KEY WORDS

A Journal of Cultural Materialism

5

Working Spaces, Working Lives

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Editors' Note

In its first number in 1998, *Key Words* set out its intention to develop Raymond Williams's project within the terms of a cultural materialism 'always subject to redefinition', alert to the historical and social agency of language and the role of literary, media and cultural forms and institutions. It took its cue from Williams's own method in framing a 'vocabulary of culture and society' in *Keywords* (1976, rev. 1983). With this present issue, we re-launch the journal and renew this project in very much the same spirit. However, just as the first issue acknowledged that 'Raymond Williams's time is not our time', so our times too have changed across a dramatically transformed political scene and complex set of social and ideological themes and discourses. Williams was certain that the future, if nothing else, would always be more complex than the present, and we believe that his work can remain a powerful inspiration in our attempt in the Journal, as in the associated activities of the Raymond Williams Society, to frame a new critical vocabulary and cultural agenda for our own times.

This re-launch of *Key Words* begins with a new Editorial Group and Advisory Board and coincides with a newly constituted executive committee of the Raymond Williams Society, based from 2005 in the East Midlands, primarily at the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University, which hosts the Raymond Williams Centre.

We especially welcome Claire Jowitt and Angela Kershaw, who have recently joined the Editorial Board. Claire's work focuses on early modern colonialism and empire, on Renaissance travel writing, scientific culture, and the culture of piracy. Angela (who will be joining us for *Key Words* 6) has written on the position of women in European political and social life and has a special interest in utopias. We very much look forward to their contribution and to the active involvement of the new Advisory Board. Their combined competence will extend the journal's historical and cultural range while augmenting the discussion of broad issues in public and political life, the environment, literature, and the arts and media to which the journal is committed. In this spirit *Key Words* will continue to provide a forum for critical debate in the tradition of cultural materialism and contribute to the making of a progressive left cultural politics, combining original essays with reviews, interviews, poetry and illustrations.

The journal is currently published annually; on occasion given over, as is the present issue, in part or in whole, to a guest editor. The essays in this issue are introduced separately by Nicola Wilson. Special thanks are due also to Carolyn Steedman and Mary Joannou for their valuable advice. We very much look forward to their further contribution and to the active involvement of the new Advisory Board.

Key Words 5 is dedicated to the memory of Charles Swann, long-time associate of Williams, socialist, and expert literary critic, who died in October 2006.

In Memoriam Charles Swann

Terry Eagleton

Charles Swann grew up near Balmoral, and met the queen once or twice. On one of these occasions she asked him rather perfunctorily what he was up to, and he replied that he was doing postgraduate research at Cambridge. As a shadow of boredom and bemusement flickered across the royal eyeballs, he asked her whether she had ever visited the place. In a tone of infinite caginess, she replied that she had sometimes passed through it on the way to Newmarket.

Like John Prescott, Charles was a class traitor. It's just that the two renegades met each other coming the other way. He attended a posh independent school in Perthshire, Glenalmond, and genetically speaking should have been a fighter pilot. His grandfather had been Air Chief Marshal of the RAF, and his father, a senior officer in the Australian air force, was his grandfather's ADC. But it would have been hard to cram a six foot eight man with a chronically weak back and far left views into the cockpit of a Spitfire. When I first met Charles at Cambridge forty-two years ago, he looked like a public schoolboy but talked like a socialist. Somehow, he had translated the patrician ethic to which he was bred — that you put others before yourself — into the kind of political terms that one imagines Royal Deeside wouldn't have found too familiar.

At Cambridge he was deep in Ruskin and Marx and Morris, and when he returned home for the vacations they used to ask him why his accent had slipped so dreadfully. But he was a natural egalitarian, and it just never occurred to him not to treat everyone the same. Sharp-tongued, astringent and searingly realistic as he was, there wasn't even a touch of *noblesse oblige* or populist sentimentality about this. He didn't like people just because they were working-class, like some of the public school boys who befriended me at Trinity because they needed for reasons of political credibility to be on nodding terms with at least one member of the human race who hailed from a house without a garden.

There was, however, a touch of the dandy about his wit. The two of us once saw the dashing, six-foot Germaine Greer, freshly arrived as a postgraduate student from Australia, lolloping across King's Parade, whereupon Charles turned to me with widened, *faux naif eyes* and asked 'My dear, where's *her pouch*?' (A few years later, Greer, now the triumphant author of *The Female Eunuch,* was touting the book at the Oxford Union, and told the audience that she was finally through with men. 'Would you reconsider that, Miss Greer?' hollered a lascivious young Rhodes scholar from the back of the room. It was Bill Clinton.)

Charles came to Jesus College to read History but, allured by the presence of Raymond Williams, changed to English for his Finals. I taught him a while, and probably never encountered a more argumentative student. He was fiercely loyal to Raymond, though he could be amused by him as well. When the two of us

visited him in his cottage near Cambridge, he would sometimes stroll us over to the village pub opposite, and in a curious, atavistic lapse into the puritanism of his native land would begin to betray distinct symptoms of alarm when we asked for anything as exorbitant as a whole pint. 'Wouldn't a half do you?' he would ask anxiously, warily scanning the saloon bar in the way of one scarcely familiar with the terrain. Charles, who could down a pint faster than he could sneeze, would reply gently but firmly that no, actually, it wouldn't. Then Raymond would take us back to his cottage and deliver a lengthy, grammatically impeccable monologue from his armchair as the room gradually darkened, until he was just a voice on the air and none of us could actually see the others. For some reason we could never quite fathom, he was curiously loath to switch on the light. One half expected the ghost of Cobbett to materialise with a flourish from the fireplace.

It was through Raymond that Charles was drawn into various kinds of New Left activity, in the early, bitterly disenchanted days of the Wilson government. He became treasurer to the Mayday Manifesto group, rubbing shoulders with Edward Thompson, Ralph Miliband, Stuart Hall, Bob Rowthorne, Raphael Samuel and a range of other leftist luminaries. We launched a Cambridge Left Forum to bring town and gown radicals together, a rare encounter in those days, and set up a committee in which shop stewards from various local workplaces were able to team up with each other. Charles and I were once stopped by the police after leafletting a building site, and I was relieved that Bob Rowthorne was with us, since his father was a copper and Bob knew just what they could and couldn't pin on us.

Not long before he died, I was able to tell Charles that whenever I thought of him, two things leapt instantly to mind: endless kindness and endless courage. He once rose from his sick bed to travel all the way to Oxford, aching back and all, to visit me on *my* sick bed, made sure there were people to attend to me, and then crept off without a word. When my partner once mentioned to him that she was working on Maria Edgeworth, he leapt to his feet, scooped a rare-looking edition of Edgeworth's collected works of his shelf, and gave it to her on the spot. He knew, in William Blake's words, that the most sublime act is to set another before you; and he did this spontaneously, off-handedly, like one who didn't have to think twice about it or struggle to do it.

As for endless courage, well, in the words of one of the hymns we sang at his funeral service in Keele chapel: Who would true valour see, let him come hither. If you want to see genuine goodness., gaze on this coffin. We're speaking of a man who spent most of his life in almost constant pain, pain that even an epidural would quell only briefly, yet whose attention when you spoke to him was wholly upon yourself rather than on his own distress. In the last years of his life he was afflicted by a series of illnesses so appalling that most of us wouldn't have survived a single one of them, at least not without feeling extravagantly sorry for ourselves. Yet Charles survived all but the last bout without a whimper of self-pity, which was also part of the patrician ethic to which he had been bred.

The courage, fearlessness and kindliness which characterise the best of the liberal gentry were virtues he turned to radical use, in an honourable tradition of English upper-class renegades. He died as he had lived: bravely, selflessly, realistically, his thoughts not on himself but on Jenny, Gilbert and Martha. They are all richer and rarer and more enviable for being of his flesh.

I don't think I ever met anyone so straight and true. He was himself, all the way through, always and everywhere; and in all the years I knew him I never heard him utter a single word that was meant purely for show or effect, or that was said simply because he felt it was expected of him. He was wholly, sometimes discomfortingly, himself. He never went out of his way to get others to love him, which was one reason we loved him so much. He had a good, old-fashioned, humanistic belief in basic human decency, which along with his steadfast trust in human reason was a quality he shared with Williams. A faith in heaven didn't happen to be among his beliefs; but if by any chance there is one, then I'm afraid the bad news for Charles is that that's where he is. So he'd better keep his scepticism quiet. Though knowing Charles, that won't be easy....

University of Manchester

I. M. Charles Swann, 18 December 1943 – 13 October 2006

Stan Smith

Your height, of course, the only place to start,
dear Charles. What was it, six foot seven or eight?
You commented of one chain-smoking vac
skivvying at Harrods, when you gained an inch,
'so much for "stunts your growth,"' casually tart:
counter-intuitive and counter-factual
your mindset, plain contrary. I recall
chiefly how you'd endeavour to look small
among us Lilliputians, strangely foetal,
knees hunched to chin inside your sweater's caul,
the imperious voice rising a further pitch,
indignant at some sophistry of state
or a friend's muddy thought – that treacherous back
the enemy within, but never a spine so straight.

Introduction

Nicola Wilson

The articles collected in this re-launch issue of *Key Words* indicate the strength of current research on the writing of class and its spatial, gendered, and textual representations. This is a diverse collection which spans a period from the late 1850s to post-millennial Britain. It takes us from the work of Dickens and the anxious franchise debates of the mid-nineteenth century, to a contemporary age of devolution, deindustrialisation, rapid, excessive consumption and 'Lifestyle TV'. Spanning this complex history, the special issue incorporates analysis of neglected working-class writers of the interwar period and the late fiction of Raymond Williams, through to the study of celebrated contemporary authors like Salman Rushdie and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. At the forefront of each article are questions about the ways in which 'class' is understood, interrogated, written and reproduced, and the sites and locations in which this questioning takes place. There are new keywords to be added to Raymond Williams's long revolution here, amongst them 'kitchen', 'Britain', and 'interior space'.

The articles are arranged chronologically in terms of subject matter. The first, by Ruth Livesey, offers a fascinating reading of Charles Dickens's last complete novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5), which was written during the time of the Second Reform Act. Exploring Dickens's attitudes to class, and class antagonism, as they are expressed in this multivalent and generically ambiguous novel, Livesey argues that Dickens rewrites 'his own familiar narratives of class' (especially the narrative of the working-class boy made good and the cross-class romance). This, she argues, is in response to the contemporary debates of modernity, and in particular the prospect of a new form of property and money franchise. The dual plots of *Our Mutual Friend*, according to Livesey, 'strain to find a mode of representation for the prospect of democracy'.

The next two articles, by myself and Joseph Pridmore respectively, take us to a number of popular, though now neglected, working-class writers of the interwar period. Both articles argue for a wider understanding of working-class fiction that pays closer attention to the significance of the female-dominated domestic sphere. My work looks at the representation of the home (and the goings-on within it) in the novels of two feminist working-class writers of the 1920s: *This Slavery* (1925) by ex mill-girl Ethel Carnie Holdsworth; and *Clash* (1929) by Ellen Wilkinson, a woman who in 1924 became the Labour Party's first female MP. I consider the ways in which the authors locate the making of class within the material realm of domesticity, and how the characters' romantic, sexual, and class-based choices in the novels relies upon a complex reading of this politicised interior space.

Joseph Pridmore's article examines the representation of gender and community in the work of two male working-class writers in the following decade. Focussing on George Garrett's earliest short story, 'Firstborn' (1934)

and James Hanley's 1935 novel *Stoker Bush*, Pridmore disputes a critical orthodoxy that has championed (or latterly critiqued) the 1930s as a particularly male-dominated and overtly politicised period in the history of working-class writing. Pridmore identifies within the work of Garrett and Hanley an eagerness to engage with female experience and to explore the 'hidden potential for abuse' inherent in working-class culture's often unforgiving strictures of community and respectability.

Hywel Dix's article, by way of an intricate reading of Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* and his detective novel, *The Volunteers* (1978), ushers in the period of devolution and the British postcolonial cultures of today. Dix argues that William's work 'anticipates the moment of devolution and the break-up of the British state'. Through a comparative reading of *The Volunteers* with the work of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Salman Rushdie, and Andrea Levy (amongst others), Dix explores the anti-imperialism of the novel and the often split subjectivity of the colonial, and postcolonial, subject. Relating the influence of Williams's fiction to the growth of cultural self-confidence and nationalism in Wales during the 1980s and 90s, Dix ultimately concludes that William's can, in a very particular sense, be understood as an early postcolonial writer.

