegates the fact of poverty to the status of an almost incidental, background factor. This is splendidly expedient for capitalism and its proponents and beneficiaries, especially as the flip side is that the rich can by the same token disguise their economic privilege via cultural choices, even to the extent of believing themselves to be ordinary.

During the 2018 Edinburgh Festival, I picked up a brochure entitled *The Working Class Fringe Guide* (see appendix IV). Its producer, Lee Kyle, claims that he 'wished to improve visibility for acts without a financial safety net'. This is an admirable venture and would work perfectly well if that economic criterion was paramount and exclusive. However:

> …this is not all about money. There are some very successful acts in here who are doing well financially now. Being working class is about more than that. My main criteria for inclusion was a lack of safety net. If it all goes wrong, middle class acts will mostly be fine financially, someone will help them. For us, that may not be the case. So what is it that constitutes being working class? I'm not going to answer that. It's not easy to describe. What I did was ask acts to self-identify. If they consider themselves working class, who am I to disagree? I accept that it means that it is possible that a cynical act or two may have slipped through the net but there was no better system I'm afraid. It is also absolutely the case that there will be acts who qualified who are not in here.

Of course 'middle class acts will mostly be fine financially', like Orwell, or Pulp's girl from St. Martin's College – she can call her daddy who can stop it all (yeah). And those cynical acts who *are* 'faking it', how would they make it convincing? Perhaps by wearing a tracksuit

or claiming to have never eaten an olive. And those acts who *would* qualify on economic terms but were not included? Perhaps they were dressed smart-casual and their act was talking about anything other than their class. Kyle's parting shot says it all: 'I hope that you see a lot of [these acts], especially if you are someone who has previously considered working class to be one particular type of comedy'. One particular type of comedy, one particular type of art, one particular type of expression; as Kit de Waal bemoaned: 'the misery memoir, the escape, the clever boy or girl "done good"'.

The act of expression is common to all, but plebs – like Phelan, Garrett, et al. – who would publish, display, or communicate in reserved spheres must be somehow rationalised, confined to tickling the jaded palates of bourgeois readers. They must be reconstructed as anomalous, declassed prodigies, completing their own escape narratives, while perhaps retaining a sense of themselves as working-class by continuing to wear tracksuits and eschew olives.

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In 2019, *Common People* was published, edited by the aforementioned de Waal, and subtitled *An anthology of working-class writers*. As we have seen, de Waal has previously bemoaned explicitly the tacit pressure on working-class writers to produce 'the misery memoir, the escape, the clever boy or girl "done good"'. Odd, then, that her Foreword ends as follows:

> Most of all, these memoirs are written in celebration and not apology, are dedicated to everyone who has yearned to see their life on the page, who has hoped one day to read about working-class lives told by the people who lived them. (xii)

Why ask undiscovered working-class writers to submit precisely what she has previously reproached as confining? Why appeal to precisely the kind of essentialised 'cultural identity' that the misery memoir presupposes, one that implies that accounts of varying degrees of relative privation are the foundational Urtexts of over half the country, who will invariably see their 'life on the page' when they read them? What is there to celebrate about being reduced to an avatar of a class position?

And who had she hoped would read them? I suspect that the answer to this pertains more to the tickling of jaded bourgeois palates; moreover, I suspect that many of the

more established contributors, including de Waal herself, are in fact now the owners of such palates. She claims that literati have often taken her aside at events in order to confide their own working-class credentials quietly in her ear with 'pride and nostalgia for the lives they have left behind or had to hide' (xii). Judging by the contributions of those more established contributors, I find it hard to believe that anyone in these circles would pass up the opportunity to weaponise the performance of an authentic working-class identity, as opposed to whispering it furtively.