Ian Haywood focuses on the 're-imagining of working-class space' in Magnus Mills's *The Restraint of Beasts* (1998), a Booker Prize shortlisted black comedy about two fencers. Exploring the novel's representation of the work-place and the pub – traditionally key sites in working-class fiction – Haywood notes the absence of any identifiable sense of 'community' (linking back to Pridmore's discussion) in the 'vacated spaces' of post-industrial culture. Arguing that the contemporary working-class novel 'opens up the representation of space to radical analysis', Haywood goes on to consider important questions about the treatment of gender, the nation, labour, and the problem of speech and agency in contemporary working-class literature.

The article by Tracey Potts, offers a contemporary sociological perspective on some of the themes in my own and Pridmore's articles. She examines how the current rhetoric of 'respectability' centred upon the injunction to 'keep things tidy' affects the design and lived experience of an individual's interior space. Considering the social effects of the importance of tidiness in our accelerated consumer world – as displayed across management theory to 'Lifestyle TV' – Potts argues that material disorder is constructed as a 'symptom, as an obstruction to successful living and working'. Pointing out the ideological links between this contemporary rhetoric and the modernist principles of the interwar era, Potts draws on the work of Zygmunt Bauman and Pierre Bourdieu to explore the classed dimensions of the emphasis to 'declutter', and the ways in which this can lead to a 'pathologisation' of the day-to-day practices of the poor. As in the early years of the twentieth century, the mantle of 'respectability' continues to influence the ways in which we live, and present, our daily lives: order, cleanliness and tidiness are now, as much as

ever, tied up with issues of power, social control and class identity – issues inevitably taken up in Sean Matthews' rare interview with Richard Hoggart, which closes this number.

The inspiration for this special issue stems from a conference organised at the University of Warwick in May 2006 entitled 'Writing Class: Representations of Working-Class Spaces in Modern Britain'. I would like to thank the Warwick Humanities Research Centre for granting the funds to organise this conference, and all the speakers and those who contributed to the excellent discussion on the day. The collection has been strengthened by contributions from speakers at the 'New Directions in Cultural Materialism' Roundtable Seminar organised by the Raymond Williams Society in London in July 2007. I would like to thank all of the contributors for the fascinating articles collected here, and the editorial board of *Key Words* who have brought the project through to completion. Together, these essays should be read as a fitting testament to the longevity and continuing development of Raymond William's work, as well as an exciting intervention into current debates on class, gender and representations.

University of Warwick

The Representation of the People and *Our Mutual Friend*

Ruth Livesey

Dickens's last complete novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) is a work that seems to revel in the necessity of its own unevenness and complexity. Recent critical accounts have ceased to view the novel's two relatively distinct plot strands and their deviations from the generic conventions of both realism and romance as the failure of a 'constructive master imagination' perceived by Humphry House.[1] Lauren Goodlad, for instance, argues that the 'profound narrative split' in the novel between a realist plot charting the violence of Bradley Headstone and a sentimental fiction in which Bella Wilfer's blind trust in her husband is rewarded with wealth is indicative of the 'atomized and privatized' world of the text.[2]

The complexity and unevenness of *Our Mutual Friend* is thus, I want to argue, indivisible from the comparative modernity of the novel in relation to Dickens's other works. *Our Mutual Friend* is unusually engaged with the present; with the social and political life of the mid nineteenth-century, rather than inviting thoughts on the contemporary moment through a retrospective narration.[3] In the era of the Second Reform Act and its promise (or threat) of democratisation, Dickens returned in this novel to the narrative of the social mobility of the respectable, hard-working boy of humble origins that had appeared in so many of his earlier works, just as he also rewrote the seduction plot of a working-class girl pursued by an upper-class man. The result is a work that both evokes and attempts to re-contain violent and explicit class antagonism of a sort rarely seen elsewhere in Dickens's works.

The dual plots of *Our Mutual Friend* strain to find a mode of representation for the prospect of democracy. The representation of such a prospect in the novel is, for the most part, worked through thematically by means of those criteria of property, money and respectability that formed the grounds of proposals for franchise extensions to the lower-middle and upper working-classes in the late 1850s and the 1860s. But genre and form also play a part in this mediation of democratisation, just as they shaped political narratives of

[1] Humphry House, 'The Macabre Dickens', in *The Dickens Critics*, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961) p. 195. For the changing critical history of the novel see Adrian Poole, 'Introduction' to Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole (1864-65; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997). All subsequent references in the text to Dickens's novel are to this edition.

[2] Lauren Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 161; see also Mary Poovey, 'Speculation and Virtue in *Our Mutual Friend*', *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 155-181.

[3] See Jeremy Tambling, *Dickens, Violence and the Modern State* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 211.

reform, radicalism and conservatism at the time.[4] The melodrama in which the pauper foundling, Bradley Headstone, demands that his upper-class rival Eugene Wrayburn acknowledge his legitimacy and equality gives way, in the latter part of the novel, to a romance in which such articulations of class struggle are muted by the language of conservative populism: that we are all united by a proud national history of independence and resistance which renders all other differences insignificant. Domestic melodrama, that form which Martin Meisel suggests became 'a prime vehicle for social feeling' in the 'new phase of political ferment' surrounding the 1832 Reform Act, is rejected as a safe form of representation by Dickens in the 1860s.[5] If the sort of domestic melodramas penned by Dickens's friend Douglas Jerrold in the 1830s provided a spectacle of the common man in peril from the forces of landed aristocracy, then by the 1860s Dickens had moved to recontain the latent class antagonism of that narrative form. The potentially revolutionary threat of the deracinated, educated working man rising against gentlemanly hauteur is foreclosed by the ending of *Our Mutual Friend*: an ending that explicitly rejects the oppositional language of class in favour of a universal notion of 'the people'.

Dickens's reworking of his own earlier representations of class in this novel is perhaps most perceptible in his depiction of working-class domestic space. *Our Mutual Friend* is preoccupied with the homelessness and dislocation of modernity, but it is the spaces of the working-class characters in this novel which are the strangest of all, revising the affectively charged, humble domestic spaces in Dickens's previous works. In Dickens's *David Copperfield*, written fourteen years before *Our Mutual Friend*, the affective power of the Peggotys' home in Yarmouth over the young David resounds throughout the subsequent narrative of his adult life. This eccentric domestic space in an upturned boat on the shore is a shell that protects a multitude of those intimate corners that Gaston Bachelard suggests fulfil our desire for immobility.[6] In the most precious corner of all sits Little Em'ly, the seamstress who wants to be a lady and who is eventually glimpsed in that glowing interior and seduced out of her place by David's cool, upper-class friend, Steerforth.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Lizzie Hexham, the virtuous and beautiful daughter of poverty, initially lives in a home that is also equally perched between water and land; labour and leisure. The 'low building' in Limehouse 'had the look of

[4] See Patrick Joyce, 'The Constitution and the Narrative Structure of Victorian Politics', *Re-Reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. James Vernon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 179-203; Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, 1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[5] Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 147.

[6] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (1958; Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), pp. 107, 132.

having once been a mill' and 'there was a rotten wart of wood upon its forehead that seemed to indicate where the sails had been' (I: iii, 30). In this case, however, the space is not one of intimacy but is penetrated by damp and smears and 'a look of decomposition' that corresponds to her father's trade of fetching bodies from the Thames. Lizzie alone, by the fire, is an object of desire to the upper-middle-class visitors, Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood. As Wrayburn spies on her he sees her as 'a deep piece of rich colour' which he prevents his friend from sharing in: "'I'll take a peep through the window," said Mortimer. "No, don't!" Eugene caught him by the arm. "Best not to make a show of her"' (I: xiii, 168). The very authorial habit of peeping into the tableaux of working-class domestic interiors to find vicarious pleasures of the imagination – of thinking, what would it be like to live like that? – are here exposed as an appeal to voyeurism as base as any sideshow attraction. The intimate corners of a tiny home glowing in the firelight, made familiar by countless social investigations in addition to the works of Elizabeth Gaskell and Dickens himself, no longer stand in for the desire of the upper-middle-class visitor to take possession of something else altogether. Dickens explores the erotic investment bound up in such acts of imagining otherness by figuring Lizzie as the only piece of colour in the scene. Homes themselves are, with the notable exception of Bella Wilfer's 'charm-ingest of dolls' houses' in Greenwich, never places of desire in this text. They are, rather, spaces to peer into and to wish to belong to (III: V). *Our Mutual Friend* is a novel of homelessness and the dematerialization of space in which there are none of those Bachelardian corners of immobility: everything is always in painful, perpetual motion.

Perhaps the most striking instance of this homelessness and dematerialization comes in a well-known scene up on the roof of the counting house of Pubsey & Co. in the City of London. The scene starts out, at least, in a familiar nineteenth-century documentary mode of writing class through the domestic space, as the wealthy Fledgeby spies Lizzie Hexham and her young companion, Jenny Wren, learning to read together, sheltered against a chimney-stack.

> Seated … against no more romantic object than a blackened chimney-stack over which some humble creeper had been trained, they both pored over one book … Another book or two were lying near, and a common basket of common fruit, and another basket full of strings of beads and tinsel scraps. A few humble boxes of evergreens completed the garden; and the encompassing wilderness of dowager old chimneys twirled their cowls and fluttered their smoke. (II: v, 276)

Peering into the intimate spaces of poorer working-class life, the class outsider in the doorway carefully itemises the material objects that add up to

something of the characters inside.[7] But in this case the list of objects – each humble, each rather worse for wear, and each seen by the eye at the door – seems to weary of its own meticulous documentation of the real. Realist representation and the evocation of an imaginary world through the details of its material objects cancels itself out in this passage. That phrase, 'a common basket of common fruit', dismisses the notion that detailing exactly what kind of fruit bought from precisely what kind of street seller and carried in what sort of basket provides any sort of meaningful content about its purchasers. The passage subverts the truth value of realism it initially invokes, as the little crippled girl, Jenny Wren, rejects the money-man Fledgeby's derision of the noise and dirt of their garden:

> 'We are thankful to come here for rest, sir … you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead.' (II: v, 279)

Down in the city streets and inside homes lie the 'chain[s]' that tie Jenny Wren to her stricken existence: freedom can only lie for her in a negation of the material word and its realist mode in a space that transcends money and class (II: v, 279). As Jenny's 'fairy godmother', the Jewish money-lender Riah, takes his master Fledgeby 'down to life' back downstairs, she hangs over the banister calling to her friend 'come up and be dead! Come up and be dead!' (II: v, 280).

The desire not to be in a certain place, or not to be at all, courses through this novel with its host of deaths, resurrections, and street hauntings as the Thames flows on and the dust heaps rise and fall. Hardly a single character in this novel lives in the same house for the duration of the narrative; all are hurried on in a restless motion, from worthy Betty Higden, on the tramp to avoid dying in the workhouse, to the wealthy Veneerings who must eventually retire to Calais in polite bankruptcy to live off Mrs Veneering's diamonds. Homes and houses are part of the implacable economy of money and waste that circulates through the text and only outside them – in gardens, secluded corners of city streets, or in the Bar of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters' Pub under the eye of its landlady – can there be any sort of rest or reformation.

The homelessness of and in this text, with its tendency to question the relationship between home, household and identity, is one of the means by which the novel mutes the significance of class itself as a means of distinction and a category of representation. Occupying a certain sort of property in *Our Mutual Friend* is no longer a solid sign of distinction and social place, a stable ground for representation. It is a sign merely of money, or of the even more

[7] See Ruth Livesey, 'Reading for Character: Women Social Reformers and Narratives of the Urban Poor in Late Victorian and Edwardian London', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9, 1 (2004), pp. 43-67.

insubstantial world of credit and shares, rather than of a man's dealings with the world. This erosion of the representative relationship between social and material place cuts the narrative loose to explore new forms of political and social subjectivity. It is in the liminal spaces outside of homes that, as we shall see shortly, the plot turns on itself to rewrite the conventional melodramatic, cross-class love triangle, and unite the aristocratic Eugene Wrayburn and the virtuous Lizzie Hexham in marriage. Within the myriad chains of streets lie the antagonisms of class difference: antagonisms which this text attempts to resolve in a space beyond place in which all can be part of that numinous collective, 'the people'.