Exhibit one: Lisa McInerney's contribution, "Working Class: An Escape Manual", is a faux-'tell it like it is' run-through of various working-class tropes delivered with an attempt at arch sarcasm – 'Writing? Well law-di-daw!' (9) – that results rather in a tone of mawkish *amour-propre*. McInerney laments that 'if, like me, you were born into a working-class family or community, do not be concerned about being labelled in perpetuity. The world is lousy with people who will happily erase your identity' (3). For her, that identity is '[her] default. No car, no holidays, no opinion on Joyce' (4). She describes chatting to 'a broadcaster' who had been told that he was no longer working class by virtue of his material success; according to McInerney, 'in this scenario, class is simplified to be about money' (5) – well indeed. But for McInerney, 'class is a construct' (11), and she goes on to claim that her working-class identity should not be 'whitewashed by [her] career in the arts. I reject the idea that culture is defined by the cultured' (ibid.). It is wholly unclear to whom she is referring to as 'the cultured': herself? Or Bloomsbury 'them'? She closes by musing 'Slippery thing, though, working-class identity. Particularly if you want to scribble for a living' (ibid.), and the latter point is indubitably true, as I have argued throughout. But the former point, that slippery identity in itself, is only made *more* slippery – and drained of its efficacy and utility – by those who, background notwithstanding, cannot deal with the status that the trappings of success inevitably confers upon them – i.e. middle-class, bourgeois, etc. – and hence ceaselessly attempt to sublimate/efface their discomfort, even guilt, and deny the reality of class by turning their milieu of origin into a permanent, ascriptive cultural identity to be performed by affecting mild vulgarity in the polite company of 'the cultured'.

Hearteningly, a little more self-awareness exists elsewhere in the anthology. Ruth Behan, in "Stalin on the Mantelpiece", pithily skewers the convoluted rubrics involved in assigning immutable class identities which can be reconciled with material wealth *and* intelligence, ideas, values (while sounding a little like a letter to the *Plebs* from the 1930s):

> Bourgeois was bad but 'Petty Bourgeois' was even worse. Proletarians were good but some of them had all the wrong ideas so they were 'Lumpen Proletarians'. Likewise, Intellectuals were good but could become 'Bourgeois Intellectuals', which was bad, or 'Effing Intellectuals', which meant they had jobs that didn't involve bricks or concrete or being out in the freezing cold. Some of the Comrades did easy jobs and had posh houses, so might be Effing Intellectuals, but calling them that would be a deadly insult, so they were only called that when they weren't actually there. (223)

In "Darts", Cathy Rentzenbrink teases out the assumption that underpins the difficulty in such reconciliations:

> People conflate class and intelligence. These days people assume I'm middle class precisely because I write books and can string a sentence together. I talk about books on Radio 4, so I must be middle class, surely? How could I be anything else? (80)

The point is that Rentzenbrink may well *be* middle-class, whether she likes it or not – but that should depend on her bank balance, mortgage statement, etc., not on whether she talks intelligently about books on Radio 4, nor indeed whether her ideas are 'right' or 'wrong'.

The incoherence of attributed values is expressed by author Cathy Rentzenbrink via her mum hearing herself 'being discussed by her teachers: "She comes from a working-class family but they have middle-class values." What did that mean?' (74). What it means is revealed by Rentzenbrink when recollecting her arrival at university: 'I'd switched from Regal King Size to Marlboro Lights in my first week. I was rebranding myself along with my choice of fags' (77) – this recalls *Wife Swap* and Pulp, but in this case there are both working-class fags *and* middle-class fags. In the same vein, when Katy Massey insists in "Don't Mention Class" that 'we weren't rough, not really, especially if respect for education, good food and common decency mean anything' (14), she is reflecting the logic of class identity whereby at least the first two are implied *middle*-class 'values'. But Massey's class is not defined by whether or not she eats good food – evidently she may well have always eaten olives – and she is at least courageously (in the context of this anthology) if a little reluctantly self-aware of how it *is* defined: 'Today, I exist in the world as an educated brown woman who makes a living in the arts. I am middle-aged and, perhaps, middle-class' (22).

Chris McCrudden's "Shy Bairns Get Nowt" is probably the piece most conscious and assertive of the heterogeneity of the people who make up the working class. His grandparents 'lived three streets apart, but were from different wings of the working classes … so asserted their differences in more subtle ways' (24), exemplifying the perpetuation of the same old tropes *within* the working class: for one set, 'cream cakes bought at the local freezer centre', for the other 'Marks & Spencer's date-and-walnut loaf' (25). At one grandparent's funeral

> My brother looked for a bowl for olives and cubes of Manchego cheese and I plated up sausage rolls. We served Nespresso coffee and Yorkshire tea. And I can't think of a better metaphor than that spread – in a privately owned council house, on an estate intended to give working families a better start in life than the slums – for our muddled position between the working and the middle classes. (29)

Olives *again*. As a final word on fags, olives and the like, I would simply note that as factors in the construction of class identities, these are in fact acts of consumption, performative or otherwise, turned into shorthands for values, intellectual capacities, and so on.