Dickens's rewriting of his own familiar narratives of class in *Our Mutual Friend* came in the midst of a resurgence of Parliamentary debate and bills in pursuit of reform and a wider consideration of voter qualifications in the later 1850s and early 1860s.[8] In the years prior to the Second Reform Act of 1867 and 'shooting Niagara', as Thomas Carlyle termed it, into mass suffrage, the relation between occupying a certain sort of property, money and political representation was a prevalent feature of political discourse.[9] In 1832 the first Reform Act had extended the franchise such that male householders in urban boroughs occupying homes of £10 or more rateable value could vote, hence enfranchising the majority of middle-class men. The longstanding Whig notion that Parliament should represent the interests of different orders of society had thus ceded to a system of suffrage based on property. During the late 1850s and 1860s proponents of further franchise extension developed alternative criteria for the vote, ranging from the insistence on universal manhood suffrage on the part of former Chartists like Ernest Jones, to the desire to distinguish the mass of 'respectable working men' from the rough underclass which was voiced by the Radical MP John Bright, to franchise reforms establishing minimum educational or financial qualifications for prospective voters.[10]

Dickens was sceptical about the capacity of franchise reform in itself to change the life of the nation. Writing to W. C. Macready in 1855 he concluded:

> As to the suffrage, I have lost hope even in the [proposal for a secret] Ballot. We appear to me to have proved the failure of Representative Institutions, without an educated and advanced people to support them. What with teaching people to 'keep in their stations' – what with bringing

[8] See Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[9] Thomas Carlyle, *Shooting Niagara: And After?* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867).

[10] Keith McClelland, 'England's Greatness, the Working Man', *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867*, ed. Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 71-118.

> up the Soul and Body of the land to be a good child, or to go to the Beershop to go a-poaching and go to the Devil – what with having no such thing as a Middle Class (for, though we are perpetually bragging of it as our safety, it is nothing but a poor fringe on the mantle of the Upper) – what with our flunkeyism, toadyism, letting the most contemptible of Lords come in for all manner of places – making asses of ourselves for Prince Albert to saddle – reading the Court Circular for the New Testament [...] I do reluctantly believe that the English people are, habitually, consenting parties to the miserable imbecility into which we have fallen, and will never help themselves out of it.[11]

A successful extension of the franchise, could, for Dickens, only be possible if the working-class 'Soul and Body' of the country were educated into independent manhood and the middle classes lost their fascination with the glamour of upper-class doings. This attack on the culture of deference and the tenets of working-class education is sustained throughout *Our Mutual Friend*, but the threat offered by enfranchisement without social advancement is also ever-present in the text.

A few years prior to the composition of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Benjamin Disraeli, presented a Reform Bill to Parliament that made explicit connections between the central anxieties of *Our Mutual Friend* – money, credit, and professional identity – and political representation. Disraeli, who was, of course, to extend the borough franchise to all male householders and £10 lodgers in 1867, proposed a conservative model of franchise extension in 1859 aimed at preserving the Constitution from radical arguments for manhood suffrage. Disraeli's Reform Bill dismissed democracy as a dangerous theory that valued numbers over quality. The object of his Bill was rather to reconstruct the constituent body of the country 'with no mere view of increasing its numerical amount, but solely with the object of improving it, by the addition of various classes and individuals to whom the privilege of the franchise may be trusted with safety to the State and benefit of the community'.[12] In pursuit of such reconstruction, Disraeli proposed that the residential property-based franchise of 1832 be supplemented by a new form of property qualification. Men who had had over £60 in a savings-bank for over two years and those in possession of East India Stock or Bank of England Funds yielding over £10 per annum had demonstrated their manly foresight, and such a form of portable property qualification, Disraeli argued, opened an 'avenue to the mechanic, whose virtue, prudence, intelligence and frugality entitle him to enter into the

[11] To W. C. Macready, 4 October 1855, *The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey, and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-2002, 12 vols.), vol. VII (1993), p. 715.

[12] Montagu Corry (ed.), *Parliamentary Reform: A Series of Speeches on that subject delivered in the House of Commons by The Right Hon. B. Disraeli* (1848-1866) (London: Longmans, Green, 1867), p. 196.

privileged pale of the constituent body of the country'.[13] Money was to become the sign of respectable citizenry for the working man, whilst being a creditor to the national debt ('in the Funns' as the nefarious speculator Silas Wegg has it in *Our Mutual Friend* (I: iv, 53)) would bring the dividend of an extra vote in elections. In addition to such financial signifiers of virtue, Disraeli also tabled a 'fancy franchise' in which members of certain professions, including barristers, lawyers and board-certified schoolmasters, should be entitled to a vote regardless of their property qualifications. Money, credit and the professions were to improve the make-up of the electorate and enable a slow evolution in the customary British Constitution.

For the founder of the Working Men's College, Frederick Denison Maurice, schemes such as Disraeli's franchise bill of 1859, and further suggestions of a professional franchise, were forms of 'money suffrage' that failed to acknowledge the proud true history of the English constitution and risked undermining that education in citizenry to which he was devoted. Property of any sort, he argued, could only be a legitimate basis for franchise qualification if it stood as proof of a 'man's dealings with the world'.[14] And yet money, throughout the first two thirds of *Our Mutual Friend*, is capable only of proving itself and displacing all other systems of representation. Limiting the franchise to those working men who had proven themselves 'decent' through cash savings or professional advancement was part of a 'miserable theory of numbers' that Maurice argued would soon lead to nothing but

> [...] a series of plots and counterplots: plots to gain admission into a narrow, exclusive circle; counterplots to keep the circle more narrow, to devise precautions against intruders. Thence arise perpetual suspicions of the few against the many, and of the many against the few; of the few against each other, of each one in the many against his neighbours; ending in the domination of one who reduces all to the condition of corpses, and then boasts that by destroying freedom he has secured equality.[15]

Limited representation on the basis of money or the professions alone would, in short, provoke a melodrama of conspiracy, revenge and revolution.

In order to 'repudiate mob force' and recover 'the old maxims of the constitution', Maurice insisted, it was necessary to understand that English constitutional history was the history of 'the growth of a people' and widening political representation in an Anglo-Saxon golden age, prior to the Norman conquest.[16] If those campaigning for the extension of the franchise could be taught to see themselves as part of an earlier, pre-modern, story – the organic

[13] Corry, *Parliamentary Reform*, p. 192.
[14] Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Workman and the Franchise: Chapters from English History on the Representation and Education of the People* (London: A. Strahan, 1866), p. 208.
[15] Maurice, p. 208.
[16] Maurice, p. xii.

romance of the growth of 'a people', rather than this revolutionary melodrama of the many and the few – then the representation of manhood through the suffrage would at the same time instil an ethos of manhood in these prospective voters. The one thing needful, Maurice argued, was a return to this true 'manhood suffrage' practised in the medieval period. This would enable the newly enfranchised male population to recognise their part in a narrative of conservative populism: that all were 'freeborn Englishmen' before the imposition of that infamous 'Norman yoke' and could return to their proud yeoman roots even in the midst of modernity.

The social historian Patrick Joyce argues that such appeals to a golden age of democracy prior to the 'Norman Yoke' were common in the era of the Second Reform Act. Such narratives served, he suggests, to legitimise a 'sense of political identity' for those working men anticipating enfranchisement.[17] Echoes of Maurice's appeal to populist manhood, rather than Disraeli's offer of conditional privileges to the 'prudent' mechanic, are ever-present in Dickens's novel. Early in the narrative, the lawyer Mortimer Lightwood drawls to his newly enriched clients, the Boffins, that their independence of mind is evidence of 'Vigorous Saxon spirit – Mrs Boffin's ancestors – bowmen – Agincourt and Cressy' (I: viii, 95). This tracing of the dustman's wife to a line that endured the 'Norman Yoke' undaunted reads at first glance as an instance of Lightwood's habitual cool humour. But it also ties the deracinated Boffins into the populist rhetoric of the 'freeborn Englishman' prevalent in discussions of the suffrage in the 1850s and 1860s: the Boffins' virtue lies precisely in the fact that money and modernity, like the Norman invasion, cannot alter their vigorous independent spirit of self-representation. Yet this collective romance of a lost universal manhood – this sense of a freeborn Englishness waiting to be recovered – is precisely what Bradley Headstone is represented as lacking in the other plot strand of *Our Mutual Friend*. Headstone's route from workhouse to schoolhouse is constrained by the test of decency, rather than the presumption of innate manliness; that is, his livelihood, property and putative vote rest on his narrowly crawling his way out of the 'jumble' of the pauper school into the restricted order of the professions as a certified schoolmaster.

As we have seen, Disraeli's proposals for a professional suffrage in 1859 foregrounded the advantages this would bring to members of the legal profession and the relatively new, socially indeterminate category of board-certified schoolmasters.[18] Despite this contemporary political validation of the power of work to make a man in the mid-nineteenth century, *Our Mutual Friend* is an anxious rewriting of the joys of professionalisation, self-

[17] Joyce, 'The Constitution and the Narrative Structure of Victorian Politics', p. 188. Joyce argues that the 'Norman Yoke' represents a melodramatic narrative. As I argue here, however, its structure is far more akin to that of romance.
[18] For contemporary debate on the social identity of the schoolmaster in relation to Headstone see Goodlad, pp. 167-182

improvement and *Bildung* evident in Dickens's earlier works like *David Copperfield*. Here the lethargic, upper-middle-class barrister Eugene Wrayburn has never represented a client in his life whilst the former pauper and certified schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone, progresses across the threshold Disraeli proposed for suffrage only at the cost of a fatal suppression of his self which bursts out in a murderous attack on Wrayburn himself.

Headstone's melodramatic plot is the limit of the democratic imaginary in *Our Mutual Friend*. Whilst the eventual marriage of Eugene Wrayburn and the working-class Lizzie Hexham seems to hold out a fantasy of classlessness and universal gentility, Headstone's implacable rage against Wrayburn marks Dickens's retreat from social mobility. Despite his carefully stored education and dedicated self-improvement, the schoolmaster still has 'a certain stiffness … as if there were a want of adaptation' to his respectable suit 'recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes' (II: I, 218). Headstone's stiffness and the retentiveness of his 'mental warehouse' is representative of his inability to convert his carefully fashioned self into any other social goods, unlike the languid gentleman, Wrayburn, who can wander between social worlds and turn things and people to his own ends.[19] If, in 1855, Dickens believed that the right sort of education would equip the working-class 'Soul and Body' of the nation to take part in political representation, then by the mid 1860s the schoolmaster had come to exemplify the wrong sort of tutelage in civic life: Headstone contains the rage of the revolutionary mob in a 'decent black coat'.

The complex plotting of *Our Mutual Friend* and its play with established generic conventions is in part an attempt to re-contain the threat of Headstone. Much as Dickens was attracted by the democratic ideal, it seems to have been for him an ideal in which distinctions of class – or, at least, class consciousness -needed to be wiped away.[20] Headstone represents the danger of retaining that sense of class-bound shame and anger in an era of democratisation. It is no coincidence, therefore, that in *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens re-writes the class dynamics of the melodrama. Juliet John has recently observed that the novel subverts the stock plot in which the respectable daughter of the poor is seduced by the rapacious, cool aristocrat (a plot, of course, that Dickens worked with quite comfortably in *David Copperfield*).[21] For the first three books of the novel Eugene Wrayburn's pursuit of the waterman's daughter, Lizzie Hexham, seems to promise an end in her seduction and abandonment by the upper-class dilettante. Headstone, on the other hand, stands in precisely the position of the approved,

[19] Goodlad, p. 177, points out that this retentiveness is the social explanation of the anality that Sedgwick identifies with Headstone: see Eve Kosofky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire* (1985; New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 161-180.

[20] Dickens's encounter with the American republic is significant here: see Andrew Sanders, *Dickens and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), pp. 111-153.

[21] Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 188-196.

respectable lover who is her social equal, destined to avenge and rescue his beloved from the clutches of her would-be seducer. Yet Dickens collapses that conventional triangulation of melodrama in the final book of the novel: Headstone's very respectability becomes the forcing-house that brings out his violence against the gentleman he can never be; conversely, Wrayburn's rescue by, and marriage of Lizzie is an attempt to resolve both the novel and the problem of the representation of class within it.

The confrontations between Wrayburn and Headstone replay the melodrama of class antagonism consequent on a world of democratisation in which the schoolmaster feels entitled to claim equality with the gentlemanly barrister, but is constantly reminded that that claim is, as is he, illegitimate under the rule of money. In response to Headstone's assertion that "'You think me of no more value than the dirt under your feet'", Wrayburn replies, "'I assure you, Schoolmaster … I don't think about you.'" (II: vi, 289) Headstone's rage that his 'value' will never be above that of dirt in the world of money is thus stoked by Wrayburn's complacency. Dickens's inversion of the melodrama might restate the revolutionary potential of the lower classes, even when on the move upwards, but it also serves to implicate the casual violence of upper-middle-class snobbery in such disorder. Headstone's maiming and drowning of Wrayburn strips the latter of such self-possessed superiority and hence his part in the melodrama of class antagonism and enables the novel to end in a very different narrative mode: a romance in which 'the people' can be united by transcendent values of virtue.

Such rewriting of the melodramatic plot gains a sharp political inflection in the light of the franchise debates of the 1850s and 60s. In the nineteenth century the conventional cross-class love triangle was central to melodrama's popularity as a vehicle for working-class radicalism.[22] But in this later instance, Bradley Headstone becomes the villain and sinks in death into the river mud, whilst Wrayburn renounces his leisured status to become Lizzie Hexham's husband: a true man of "'purpose and energy'" who will turn all to "'the best account'" (IV: xi, 735). Dickens thus invokes and eventually displaces the antagonistic radicalism of melodrama with a conservative populist Romance in which Wrayburn's drowning and rebirth – in itself a Romance trope – erases all sense of insurmountable class distinctions between himself and Lizzie. Headstone's implacable resentment of and desire to claim the identity of gentleman means that he, however, remains impelled in the melodramatic imaginary of excess; of persecution, class consciousness, shame and anger.

If Dickens turns away from melodrama in the latter part of *Our Mutual Friend* this does not mean that the critique of aristocratic privilege associated with that genre is lost. As with the satire on the wealthy Veneerings' 'bran-new' best friends among the minor aristocracy, Dickens relentlessly exposes

[22] See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess* (1976; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 84-6; Meisel, p. 147.

the shortcomings of a culture of deference, toadyism and aristocratic complacency (I: ii, 17). Members of the aristocracy in *Our Mutual Friend* are not the sinister machinators of melodrama but merely ignorant of the world that circulates for them. Nevertheless, they are ruthlessly cut down to size in order to produce a closing vision of one people. For Walter Bagehot, whose influential essays on the English Constitution appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1865 just as the serial issue of *Our Mutual Friend* came to an end, the English political system was formed by custom and tradition and protected by that culture of deference anathematized by Dickens.[23] According to Bagehot, the English Constitution required a sharp demarcation of lower, middle and upper classes for its peaceful continuance. The unenfranchised were, he argued, 'induced to obey' their rulers by a culture of deference, and this was preserved not out of respect for the actual 'heavy and sensible class' of politicians, but through the 'theatrical show' of aristocratic society:

> A certain state passes before them: a certain pomp of great men; a certain spectacle of beautiful women; a wonderful scene of wealth and enjoyment is displayed, and they are coerced by it. Their imagination is bowed down; they feel they are not equal to the life revealed to them. Courts and aristocracies have the great quality which rules the multitude, though philosophers can see nothing in it – visibility.[24]

In its systematic deconstruction of a culture of deference, *Our Mutual Friend* cuts through this notion of a customary constitution and a tripartite class hierarchy. The weight of this work is carried in the greatest part by the figure of the Dolls' Dressmaker, Jenny Wren, and it is precisely in that realm of spectacle and the imagination outlined by Bagehot that this trimming out takes place.

Describing to Riah how she dresses her high society dolls, Jenny's account is a prescient parody of Bagehot's lower orders, bowing down their imaginations before aristocratic display:

> 'There's a Drawing Room, or a grand day in the Park, or a Show or a Fete, or what you like. Very well. I squeeze among the crowd, and I look about me. When I see a great lady very suitable for my business, I say "You'll do, my dear!" and I take particular notice of her, and run home and cut her out and baste her. Then another day I come scudding back again to try on, and then I take particular notice of her again. Sometimes she plainly seems to say, "How that little creature is staring!" and sometimes likes it and sometimes don't, but much more often yes than no. All the time I am only saying to myself, "I must hollow out a bit here; I must slope away there;" and I am making a perfect slave of her, with making her try on my doll's dress.' (III: ii, 431)

[23] Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867). Orig. pub. in the *Fortnightly Review* 15 May 1865 -1 January 1867. The monthly serial parts of *OMF* were also published by Chapman (May 1864 - November 1865).
[24] Bagehot, p. 51.

The dolls' dressmaker enslaves the aristocracy through the triumph of the imagination. Through the habit of miniaturization, which, as Bachelard suggests, condenses and enriches values, Jenny Wren reproduces aristocratic society in tiny form, but also, somehow, as more truthfully itself: a set of dummies in costly clothing.[25]

Crippled, living in pain and struggling to make a living for herself and her alcoholic father through turning scraps into luxurious dolls' clothes, Jenny Wren at first seems to fit a familiar archetype of the working-class girl child in nineteenth-century culture. Her enduring companionship with Lizzie Hexham fulfils the role that Peter Brooks has identified of the child in melodrama as a symbol of the innocence of her older and more explicitly desirable friend.[26] Yet the character's entry into the narrative in Book II chapter I evades Brooks' categorisation of the child in melodrama as the guide to virtue and the unworldly sign of the workings of a higher, providential plot, even as it alludes to them:

> A parlour door within a small entry stood open, and disclosed a child – a dwarf – a something – sitting on a little low old-fashioned arm-chair, which had a kind of little working bench before it.
> 'I can't get up,' said the child, 'because my back's bad, and my legs are queer. But I'm the person of the house.' (II: i, 222)

Jenny Wren is indeed unworldly and in dialogue with the dead, but she is also materially situated in the labours of nineteenth-century London. The manner in which she knows she cannot be a child, although a child in years, and confesses the hardships of her labours, is undoubtedly an allusion to the child labourers and street sellers that populate Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*: a work to which this novel is much indebted.[27] The repeated assertion that she is 'the person of the house', however, lays claim to a possessive individualism that Mayhew's watercress girl, for example, never approaches.

How do we read this assertion of her personhood in relation to the house? The implication seems to be that she names herself – a girl of twelve or thirteen – as head of her household, landlady to her lodger Lizzie Hexham, and, as the narrator puts it 'in a dire reversal of the places of parent and child', mother to her father (II: ii, 241). That this oddity is head of the household,

[25] Bachelard, p. 150.
[26] Brooks, p. 34.
[27] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, ed. Victor Neuburg (1861-2; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

wage-earner and provider of rent and rates seems particularly charged in an era of discussion of what sort of (adult, male) lodgers, tenants and ratepayers should fall within the range of franchise extension. Marcus Stone's illustrations of the drunken 'Mr Dolls', as Eugene Wrayburn christens him, bears an uncanny resemblance to the figure of the 'unrespectable working man' caricatured during the franchise debates. On the criteria of household suffrage finally implemented in 1867, however, this fictional, eminently corruptible Mr Dolls of Smith Square, Westminster, who sells his daughter's secrets for a thrupence worth of rum, and defers to anyone willing to supply him with it, would have had the vote.

Yet it is the person of the house – this strange something out of the ordinary order of representation – who remakes the world of *Our Mutual Friend* as a Romance. The nursery-rhyme name of Jenny Wren, the narrator informs us, is an 'appellation' 'she had long ago chosen to bestow upon herself', and lies lightly over the top of her indomitable 'real name', Fanny Cleaver (II: ii, 233).[28] As she habitually 'chops' shut her sharp jaw, Jenny Wren is a Cleaver that lops off the pretensions of nearly all the adult males in her range, including Eugene Wrayburn. If adult males become naughty children in Jenny's inversion of patriarchy, then the spectacle of her rulers and betters serves as her own private doll's dummies. She is, in this sense, the agent of an attack on the culture of deference and toadyism, but her very otherworldliness (in addition to her age and femininity) prevents her serving as any sort of model of material change.

A cleaver of course, is not only an instrument for cutting apart or down, but also its opposite: something that clings and holds things together. If Jenny Wren/Fanny Cleaver cuts the pretenders for Lizzie's affections (and the aristocracy) down to size then she is also the one who finds the word that enables Lizzie and Eugene to marry. As Wrayburn lies wandering in and out of consciousness after he is attacked by Bradley Headstone, Jenny Wren whispers the word 'wife' which he needs to request a deathbed wedding. Although it is Jenny Wren's habit of re-naming characters after those in a fairy tale, it is she who becomes the pivot upon which the narrative shifts from a melodrama of insuperable class oppositions to a fairy tale romance of populism; albeit one almost as painful for the protagonists as Anderson's Little Mermaid. In this most mixed of novels it is only fitting that Jenny Wren is at once both such an innocent, celestial, instrument of providence, and a sharp 'person of the house' whose curtailing of aristocratic ease is enforced by her part in the world of money, circulation and consumption down in the streets.

In the final chapter of the novel, Dickens brings together the inversion of melodramatic plot and the question of political representation itself. Mortimer Lightwood revisits the home of Mr Veneering (now Member of Parliament

[28] See Sedgewick, p. 164, on the sexual connotations of this name.

for the constituency of Pocket Breaches for the sum of five thousand pounds) to discover what 'the voice of society' has to say about Wrayburns' marriage. The irrepressible dowager, Lady Tippins, announces to those assembled for dinner, "'let us resolve ourselves into a Committee of the whole House on this subject'" and votes are cast by the guests (IV: xvii, 795). Once every other person present has offered an opinion on the 'madness' of the Wrayburns' marriage, the nervous poor relation of a peer, Twemlow, is finally asked for his vote in the matter and he concludes that 'this is a question of the feelings of a gentleman':

> '[…] if such feelings on the part of this gentleman induced this gentleman to marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say when I use the word, gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man. The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred.' (IV: xvii, 796)

This language of democratic gentility becomes the 'voice of society' itself at the close of the novel as Twemlow and Lightwood walk home arm in arm, leaving the Veneerings' Houses of Parliament behind. But the moments of melodrama, shame and rage in the text remain an excess that cannot be recuperated by this assertion of cohesion and democracy: the ending remains haunted by Bradley Headstone and the all-too convincing performance of Boffin's corruption by wealth unsuited to his station. If Dickens attempts to close the novel by depicting a world of common values and customs in which democracy might succeed, it is a world that, like Headstone himself, can scarcely repress the passions of class-consciousness it needs to keep down in order to function.

Politicising the Home in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *This Slavery* (1925) and Ellen Wilkinson's *Clash* (1929)[1]

Nicola Wilson

> In fact, by most historians' accounts, it is a pretty modest subject altogether: my subject is domesticity and ideas about the home.[2]

Over the past few decades, there has been increasing recognition of the significance of the home as a key locale in the making of class. Whilst the goings-on within domestic space have traditionally been ignored in historical and sociological understandings of how class 'happens', an important body of recent work has sought to examine the ways in which the material spaces of the home and the relationships that take place within it affect one's class and gender roles.[3] Considering the influential work of Carolyn Steedman, Valerie Walkerdine and Joanna Bourke, amongst others, Valerie Hey comments, 'these writers have uniquely explored the "domestic" contours of past and present class narratives, in terms of their gendered specificity. "Home" is the site par excellence where they show us learning an initial gendered class consciousness'.[4] The 'New Working-Class Studies' has latterly developed this conceptual re-grounding in the following terms:

> The shift away from the formal spaces of workplaces and unions as the primary sites of the economic, social and political construction of the working class calls for new ways of studying and representing working-class lives, cultures and politics. [...] We can construct alternative readings of working-class communities which present (and represent) working-class lives as complex and embodied practices played out in a wide variety of spaces, neither reified nor vilified, but explored and analysed. [...] The purposes of such alternative accounts [...] [is to] draw attention to the broader, heterogeneous spaces of working-class lives.[5]

[1] I am grateful to Jim McGuigan, Jason Toynbee, and Jeff Wallace for their comments on a draft of this article.

[2] Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 116.

[3] The 'happening' of class is from E. P. Thompson, 'I do not see class as a "structure", nor even as a "category", but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships'. See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; London: Penguin, 1980), p. 8.