On literature at large, McCrudden laments that he has seen countless stories about the 'subtle permutations' within middle-class life, but precious few similarly subtle treatments of the working class. His conclusion as to why is startlingly redolent of de Waal's earlier sentiments:

> We tend to flatten a whole spectrum of experiences into a few tired tropes: the boy or girl done good, the escape from poverty, the sink estate rife with drugs and teenage pregnancies. (29)

Imagine how dispiriting it must be for a relatively impoverished aspiring writer to be asked to write just that, because that is exactly what the jaded bourgeois palates of your supposed champions want to read.

***

Wherever one draws the arbitrary material lines between classes, those falling below that line are not and never were a monoculture. Neither are they the saintly guardians of some mute popular truth. Neither do they need help from omnipotent moral busybodies – they just need paid better, as anyone who has ever been below that line for any length

of time knows fine well. Neither are their tastes in art and culture defined by their position, nor their capacity to produce it constrained by it – other than the lack of leisure and artistic freedom required to produce it – as Jim Phelan, John Sommerfield, George Garrett, Ellen Wilkinson, and Lionel Britton all amply demonstrate by their achievements despite such impediments.

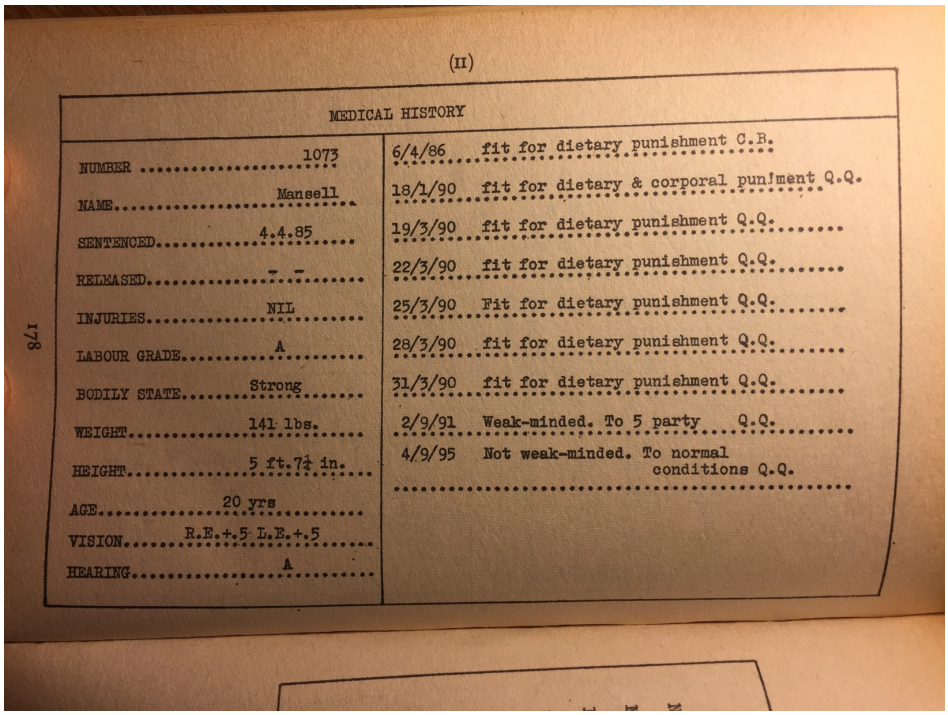
It is a shame that writers emerging from the working class today still seem to be denied that freedom, so obsessed are we with ideas of group cultural identities and the characteristics, knowledge, capacities, ideas, values – and *stories* – implied to inhere within the bearers of them.

McCrudden wrote that 'there are two ways of looking at class. For some people, class is a vector: a quantity that has direction. It admits the possibility that Hilda can become Ann and then Chris' (31); in other words, that people are both unique and mutable. But 'for others it's a fixed point. Where you start out is where you stay' (ibid.): this is why the veneration of cultural identity *at the expense of* the unique and the universal is a perverse and fruitless way to think not only about class, but also, ultimately, people. Because as The Stone Roses' Ian Brown once famously exhorted: 'It's not where you're from, it's where you're at' ("Ian Brown").

This is so, isn't it?

Appendices

Appendix I



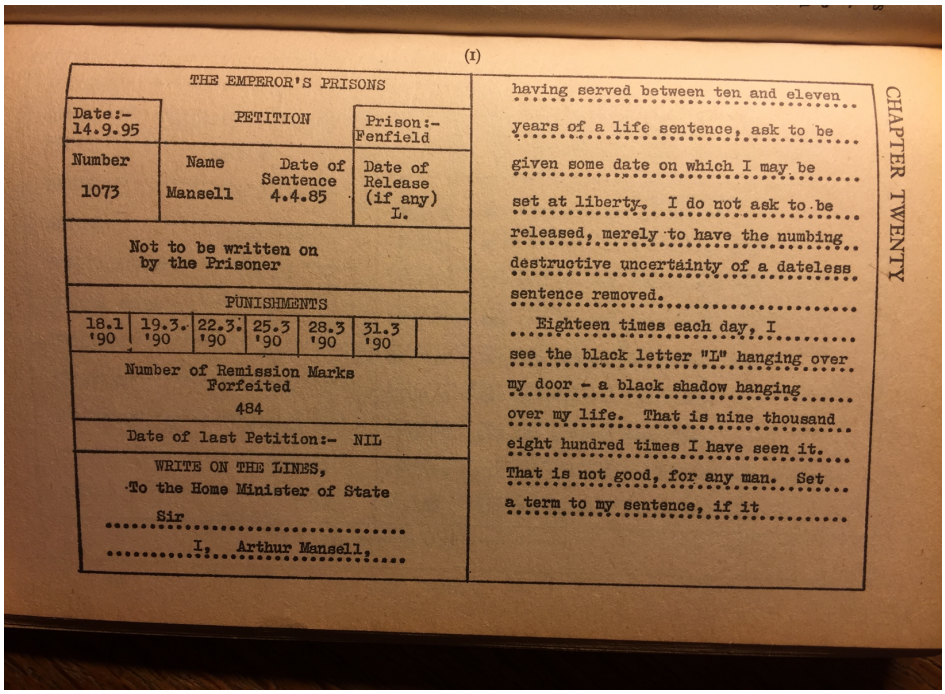
(II)

MEDICAL HISTORY

NUMBER	1073
NAME	Mansell
SENTENCED	4.4.85
RELEASED	- -
INJURIES	NIL
LABOUR GRADE	A
BODILY STATE	Strong
WEIGHT	141 lbs.
HEIGHT	5 ft. 7¼ in.
AGE	20 yrs
VISION	R.E.+.5 L.E.+.5
HEARING	A

6/4/86	fit for dietary punishment C.B.
18/1/90	fit for dietary & corporal punishment Q.Q.
19/3/90	fit for dietary punishment Q.Q.
22/3/90	fit for dietary punishment Q.Q.
25/3/90	Fit for dietary punishment Q.Q.
28/3/90	fit for dietary punishment Q.Q.
31/3/90	fit for dietary punishment Q.Q.
2/9/91	Weak-minded. To 5 party Q.Q.
4/9/95	Not weak-minded. To normal conditions Q.Q.

178



(I)

THE EMPEROR'S PRISONS

Date:- 14.9.95	PETITION	Prison:- Fenfield
Number 1073	Name Mansell	Date of Sentence 4.4.85
		Date of Release (if any) L.