[4] Valerie Hey, 'Joining the Club? Academia and Working-Class Femininities', *Gender and Education*, 15.3 (2003), 319-35 (p. 321-22). See for example Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1986); Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey, *Democracy in the Kitchen: Regulating Mothers and Socialising Daughters* (London: Virago, 1989); Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[5] Alison Stenning, 'Where is the Post-Socialist Working Class? Working-Class Lives in the Spaces of (Post-) Socialism, *Sociology*, 39.5 (2005), 983-99 (p. 993-94). For the 'New Working-Class Studies' movement in the US see *New Working-Class Studies*, ed. John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). In Britain, the ESRC 'Working-Class Lives: Geographies and Sociologies' seminar series, which ran from 2004-05, was set up to reinvigorate theoretical debates on the politics of class.

It is a central premise of this article that whilst the 'broader, heterogeneous spaces of working-class lives' are now well-recognised in much critical discourse, the discussion of working-class literature has traditionally remained mired in certain fixed notions about the spatial politics of class.[6] This is to the detriment of our understanding of the novels, so that when the working-class writer's plot diverges from the locations of a more orthodox class narrative, much of its content has been ignored.[7] Here I explore the representation and function of the domestic interior in two important novels of the 1920s by working-class women, drawing attention to the primacy of the home and what takes place within it, to argue that the domestic interior is a crucial site for the characters' consciousness of class. As committed left-wing women who shunned socialism's tenacious hold onto the ideological divisions of a public and a private realm, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth and Ellen Wilkinson fought throughout their careers to show how contingent these 'separate spheres' were.[8] Whilst the home is depicted as a retreat from the labour of the workplace in much working-class writing of the time, in both women's fiction and published journalism, home is understood as a place of work and as an important locale in a discourse of class politics. By considering how the domestic interior takes shape and the ways in which its material spaces are interpreted by the characters in *This Slavery* and *Clash*, this article demonstrates that the home is the primary site for the characters' lived understanding and consciousness of class.

[6] I use 'working-class literature' and the 'working-class novel' to refer to fiction about working-class life by an author commonly thought of as a 'working-class writer' (Ellen Wilkinson had moved far away from her working-class origins by the actual time of writing). For a traditional distinction of the difference between the 'working-class novel' and the 'proletarian' or 'socialist' novel, the latter of which is seen to be 'written in the historical interests of the working class', revealing 'a standpoint consistent with that of the class-conscious sections of this class', see H. Gustav Klaus, 'Introduction', in *The Socialist Novel in Britain: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition*, ed. H. Gustav Klaus (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).

[7] For important critiques of the critical discourse on working-class writing see Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Maroula Joannou, *'Ladies, Please Don't Smash These Windows': Women's Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change 1918-38* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); and John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002).

[8] For a historical understanding of this point see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983).

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth (1886-1962): *This Slavery*

The polemical *This Slavery* was the seventh published novel of former mill girl, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth.[9] Carnie Holdsworth was born into a Lancashire cotton weaving family in 1886 and, like many children in the mill towns of the time, entered the factory as a half-timer at eleven, becoming a full-time hand two years later.[10] In spite of the ten hour days – what she would later describe as those 'long hours of unremitted toil and the evil atmosphere' – Carnie Holdsworth was a passionate poet and autodidact, and received encouragement from the Blackburn Authors' Society. In 1907 she was enabled to publish five hundred copies of a small six pence volume of poetry, and a year later, when it was republished in a second and enlarged one shilling edition, she came to the attention of the socialist campaigner and writer, Robert Blatchford.[11] With his encouragement, Carnie Holdsworth left the mills for a full-time writing career in 1908 (she would return for a brief period two years later). She spent two years teaching at the short-lived Bebel House Women's College and Socialist Education Centre in London, part of the Central Labour College's programme of 'Independent Working-Class Education', and her first novel, *Miss Nobody* was published in 1913.[12] By the time of the publication of *This Slavery*, the politicised mill-girl story for which she is now most often remembered, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was well established as a journalist, writer of children's stories, and prolific novelist. Along with her husband, Alfred Holdsworth, she edited and produced *The Clear Light*, the organ of the National Union for Combating Fascism, between 1923 and 1925.

[9] Ethel published under her maiden name, 'Carnie', her married name, 'Carnie Holdsworth', and 'Holdsworth' during her lifetime. For ease of reference I shall use 'Carnie Holdsworth' here as this is the name under which she published *This Slavery*. I retain the name as printed in bibliographical references.

[10] I am grateful for some of this information to Phyllis Mary Ashraf, *Introduction to Working-Class Literature in Great Britain*, Part II (Berlin: Ministerium fur Volksbildung, 1979); H. Gustav Klaus, 'Silhouettes of Revolution: Some Neglected Novels of the Early 1920s', in *The Socialist Novel in Britain: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 89-109; and Edmund and Ruth Frow, 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth: Writer, Feminist and Socialist', in *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880-1914*, ed. H. Gustav Klaus (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), pp. 251-56.

[11] Ethel Carnie, *Rhymes from the Factory* (Blackburn: Denham, 1907). See Robert Blatchford, 'A Lancashire Fairy. An Interview with Miss Ethel Carnie', *Woman Worker*, 10 July 1908, p. 155.

[12] Ethel Carnie, *Miss Nobody* (London: Methuen, 1913). Bebel House, run by Mrs Bridges Adams, was named after August Bebel, who published an influential Marxist-feminist treatise, *Frau und der Sozialismus* in 1879, first translated into English in 1885. See August Bebel, *Women Under Socialism*, trans. Daniel De Leon (New York: Schocken, 1971). The Marxist policies of the Central Labour College's 'Independent Working-Class Education movement', whose heyday was in the early '20s, stood in direct opposition to those of the Workers Educational Association. See Jonathon Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2002), pp. 256-97, and Jonathan Ree, *Proletarian Philosophers: Problems in Socialist Culture in Britain, 1900-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 15-22.

This Slavery was published by The Labour Publishing Company, a left-wing publishing house that aimed to make texts of interest to the labour movement more readily available to the pockets of a working-class audience. It was sold at the relatively cheap price of two shillings and six pence (most novels of the time cost seven shillings and six pence).[13] Focussing on the lives of a family of Lancashire cotton weavers – sisters Hester and Rachel Martin, their mother Mary, and their paternal grandmother – the novel is a Marxist retelling of the kind of pulp mill-girl fiction that was popularly consumed in weekly magazines for working girls and women at the time.[14] Carnie Holdsworth adapts this melodramatic genre by adding a socialist and woman-centred framework to the classic mill-girl tale of virtuous heroines, lecherous overseers and wicked mill owners. At the centre of *This Slavery* is a passionate plea for women's freedom under socialism: "'I wonder when women'll be free, mother? An' chaps, too, of course. But we, we somehow have a tradition behind us besides an economic slavery. We've got the race on our shoulders, an' all th' other besides'".[15] With its scathing narrator and Marxist-feminist class politics, the novel caused a stir in the labour press, and Carnie Holdsworth lost the support of many of her previous allies who condemned what the author would go on to defend as her 'first attempt to portray a horrible social struggle'.[16]

The opening of *This Slavery* clearly indicates the importance that the kitchen space will have on our understanding of the characters and the narrative events that follow. The action of the text begins at the end of a long and tiring washing day, as Hester, Rachel, and their grandmother sit quietly around the fire in the darkening kitchen. The lights have not yet been lit in a bid at economy, and the household is at peace – Hester is darning her stocking, Rachel is reading Edward Clodd – until they receive a visit from Jack Baines, a fellow weaver who hopes to wed Hester.[17] The narrator offers an expansive depiction of this intimate opening scene:

> Mrs Martin was out. Without her restless, bustling energy, the kitchen had an air of peaceful dreaming. Firelight hid the worn look of the oilcloth. The battered bust of Beethoven on the mantel-shelf between prosaic tea-

[13] On this short-lived publishing venture, see Pat Francis, 'The Labour Publishing Company 1920-9', *History Workshop Journal*, 18 (1984), 114-23.

[14] Weeklies such as *Peg's Paper* (established 1919) and *Ivy Stories* (1922-39) offered their working-class readership cheap entertainment through romantic serial fiction and 'matey' advice. See Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

[15] Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (London: The Labour Publishing Company, 1925), p. 59. All future page references are given in the text.

[16] Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, 'Mrs E. Carnie Holdsworth's New Novel', *Blackburn Times*, 27 June 1925, p. 16.

[17] Edward Clodd (1840-1930) was an early follower of Charles Darwin and worked to popularise his theories through texts like the much reprinted, *The Childhood of the World: A Simple Account of Man in Early Times* (London: Macmillan, 1873).

caddy and coffee-canister frowned splendid courage in the shadow. Glints of flame from the fire were reflected in the glass that screened the face of gentle William Morris. Liebknecht, the companion picture, looked out in the shadows, as though contemplating with twilight grief the respectable poverty of this Lancashire household (5).

This domestic portrait is fascinating on a number of fronts. In the first place, the key material signifiers of the respectable working-class kitchen – fire, oilcloth, mantel-shelf, tea-caddy – are subtly re-configured. Take as an interesting comparison the first depiction of the Eastons' kitchen in Robert Tressell's classic novel of working-class life, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, published in 1914:

> At one end was a small range with an oven and a boiler, [and] a high mantelpiece painted black. On the mantelshelf was a small round alarm clock and some brightly polished tin canisters. At the other end of the room, facing the fireplace, was a small dresser on the shelves of which were neatly arranged a number of plates and dishes. [...] In the middle of the room was an oblong deal table with a white tablecloth upon which the tea things were set ready. [...] An air of homely comfort pervaded the room; the atmosphere was warm, and the fire blazed cheerfully over the whitened hearth.[18]

There is a long narrative history of a sentimentalised representation of the 'homely comfort' of the respectable working-class home. The pattern of longing embodied in this depiction of the working-class interior is, as Ian Haywood notes in his article in this collection, most significantly articulated in two influential twentieth-century sociological studies: George Orwell's charting of The Great Depression in *The Road to Wigan Pier* and Richard Hoggart's recollections of the interwar period, published as *The Uses of Literacy*.[19] Julia Swindells and Lisa Jardine have identified 'the *topos* of the "comely" family home' as a key formative component in the narrative of English socialism.[20]

It is this way of writing the working-class interior as a place of retreat and succour for the family breadwinner, as exemplified in the depiction of the Eastons' kitchen in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, that Carnie Holdsworth directly engages with in *This Slavery*. For in contrast to the Eastons' home, with its 'clean and cosy house with a table set invitingly for tea', Carnie Holdsworth

[18] Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914 and 1955; London: Flamingo, 1993), p. 51.
[19] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962); and Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and entertainments* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).
[20] Julia Swindells and Lisa Jardine, *What's Left? Women in Culture and the Labour Movement* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 13.

is concerned to point out that there is little 'homely comfort' in the Martins' 'respectable poverty'.[21] Though the fire, an important image throughout the novel, is lit in this opening scene, it neither provides sufficient heat nor 'blaze[s] cheerfully'; the characters' first dialogue involves the girls' grandmother asking if it is 'deein' down' and for her rocking-chair to be moved nearer to it (5). Nor does it illuminate a relatively prosperous interior. Even without the devastation that the mill fire at the end of Chapter 1 wreaks upon the family economy, the Martins' abode is from the opening a place of deprivation: the oilcloth is worn (Mrs Martin later worries about a 'rent' in it, fearful of the poverty-stricken look of a bare floor), the dresser is old, the couch 'shabby'. The narrator finds little to romanticize in the material conditions of the poor working-class household. This in fact is the essence of her reply to the *Sunday Worker*'s critique of the novel ('she can see in poverty – nothing but poverty'): 'As one who was half-starving in the richest city in the world only three years ago, [...] I can see nothing in dry crusts but – dry crusts'.[22]

What is romanticised in this opening scene are the prominent visual markers of the household's politics. Prints of popular left-wing figures such as William Morris and Karl Liebknecht adorned the walls of many socialist households in this period and were readily available through weeklies like the *Clarion* and the *Labour Leader*.[23] However, what makes Carnie Holdsworth's reference to them so striking in the opening of *This Slavery*, is their relative absence in male left-wing writers' depictions of the home. This is an intriguing anomaly. A more common way of signifying a characters' political engagement – or 'difference' – through their domestic interior, is by the presence of books. In the home of Frank Owen, Tressell's socialist autodidact, there are a number of shelves of books by the fireplace. Similarly, in Larry Meath's lodgings in Walter Greenwood's 1933 novel, *Love on the Dole*, it is the character's collection of books to which the narrator draws particular attention: 'Books arranged on shelves either side the fireplace. A comforting sight; so extraordinary a furnishing of a North Street front room.'[24]