Not to be written on by the Prisoner

PUNISHMENTS

18.1 '90	19.3. '90	22.3. '90	25.3 '90	28.3 '90	31.3 '90	

Number of Remission Marks Forfeited
484

Date of last Petition:- NIL

WRITE ON THE LINES,
To the Home Minister of State

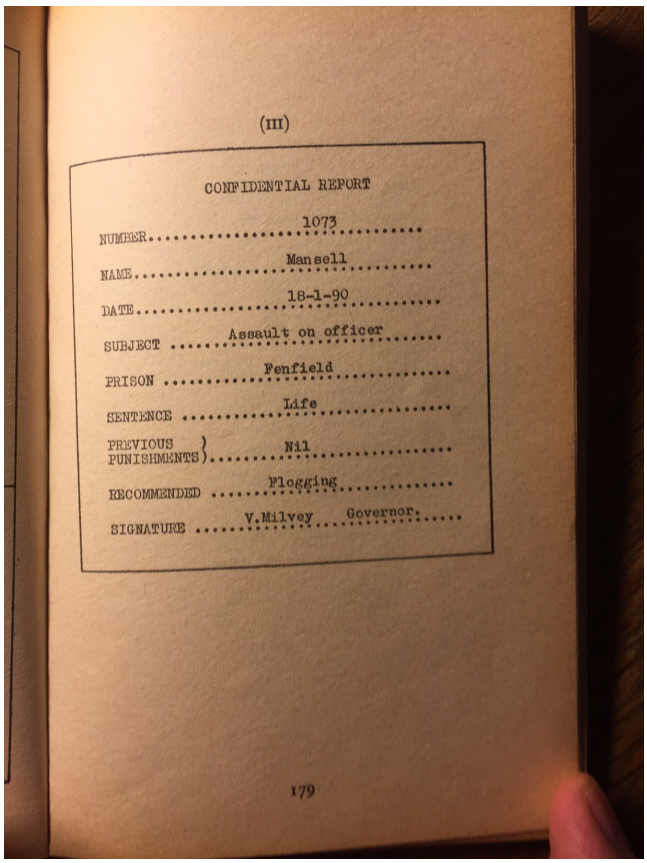
Sir

I, Arthur Mansell,

having served between ten and eleven years of a life sentence, ask to be given some date on which I may be set at liberty. I do not ask to be released, merely to have the numbing destructive uncertainty of a dateless sentence removed.

Eighteen times each day, I see the black letter "L" hanging over my door - a black shadow hanging over my life. That is nine thousand eight hundred times I have seen it. That is not good, for any man. Set a term to my sentence, if it

CHAPTER TWENTY



(III)

CONFIDENTIAL REPORT

NUMBER ..... 1073 .....

NAME ..... Mansell .....

DATE ..... 18-1-90 .....

SUBJECT ..... Assault on officer .....

PRISON ..... Fenfield .....

SENTENCE ..... Life .....

PREVIOUS PUNISHMENTS) ..... Nil .....

RECOMMENDED ..... Flogging .....

SIGNATURE ..... V.Milvey Governor .....

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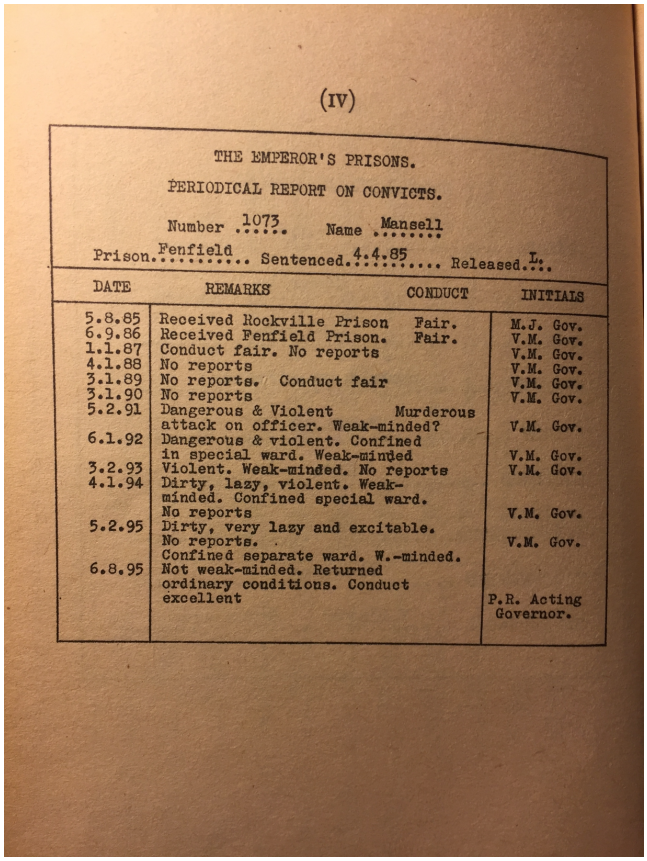


(IV)

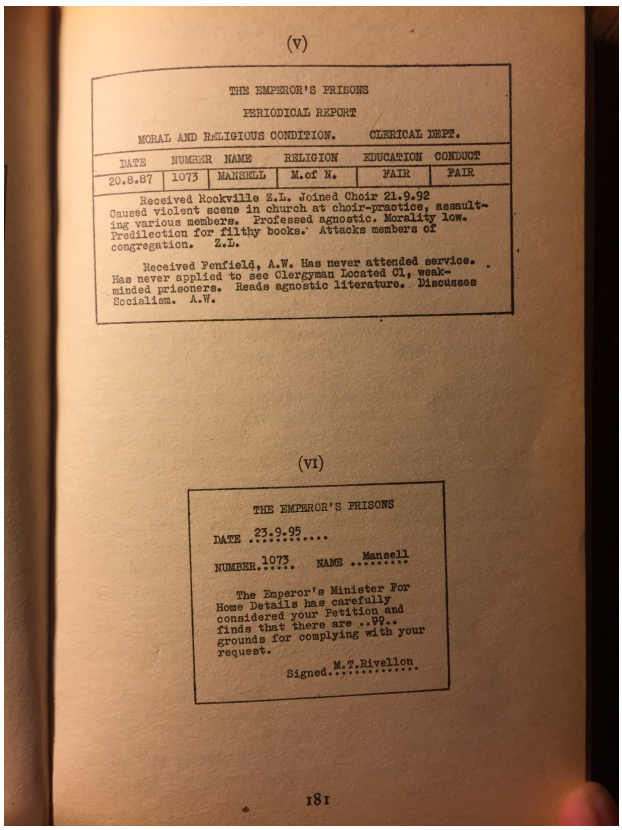
THE EMPEROR'S PRISONS.

PERIODICAL REPORT ON CONVICTS.

Number 1073 Name Mansell

Prison Fenfield Sentenced 4.4.85 Released L.

DATE	REMARKS	CONDUCT	INITIALS
5.8.85	Received Rockville Prison	Fair.	M.J. Gov.
6.9.86	Received Fenfield Prison.	Fair.	V.M. Gov.
1.1.87	Conduct fair. No reports		V.M. Gov.
4.1.88	No reports		V.M. Gov.
3.1.89	No reports. Conduct fair		V.M. Gov.
3.1.90	No reports		V.M. Gov.
5.2.91	Dangerous & Violent Murderous attack on officer. Weak-minded?		V.M. Gov.
6.1.92	Dangerous & violent. Confined in special ward. Weak-minded		V.M. Gov.
3.2.93	Violent. Weak-minded. No reports		V.M. Gov.
4.1.94	Dirty, lazy, violent. Weak-minded. Confined special ward. No reports		V.M. Gov.
5.2.95	Dirty, very lazy and excitable. No reports. Confined separate ward. W.-minded.		V.M. Gov.
6.8.95	Not weak-minded. Returned ordinary conditions. Conduct excellent		P.R. Acting Governor.



(V)

THE EMPEROR'S PRISONS

PERIODICAL REPORT

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITION. CLERICAL DEPT.

DATE	NUMBER	NAME	RELIGION	EDUCATION	CONDUCT
20.8.87	1073	MANSELL	M.of N.	FAIR	FAIR

Received Rockville Z.L. Joined Choir 21.9.92 Caused violent scene in church at choir-practice, assaulting various members. Professed agnostic. Morality low. Predilection for filthy books. Attacks members of congregation. Z.L.

Received Penfield, A.W. Has never attended service. Has never applied to see Clergyman Located C1, weak-minded prisoners. Reads agnostic literature. Discusses Socialism. A.W.

(VI)

THE EMPEROR'S PRISONS

DATE 23.9.95

NUMBER 1073. NAME Mansell

The Emperor's Minister For Home Details has carefully considered your Petition and finds that there are ..99.. grounds for complying with your request.

Signed M.T.Rivellon

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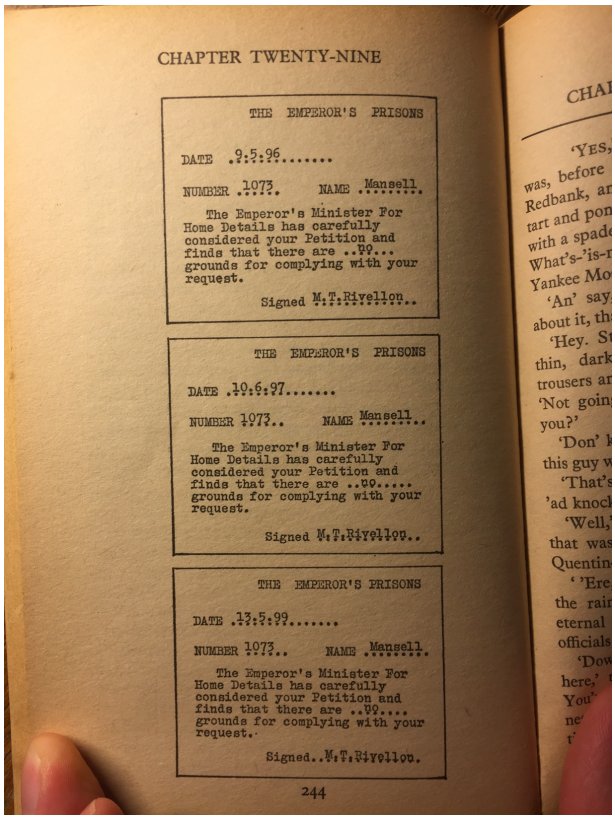
Appendix II



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE EMPEROR'S PRISONS

DATE 9.5.96

NUMBER 1073. NAME Mansell

The Emperor's Minister For Home Details has carefully considered your Petition and finds that there are ..99... grounds for complying with your request.