In *This Slavery*, however, the material realities of the weekly budget do not stretch to the purchasing of books: the texts which Rachel so eagerly consumes enter the home either via the Co-operative lending library, or the pockets of Jack Baines (being his weekly pretext for calling upon Hester). By furnishing the Martins' kitchen with popular reproductions of figures in the labour movement, rather than using the material object of the book to signify

[21] Eileen Yeo, 'Women and Socialism in Tressell's World', in *The Robert Tressell Lectures 1981-88*, ed. David Alfred (Rochester: Workers Educational Association, 1988), pp. 79-92 (p. 85).
[22] 'Peachem', 'The Books They Write', *Sunday Worker*, 5 July 1925, p. 9. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, letter in 'The Books They Write', *Sunday Worker*, 26 July 1925, p. 6.
[23] Kenneth Morgan draws attention to the long-running 'cult of personality' in the Labour movement in *Labour People: Leaders and Lieutenants, Hardie to Kinnock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 1.
[24] Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (1933; London: Vintage, 1993), p. 190.

its inhabitants' characters, Carnie Holdsworth thus politicises the space of the kitchen *itself* in this novel. From her early prose, she had sought to challenge what she saw as the wilful naivety of 'separate spheres' thinking as it made itself felt in the labour and socialist movements, consistently drawing attention to the 'slavery' that working-class women faced *within* the home in addition to the work that they did outside of it. In a provocative article in the *Woman Worker*, she pronounced:

> Oh, these houses, with their carpets that are always wanting shaking, and myriad knick-knacks that are for ever wanting dusting and washing – what are they responsible for! [...] Nothing is as pitiful as a poor, mindless drudge, who can see nothing, hear nothing beyond the four walls of her home.[25]

It is highly revealing that these ubiquitous prints fail to feature in the homes of politicised male characters – such as Frank Owen, Larry Meath, or the trade union leader, Jim Cameron, in Harold Heslop's 1935 novel, *Last Cage Down*.[26] This apparently confirms a tendency towards the separation of the home from the 'political' in the writing of male authors as didactic in their own way as Carnie Holdsworth.[27] With the prominent representations of Morris and Liebknecht colouring their living quarters, the Martins' home is anything but a place of retreat from the class struggle outside its walls.

The protagonists' kitchen in *This Slavery* is the primary site for the playing out of a 'class' narrative: class in all its political, material, cultural and economic forms. Towards the end of the first chapter, the brutalities of working-class existence (Hester describes this as having 'to fight for everything – bread, love, everything – like beasts') are manifested in a fiery family conference that significantly takes place around the kitchen table (18). After welcoming Jack into her home and setting a place for him at the table for supper, Mrs Martin dashes his hopes of courting Hester with a determined response to the potential loss of a family breadwinner: "'I'm going on for fifty. I've worked nigh on forty years in the factory. I'll have to go till I drop I'm thinking. I can't keep three on us on our Rachel's bit o'brass. We'll be half clemmed when our Hessie's gone'" (15-16).

The variety of economic transactions that occurred between dependent family members around the kitchen table forms a staple part of working-class writing. The handing-over of the breadwinner's weekly wage package to

[25] Ethel Carnie, 'Our Right to Play', *Woman Worker*, 14 April 1909, p. 342.

[26] Harold Heslop, *Last Cage Down* (Wishart, 1935; repr. Lawrence & Wishart, 1984).

[27] This separation is most neatly illustrated in the first two chapters of *Last Cage Down*. Whilst the first chapter follows Jim at work in the mine, the second is given over to a detailed description of the home that he lives in with his mother, where the main narrative event is his taking of a bath in the kitchen. There is however a framed photograph of Keir Hardie above the mantelshelf in the kitchen of Desmond Fury, the Labour activist in James Hanley's *The Furys* (1935; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 275.

'mother' (either on a Friday night or a Saturday lunch time) was a much-anticipated event in the household, and important in both financial and symbolic terms. In this scene, as Mrs Martin's resistance to Jack's proposals in the name of the household's economic survival thwart Hester's romance plot, the author graphically illustrates the role that the family economy played in determining young working-class women's lives. In a recent study of the importance of young women workers as a significant proportion of the labour market in the first half of the twentieth century, the historian Selina Todd takes issue with the 'male breadwinner model', arguing that this has obscured the significance of young women as wage earners. She comments that, 'daughters' earnings were an integral, regular and crucial component of the family economy'.[28] Mary Martin's insistence on Hester's duty as a wage earner (she later comes to regret this) has a devastating effect on her daughter: 'It was almost as though she were being told that she had not yet paid off the debt she owed for having been brought into the world and worked for – till she was eleven years old' (15). It is part of Carnie Holdsworth's critique of the economic system that the labour market can have such an effect upon the lives and loves of her characters. With Hester forced to pass up her worker sweetheart, the chain of events that will lead to her marriage to the mill owner Sanderson – described by Jack as a *'Prostitution'* to capitalism – are put into play (142).

In Book II of the novel, the 'box-like' working-class home becomes a dramatic site of class retribution (10). The action in this second half of the text, after Hester's wedding with Sanderson ('a beginning which is traditionally the ending of a tale') revolves around a strike led by Hester's thwarted suitor, Jack Baines (126). As in the earlier industrial novel – such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* – the break-down in industrial relations exposes the mill-owners' myopia in attempting to separate the comforts enjoined in their domestic properties from the work that goes on in their factories, and of neglecting their responsibility towards the workers in name of the profits they can make out of them (there is much talk of harsh driving and pitiable wages in the mills of *This Slavery*). The strikers are keen to make their suffering felt at the doors of their employers. In Chapter 24, Sanderson and Hester's home is surrounded by 'the feet [of] an iron chorus' as the workers amass outside their gates (unsurprisingly, Sanderson shuns the type of heroism favoured by Gaskell's mill-owner, John Thornton, preferring instead to make sure that the doors are locked and firmly bolted).

Whilst the mill-owners continue to deny the links between their own properties and those of their workers, the author graphically brings home the inextricability of their fates when Stephen – Hester and Sanderson's crippled son – dies from the diphtheria that has been rampant in the poor quarters of

[28] Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 57.

the town. With more than her usual didacticism, Carnie Holdsworth lays the blame for the child's illness firmly upon Sanderson: the disease is deemed to have spread from the poor drains on his properties which he neglected to have fixed. In punishing Sanderson in this way, the author re-figures the image of the leaking, permeable working-class home – the sporadic concern of sanitary reformers from the early nineteenth century onwards – into a powerful symbol of class retribution. As a tutor for the Central Labour College, Carnie Holdsworth would certainly have been aware of the passage in Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* when he describes:

> The unusual activity which the sanitary police manifested during the cholera visitation, [...] [when] a universal terror seized the bourgeoisie of the city. People remembered the unwholesome dwellings of the poor, and trembled before the certainty that each of these slums would become a centre for the plague, whence it would spread desolation in all directions through the houses of the propertied classes.[29]

Hester speaks for the author when she declares: "'He has been killed by the spread of disease from the poor quarters of the town. You cannot set frontiers in the air'" (177). The narrator wryly adds, 'the diseases of unhygienic poverty at least could leap, like avenging angels, even where hygiene was' (179).

Ellen Wilkinson (1891-1947): *Clash*

Clash, published in 1929 by George G. Harrap & Co., was Ellen Wilkinson's first novel. Born into an upper working-class family in 'a grimy district of industrial Manchester', Wilkinson was a triumphant scholarship girl and achieved a formidable educational standard for a working-class woman of her time, gaining an Honours degree from Manchester University in 1913.[30] By the time she entered the House of Commons as the Labour Party's first female Member of Parliament in 1924, she had worked for Millicent Garrett-Fawcett's National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and as a women's organiser in the trade union movement during the First World War. She went on to have a distinguished political career, consistently championing the cause of social justice and consumer rights. In the late 1930s, she was responsible for bringing in the Hire Purchase Act, which protected working families from losing all of their deposits, and being stripped of their furniture, if they could no longer

[29] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845; London: Penguin, 1987), p. 101.

[30] Ellen Wilkinson, 'Ellen Wilkinson', in *Myself When Young: By Famous Women of Today*, ed. Margot Oxford (London: Frederick Muller, 1938), pp. 399-416 (p. 399). Much of this biographical information comes from Betty Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson, 1891-1947* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

keep up the payments for credit. As the MP for the distressed ship-building constituency of Jarrow, Wilkinson became uniquely identified with the suffering and passions of the Thirties when she led the 1936 Jarrow Hunger Match – a symbolic crusade that had a dramatic impact on the public conscience of the time. She was made Minister of Education in Attlee's post-war Labour Government, shortly before her unexpected death from ill-health in 1947.

As the debut novel of a charismatic politician (Wilkinson was popularly known as 'Red Ellen') and the first published novel by a female MP, *Clash* was eagerly anticipated by the press and met with an astonishing amount of publicity.[31] Appearing just two months before the General Election of 1929 and depicting various well-known figures – Lady Astor, Winston Churchill and the current Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin – the novel's propaganda value as a 'romance-cum-Labour' story was much commented upon.[32] *Clash* centres upon the activities of its feisty protagonist, Joan Craig, a young trade union organiser from Yorkshire, who travels to London in the novel's opening to witness the start of the 1926 General Strike. Her political activity there throws up two romantic entanglements: Tony Dacre, a bohemian who becomes temporarily swept up into support for the strikers (despite the staunch conservatism of his formidable wife), and Captain Gerry Blain, a crippled First World War veteran who professes an ardent socialism. It is Joan's task in the heady, turbulent days of the General Strike and the months following its ignominious collapse during the miners' lock out, to choose between these two suitors: the former for whom she has a genuine passion, the latter with whom her political allegiances and moral scruples are more sensibly aligned. It is the narrator's depiction of the characters' relation to the home and the domestic interior that finally enables Joan to make her romantic and class-based choices.

The central domestic interior in the text, and the space to which the narrative gaze most often returns, is the Gordon Square home of Joan's 'wealthy bachelor woman' friend, the ex-suffragette and literary hostess, Mary Maud Meadowes.[33] This is where Joan first goes when she arrives in London, and where she stays during the course of the Strike. Despite the fact that Mary Maud gains some of her income from mining, she, like several of the other 'parlour-Bolshies in Bloomsbury', is prompted by Joan to support the strikers

[31] *Clash* was reviewed by most of the national and regional daily papers, as well as various magazines and monthlies. All of these reviews, which total some eighty pages, are collected in the Ellen Wilkinson scrapbooks in the British Labour Party archive. Bodleian Library Oxford, British Labour Party Archive, General Correspondence and Political records. Part 9, Section B: The Marion Phillips Papers and Ellen Wilkinson Scrapbooks, X Films 83/32, W1/6.

[32] Anon, 'The General Strike and After', *Hull Daily Mail*, 19 April 1929; in the Ellen Wilkinson Scrapbooks, Labour Party Archives, 83/32 W1/6 (p. 30).

[33] Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Harrap, 1929; London: Virago, 1989), p. 17. All future page references are given in the text. Mary Maud Meadowes is based on Margaret, Lady Rhonda (1883-1958), who founded the feminist weekly periodical, *Time and Tide*, to which Ellen regularly contributed.

during the tumultuous week of the strike.[34] Our first glimpse into her flat offers a tantalising view into a decadent and hedonistic lifestyle. Mary Maud has been out partying into the night with society's Bright Young Things:

> Joan let herself into the hall and cautiously tiptoed upstairs. Very quietly she opened the door of the balconied room on the first floor. The big standard lamp was still alight, and Mary Maud, huddled in a green and gold velvet wrapper, lay on the divan, a cigarette-holder still in her fingers, though the cigarette had burnt to ash (19).