Signed M.T.Rivellon

THE EMPEROR'S PRISONS

DATE 10.6.97

NUMBER 1073.. NAME Mansell

The Emperor's Minister For Home Details has carefully considered your Petition and finds that there are ..99..... grounds for complying with your request.

Signed M.T.Rivellon

THE EMPEROR'S PRISONS

DATE 13.5.99

NUMBER 1073.. NAME Mansell

The Emperor's Minister For Home Details has carefully considered your Petition and finds that there are ..99.... grounds for complying with your request.

Signed M.T.Rivellon.

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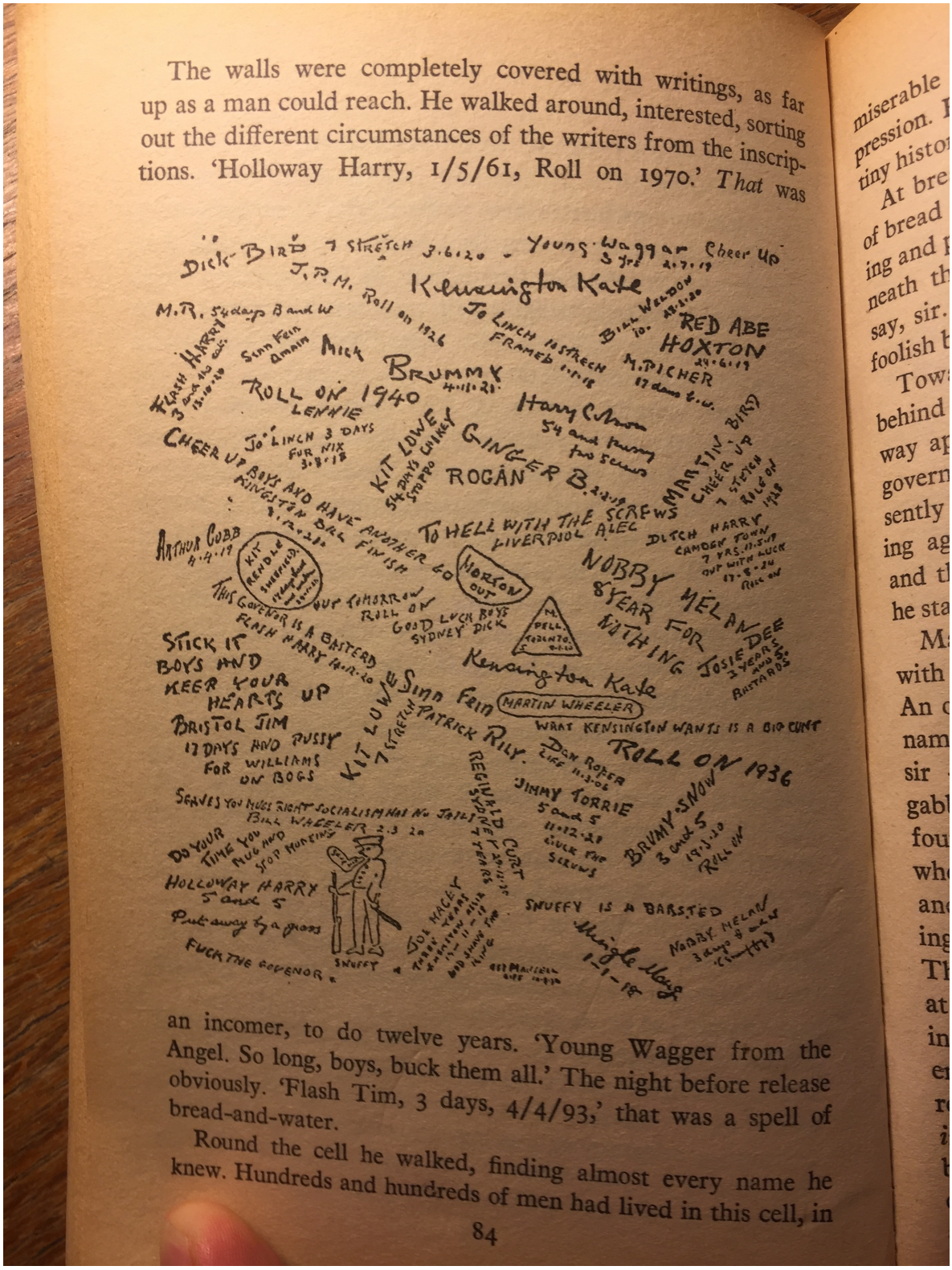
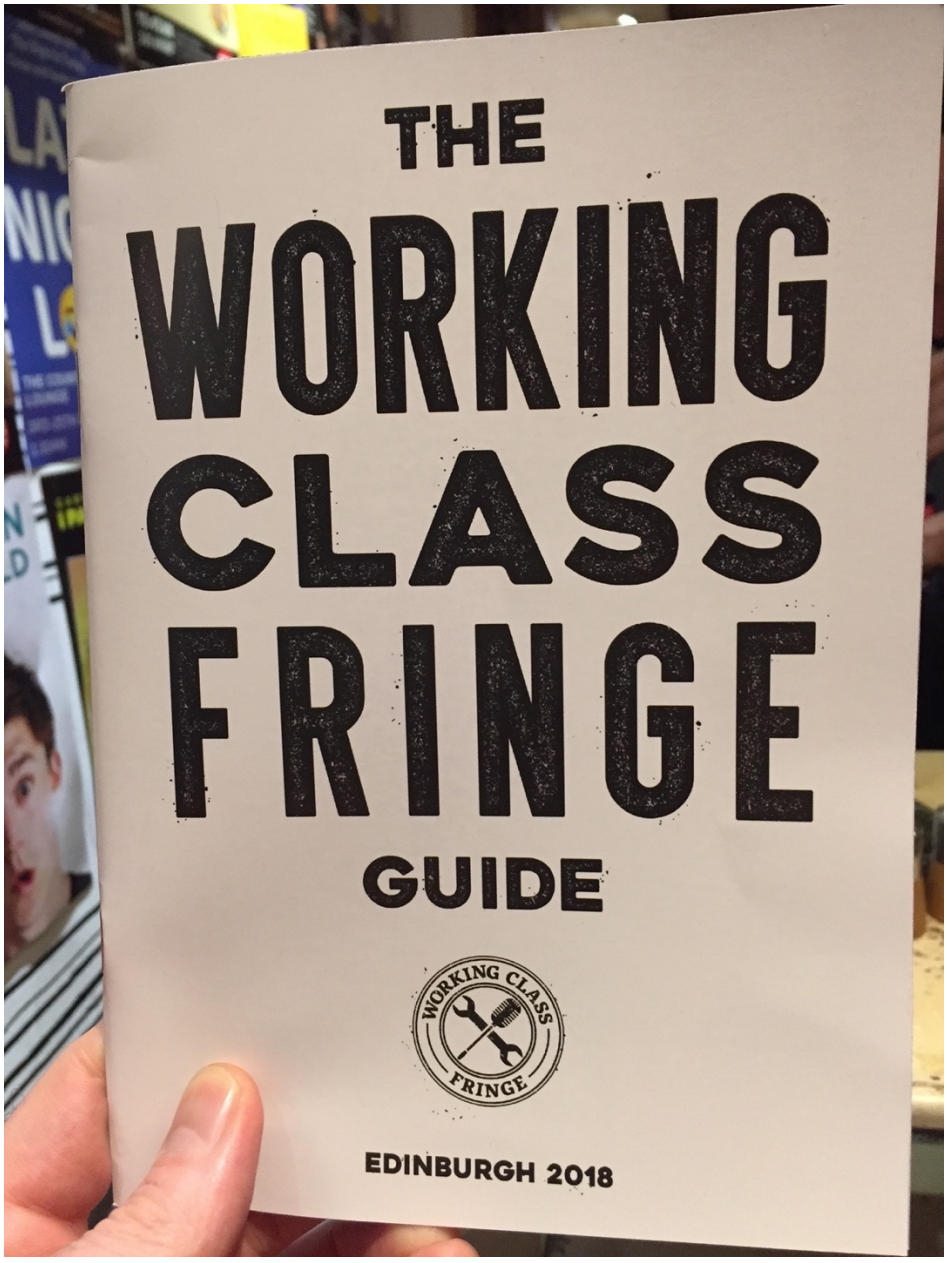
Appendix III



an incomer, to do twelve years. 'Young Wagger from the Angel. So long, boys, buck them all.' The night before release obviously. 'Flash Tim, 3 days, 4/4/93,' that was a spell of bread-and-water.

Round the cell he walked, finding almost every name he knew. Hundreds and hundreds of men had lived in this cell, in

Appendix IV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EDINBURGH 2018

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