The flat's Gordon Square address is significant. Since 1904, Gordon Square had been known as the geographical home of the Bloomsbury group, that exclusive circle whom, according to the narrator of *Clash*, 'bestowed fame on themselves by writing reviews of each other's books' (17).[35] In contrasting the problems of the 'overcrowded little houses' in the striking mining districts with the opulent interiors of the Bloomsbury literati, Wilkinson intended *Clash* to be read as a provocative spatial challenge to the metropolitan chattering classes (244): 'Round that little West London stretch the great areas of Shadwell and Stepney, Wapping and Whitechapel, and further still, the coalfields of the Midlands and the furnaces of the North. "We are the people of England and we have not spoken yet"'.[36]

Mary Maud's 'jewel box' of a home, with its soft furnishings, 'cheery electric fire' and 'soothing beauty', is explicitly framed as a nest in the novel, a 'bolt-hole' for all of the characters during the turmoil of the General Strike (several of them are bathed, rested, and fed here) (20-21). Its interior decoration is a topic of discussion between Mary and Joan in their opening dialogue:

> 'Oh, Mary Maud, how lovely. You have had it all redone since I was here'.
>
> 'It *is* rather nice. It's by a woman decorator. You must meet her. I got so tired of Gornuikh's cubes and angles – bleak, sharp things to live with. This is Helen Dacre's. She loves comfort as I do. Don't these velvet purples and greens and reds seem cosy?' (20)[37]

[34] 'Parlour-Bolshies' is Hannen Swaffer's phrase. See Hannen Swaffer, 'Clash', *Daily Express*, 9 May 1929, p. 5.

[35] Wilkinson lived in Bloomsbury when she stayed in London for her parliamentary work. On the importance of this space to the socialist-feminist imagination, and the connections between the women who lived within it, see Carolyn Steedman, 'Fictions of Engagement: Eleanor Marx, Biographical Space', in *Eleanor Marx (1855-1898): Life, Work, Contacts*, ed. John Stokes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 23-40; and Catherine Clay, *British Women Writers 1914-1945: Professional Work and Friendship* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[36] Ellen Wilkinson, 'The Wage-Workers' Place in Literature', *Plebs*, November 1929, pp. 247-48 (p. 247).

[37] Wilkinson appears to have invented the name Gornuikh to suggest links with the English

It is clearly significant that Mary Maud's room is described in such terms. By the time *Clash* was published, the aesthetic ideals of the avant-garde 'Modern Movement' were firmly established.[38] Celebrating the simplification of form, the rejection of ornamentation, and the prominent use of modern building materials like glass, steel and reinforced concrete, the champions of the new architectural 'honesty' and 'transparency' of the '20s saw it as symbolic of a shift in the cultural, social and economic order of post-war society.[39] Walter Benjamin described 'naked' living as a pared down existence seized upon by a war weary-generation sated by 'the endless complications of everyday living'.[40] The home, according to the proponents of this movement, was to be a rationalized space, stripped of all superfluity and excess (the architect Le Corbusier infamously described the home as a 'machine for living in' in his influential 1923 manifesto, *Vers Une Architecture*).[41] Much of this thinking was politically inspired by contemporary developments in Soviet Russia, where there was a concerted effort to shed 'petit-bourgeois cosiness' and to establish the clean and orderly spaces of socialism on the home-front.[42] Visions of a new way of dwelling, whereby people would live in minimalist homes free from their 'self-imposed slavery by things', promised to lead to profound changes in the patterns of everyday life, emancipating women and men from a selfhood that had, in Marxist terms, previously been premised upon the possession of, and attachment to, material objects.[43]

As a founding member of the British Communist Party and a frequent visitor to Soviet Russia in the 1920s, Wilkinson was well aware of these debates. That Mary Maud has turned away from the starkness of the modernist avant-garde and re-embraced the notion of 'comfort' in her drawing room is therefore of consequence. Throughout the text, her home acts, in Walter

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Vorticists and the Russian Constructivists. As a reader of Soviet literature, she may have come across the name through Yuri Libedinsky's novel, *A Week*, trans. Arthur Ransome (Allen & Unwin, 1923), in which a heroic character called Gornuikh leads the proletariat to truth. See Eric Konkol, '*A Week* by Yuri Libedinsky', SovLit <http://www.sovlit.com/week/> [accessed 22 March 2007]. Thanks to Maroula Joannou, Stan Smith and Sean Matthews for this reference.

[38] In the same year as the publication of *Clash*, Dorothy Todd (former editor of *Vogue*) and Raymond Mortimer (an intimate of the Bloomsbury circle) celebrated these ideals in a collaborative venture, *The New Interior Decoration* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1929).

[39] See Katrina Van Herck, '"Only Where Comfort Ends, does Humanity Begin": On the "Coldness" of Avant-Garde Architecture in the Weimar Period', in *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, ed. Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (Routledge, 2005), pp. 123-44

[40] Walter Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty' (1933), in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. II, 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 731-36 (p. 735).

[41] Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture* (Paris: 1923). This was published in English as *Towards a New Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1927).

[42] See Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

[43] This is from Bruno Taut's influential 1924 work, *Die neue Wohnung. Die Frau als Schopferin* (The New Dwelling. The Woman as Creator); cited in Van Herck, p. 130.

Benjamin's terms, as a 'stimulus to intoxication and dream'.[44] This is seen for example when Mary prefers to indulge in her luxurious surroundings and her dreams of 'sacrificing' her protégé to the Women's Movement (elsewhere this is directly related to the elder generation's willingness to sacrifice the younger generation in the First World War), rather than engaging with the suffering of the people: 'But it was not in Miss Meadowes' comfortable nature to remain worried for long. She settled herself before the fire and allowed herself to be petted by Suzanne with a lovely cup of hot chocolate. She wanted to help the miners, but it was pleasanter to dream about Joan' (112-13). When the reader finally sees into Joan's 'little attic' room with Gerry (this is seen only once in the text), it is little surprise that the protagonist's simple, functional surroundings embody the 'honesty' of the Modern Movement, as well as the best of socialist cleanliness and order. This is the antithesis of Mary Maud's domestic space:

> The walls were papered with a plain blue paper, against which some bold black and white lino-cuts in narrow black frames gave a distinction that no colours could have done. The furniture, a heavy table, some chairs and a small plain writing-desk were obviously of cheap wood and had been painted black. There were a few pieces of thick dead-white French pottery. The curtains which Joan drew across the window exactly matched the walls. As Gerry had said, there no frills – but it was a restful room (224).

In terms of the partisan politics of the plot, the interior of Mary Maud's home represents a direct threat to Joan's political credibility. Each time the young trade unionist returns to it, her class allegiances are muted, the social world forgotten. A particularly revealing example of this process is seen in the following passage:

> Carey's Main was already fading a little out of the picture. It was lovely to be back again in Mary Maud's house, sitting by the fire, to eat one of Suzanne's perfectly cooked meals, and to hear all the gossip. And after supper – a long luxurious smoke, snuggling in the cushions, wrapped in the soft beauty of the charming room (269).

Joan's sensual pleasure here is clearly undercut by a contemporary critique of the 'cosiness' of the bourgeois interior as a wilful denial of social and political reality. The references to physical consumption, smoke, gossip, 'snuggling' into the furniture, and Joan's being 'wrapped' up in the beauty of the room – all of which encourage her to forget the more immediate problems of the striking mining districts – suggest a dulling of the mind and an

[44] Walter Benjamin, 'The Interior, The Trace', in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLauglin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 212-27 (p. 216). Benjamin carried out this work between 1927 and 1940.

envelopment of the senses.[45] Walter Benjamin described the smothering effects of the nineteenth-century domestic interior; the kind of stuffy, outdated lair of a home that Mary Maud lives, in the following terms: 'To live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider's web, in whose toils world events hang loosely suspended like so many insect bodies sucked dry. From this cavern, one does not like to stir'.[46]

As the text progresses, the question of Joan's class positionality is directly related to the lure of Mary Maud's home. She is upbraided by her Union boss's straight-talking Yorkshire wife for prolonging her stay in London after the end of the strike, 'day-dreaming in Miss Meadowes' chocolate-box' (191-92), and Gerry forces the issue when he questions Joan's increasingly evident investment in a 'soft-cushions-and-hot-baths life' (299). The reader is meant to understand that Joan must separate herself from the 'cosiness' of Mary Maud's bourgeois interior is she is to retain her fighting status in the 'big broad issue' of 'class against class', 'the issue that this century will be occupied in fighting out' (309). After she has decided to marry Gerry, rather than Tony (and therefore to keep her independent working life), it is 'Mary Maud at home' that Joan cannot allow herself to face (308). Gerry's 'shabby' rooms in Great Ormond Street, with their more familiar domestic signifiers (gas-ring, kettle, tea-things, and hearth) are the final setting for the plot (157).

Wilkinson's depiction of interior spaces in *Clash*, however, reveals more than an unquestioning championing of modernist orthodoxy. Despite the critique of a smothering bourgeois culture in the novel, in line with both contemporary Marxist and avant-garde thinking on domestic space, there is a concomitant recognition that emotional ties to a world of material things are not so easy to displace. Joan's desire for the comforts of Mary Maud's home is not difficult to understand in light of the interwar 'England' of the novel:

> The great steel towns of the north, the mining villages she knew so well, the little homes in which she had stayed during her organizing tours. Decent men and women working far too hard, crowded together in uncomfortable homes. Lack of obvious things like baths and hot water, lack of comforts, and, for at least five years, lack of food and warm clothes (51).

The narrative attention to the numerous hot baths taken in Mary Maud's 'perfectly tiled bathroom' (there is even a prolonged exchange between Joan and Mary Maud on the curiosity of bath salts) seems less incongruous when one remembers that the more common alternative for most of the population is 'a tin bath in the scullery once a week' (275). Nor for that matter, should

[45] In Soviet Russia, 'soft' furnishings were considered hazardous to health. See Buchli, p. 45.
[46] Benjamin, 'The Interior, The Trace', p. 216.

Joan's working-class origins be ignored. Whilst Joan refers to her childhood only once in the text, in a flippant moment of revelation with Tony – 'I was born in a slum and nearly in a factory, for mother worked at her looms till the last minute' – her relish for Gordon Square's seductive interior can only be understood through reference to the material deprivation in the home from which she has come (34). At one point she creeps fully dressed underneath the covers in her mauve and silver bedroom in Mary Maud's house: 'It was an old habit, dating from childhood in her crowded little home. Warm bedrooms were an unknown luxury then. The only chance of any privacy was to slip between the sheets in the dark, cold little room and hope people would forget her' (183). Despite the protagonist's class trajectory, it is this original home that continues to determine her perception of space.

Wilkinson was also well aware that, in spite of the prominence that the 'Modern Movement' achieved in certain circles, its apparent rejection of the practices of home-making made it difficult to accept in everyday life. Whilst its heroic rhetoric may have filled architectural journals, it was, as the historian John Burnett points out, 'experimented with, rather than adopted, in England'.[47] In *Clash*, the Russell Square home of Tony's wife, Helen Dacre (its interior decoration is wholly her preserve), is the subject of some merciless satire. Joan describes their front room as resembling something of a 'super-celestial bar':

> After the glowing comfort of Mary Maud's flat Joan was surprised at the starkness of Helen's own. The room was a study in silver and red. The walls and ceiling were covered in dull silver. The woodwork was quite straight, no mouldings, no curves anywhere, and painted a bright red. The chairs were of ebony and upholstered in silver-grey, and the table had a top of hammered silver. Dulled white glass with geometrical black and red lines drawn on it made curious lampshades (38).

The Dacre's home is not a place to live in: Tony admits to Joan that this is Helen's 'showroom' and is rarely used by the pair (38). In addition to the lack of a sexual relationship between husband and wife (they sleep in separate bedrooms), the narrator is keen to point out that their home is bereft of food and day-to-day comforts. In Chapter 9 for example, Helen sits having a 'sketchy breakfast' in an empty kitchenette. Whilst the overabundance of food in Mary Maud's home may be criticised, the narrator has equally little sympathy for what is presented as the selfishness of the Modern Woman who can so utterly neglect the physical business of home-life:

> Tony's joke about his food at home was not without foundation. Helen cared nothing about food. Her smart maid did not live in, and the daily char couldn't be expected to cook. Consequently, what meals the Dacres had at home were hastily collected when required from the nearest *delicatessen* shop. Helen seemed to have no notion of stores or even of quick cooking (106).

[47] John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1970* (London: David & Charles, 1978), p. 262.

Wilkinson's nuanced treatment of domestic space in *Clash* indicates that it is not necessarily comfort *per se* which is critiqued. As the depiction of the Dacres' home shows, its absence makes for poverty in human relationships. It is rather the inhabitants' attitudes to their material goods that is at stake. Over the course of the 1920s, a more complex understanding of materiality emerged in Russia as it became clear that Soviet prosperity was threatened by the castigation of all material culture as petit-bourgeois, and that workers' desire for material goods and well-being had not changed from the pre-Revolutionary days. The problem of comfort could be accommodated if material culture was understood contextually rather than denotatively.[48] Wilkinson's depiction of the characters' interior spaces in *Clash* bears out this thinking. For whilst Joan's room is described by Gerry as 'a jolly comfy place', because of her hectic lifestyle she is not tied to it (Gerry is disappointed to find that there are no signs that she even sleeps there) (224). Helen Dacre and Mary Maud's attachment to their property is very different however. Whilst, as I have described, Mary Maud 'sinks' into her furnishings, it is her 'property and comfort' that Helen clings to when the question of Tony divorcing her is raised (75). Helen, who is said to have a 'very strongly developed property-sense' (176), adheres to what the text presents as the 'Victorian' notion of marriage as a room, a 'bedroom with a suite of furniture and a large brass bedstead' (39). This is the opposite of the type of mobile, comradely marriage where 'work comes first', that Joan achieves at the end of the text by deciding to live with Gerry (310).

In both *This Slavery* and *Clash*, the home is represented as a central locale in the landscape of class struggle. The inhabitants' relationship to its objects and interior spaces, and their lived understanding of its material realities, dictates their consciousness of class and gender and holds great sway over their romantic imaginings. In *This Slavery*, Carnie Holdsworth takes issue with a sanitised writing of the respectable working-class interior, a separation of the home from the 'political' that is evident in much male working-class writing and is typified in George Orwell's oft-quoted gaze into the working-class interior in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: 'In a working-class home [...] you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not easy to find elsewhere. [...] I have often been struck by the peculiar easy completeness, the perfect symmetry as it were, of a working-class interior at its best'.[49] The

[48] As Buchli explains, 'an object of material culture could no longer represent unambiguously petit-bourgeois values. [...] Rather, it was the relationship one had with the stuffed sofa which determined consciousness', p. 56.

[49] Orwell, p. 104.

kitchen in *This Slavery* is a place of economic want and deprivation, and the site where the Martin sisters' awareness of their place in a class society is formed. In Ellen Wilkinson's *Clash*, the protagonist must 'read' the materiality of the home and distinguish her desire from the seditious bourgeois interior in order to make the politically correct choice of marriage and home life for which she is most suited as a class-conscious and politically active woman. In both of these once popular, though now neglected texts of the late 1920s, domesticity and ideas about the home are central to the ways in which class 'happens'.

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Gender and Community in 1930s Working-Class Writing

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This essay offers a reading of two texts, George Garrett's story 'Firstborn' (1934), and James Hanley's novel *Stoker Bush* (1935).[1] There is a tradition of work concerned with working-class identity, in the line running from George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), through Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), and Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958), which, although centrally important for its accounts of working-class social mores and experience, has long been criticized for its failure properly to address issues around gender and sexuality.[2] Since the 1960s, much has been done to begin to redress this imbalance, particularly in the fields of History and of Cultural Studies – in Women's History and Women's Studies – and in feminist-inflected literary criticism. My reading of Garrett and Hanley sets them in the context of these currents of critical history, and begins the reassessment of the value of these fictions for our understanding of gender and sexuality in 1930s working-class communities.

The Making of Working-Class Community

If one were to list 'traditional British working-class values,' then the word 'community' would certainly appear close to the top. Constellated around this concept would be an assortment of associated phrases suggesting the characteristics of such communities: 'close-knit,' 'familiar,' 'extended families,' 'strong ties' and 'in and out of each others' houses.' The sense of a geographically and socially delimited arena of human interaction, unique and exclusive to the working class, predominates in writing both by and about the working class in the period. Some working-class writers took pride in community and communal values, seeing them as a crucial part of their class identity, whereas others preferred to show how a working-class community's supposedly nurturing solidarity was undermined, either by oppressive forces from without or by internal contradictions. Writers from outside the working class, most famously George Orwell, give particular emphasis to the positive aspects of working-class life.

In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell offers a classic account of 'a working-class interior at its best'.[3] Orwell acknowledges that he is concerned with a

[1] George Garrett, 'Firstborn', in *The Collected George Garrett*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Michael Murphy (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 1999), pp. X-Y. James Hanley, *Stoker Bush* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935).

[2] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989, c.1937); Richard Hoggart *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992, c.1957), and Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).

[3] Orwell, p. 108.

'comparatively prosperous home', a situation only possible 'if [the man being] is in steady work and drawing good wages – an if which gets bigger and bigger', but his representation nonetheless describes the familiar, even iconic features of working-class contentment:

> Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking-chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat – it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently *of* it to be taken for granted.

Samuel Hynes has argued, however, that this passage is based not on a direct observation made during the countrywide trek on which the book was based, but rather on recollections of how working-class households were imagined to look during Orwell's Edwardian childhood, on a stereotype already in place:

Two aspects of this vision are especially striking, when one considers that it occurs in a 'documentary' book written by a socialist. First, the political implications are essentially conservative—just keep the working classes working and they will be happy, happier than *we* are; and second, the secure and cheerful life that they live is one from which middle-class intellectuals are excluded—*we* can never be *them,* and *they* can never be *us.* The fictional tradition operating here is no longer the proletarian novel: this passage is in the Dickensian tradition of the sentimental poor. It defines human happiness in terms of domestic security and family bonds, says nothing about class solidarity or political or social action, and makes poverty a happy, innocent state. It is a very odd passage indeed for a socialist to write.[4]

In the context of the 1930s, an era of profound economic depression, Orwell's idea of a contented working class seems, at best, a sentimental idealisation. Working-class life in the decades between the two World Wars was too often in fact characterised by poverty, political unrest and violent confrontation.[5] In the early 1920s unemployment was endemic. Collective social protest was the historical norm rather than the exception: there were six national marches to protest about working-class living conditions between 1922 and 1936, the General Strike of 1926, and the Jarrow Marches of 1933, 1934 and 1936.m Violent public clashes between police and unemployed demonstrators were commonplace. In addition, the tensions generated in the

[4] Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976), p. 276.

[5] See Ross McKibbon, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen-Thirties* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1971).

1930s by such political organisations as Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (the Blackshirts) ensured that the working class inhabited an atmosphere charged with potential violence. Such events as the B.U.F occupation of Olympia on the Seventh of June 1934,[6] and the hostilities at Cable Street between anti-fascist groups and the Blackshirts on October 4 1936 (which led to the Public Order Act of that same year), were symptomatic of widespread tension and unease.[7]

Events such as these had an obvious effect on the male-dominated spheres of workplace, street and picket line – effects powerfully recorded in the classic proletarian fictions of the time, one thinks of Walter Greenwood, Lewis Jones – but at the level of working-class communities their repercussions were also felt in the female-dominated domestic sphere. When the breadwinner of a working-class household was out of work, denied parish relief or blacklisted by employers for his involvement in industrial action, it fell to the wife and mother, regarded as the central figure in the home, to cope with financial circumstances that were often close to impossible. The writings of Garrett and Hanley, as I discuss below, are distinctive for the sympathetic emphasis they give to the impact of unemployment on the domestic sphere.

Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* offers a more balanced view than Orwell of working-class life in the 1920s and 1930s working class, but Hoggart does also accentuate many of the more positive aspects of the lives he investigates: holidays and recreational activities; the intimacy and friendliness of tightly-knit communities; and the notion, consonant with *The Road to Wigan Pier,* of a beneficial mutual support and solidarity that grows among people who are struggling financially. Raymond Williams, particularly in his earlier writing, saw an intrinsic value in working-class popular culture and recreation, and considered them a vital part of class identity. However, where Hoggart can, as in his account of working-class political apathy, appear quietist in the face of socio-economic inequality, Williams saw working-class culture as plagued by deprivations that could only be removed through social transformation, the 'long revolution'.[8] The stress on such transformation that runs through Williams's work sets him apart from Hoggart and other, external observers of the working-class such as Orwell.

Despite these important distinctions, Orwell, Hoggart and Williams share a critical and historical blind spot with regard to women's experience. Tellingly, Juliet Mitchell's groundbreaking contribution to debates around class and gender, drawing attention specifically to this deficiency in the 'Culture and Society' tradition, was entitled 'Women: The Longest Revolution' (1966).[9] 'The

[6] Roland Blythe, *The Age of Illusion: England in the Twenties and Thirties, 1919-1940* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), p. 176.

[7] John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics 1929-1939,* 2nd ed. (Harlow: Longman, 1994), p. 230.

[8] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961).

[9] Juliet Mitchell, 'Women: The Longest Revolution', *New Left Review* 40, November-December

problem of the subordination of women and the need for their liberation was recognized by all the great socialist thinkers in the 19th century,' Mitchell argues. 'It is part of the classical heritage of the revolutionary movement. Yet today, in the West, the problem has become a subsidiary, if not an invisible element in the preoccupation of socialists. Perhaps no other major issue has been so forgotten.'[10] In a similar vein, Marie Mulvey-Roberts and Tamae Mizuta have demonstrated that the writing of male critics has tended to treat women's issues with caution or even outright mistrust.[11] Despite the tradition of feminist-socialist writing initiated by Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1790s, continued in the Owenite feminism of Anna Wheeler, Eleanor Marx and their contemporaries, and feeding into the Women's Suffrage movement of the early twentieth century, many male socialists considered feminism to be a predominantly bourgeois issue that turned attention away from the class struggle and threatened to become a divisive force. Often they felt that it would be best to 'defer the woman question until after the revolution.'[12] Of female characters in 1930s working-class fiction, Janet Montefiore writes:

> Whereas the stories about working-class men...characteristically emphasise their growth to class-conscious enlightenment, the female victims can only signify misery, not understand it. Their used, degraded bodies represent the suffering of their class, just as their narrow minds represent its emotional deprivations.[13]

There is, however, writing from the period which offers a more suggestive and sympathetic account of the position of the female, or gendered subject, in working-class communities, and a more complex sense of the internal contradictions inherent in such areas. Such work can reveal much about the various forces acting on women within this milieu, and present new perspectives on working-class culture. In this essay I look at two such texts: George Garrett's story 'Firstborn' (1934), and James Hanley's novel *Stoker Bush* (1935).

'What use is a bed to me?' George Garrett's 'Firstborn'.

George Garrett, Merseyside seaman and dedicated campaigner for workers' rights, was familiar with working-class communities throughout his life, and used them as the primary setting for his writing. His earliest and perhaps best

1966, pp. 11-37.

[10] Mitchell, p. 12.

[11] Marie Mulvey-Roberts and Tamae Mizuta (eds.), *The Reformers: Socialist Feminism* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993), pp. xi-xii.

[12] Mulvey-Roberts and Mizuta, p. xiii.

[13] Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 100.

short story, 'Firstborn', is a bleak portrayal of two lives in a working-class community. The protagonists are oppressed and eventually dehumanised by constant economic pressure and hardship. Garrett moves skilfully between the daylight world of the urban seaport (recognizably Liverpool) and a nightmarish dystopia beneath the streets where, in a style reminiscent of Expressionism, man-made sewer tunnels mutate and blur into the channels and orifices of the human body. As Michael Murphy suggests, 'It is difficult to find any possibility of redemption in the harsh necessities portrayed.'[14] However, the work's form, and the nature of Garrett's attention to the central relationship, combine to present a peculiar and distinctive tale.

'Firstborn' opens as, in many ways, a conventional story, and Garrett details familiar experience from people and places he knew well. A sailor, Harry Marsden, agrees to 'call on' Marie, the sister of a shipmate, after a night in the pub. He courts Marie and they marry soon after, whereupon she begins the process of saving enough money to move out of the back room they rent while Harry starts looking for a job with better prospects. The scenario is touchingly presented, with moments of humour, but all the time we are reminded that Harry and Marie's happiness is overshadowed by the extreme difficulties of their material conditions, which are far from those of their own choosing.

The mixture of humour and realism is apparent in passages dealing with the early days of the marriage. For working-class couples of the 1930s who could not afford to provide for or find a suitable home in which to bring up children, the primary form of birth-control was simple abstinence. Although free to consummate their relationship in terms of religious and social dictates, such couples were prevented from doing so by financial constraints. This is the situation in which Harry and Marie find themselves. Garrett humorously reports that Harry's 'resulting bad temper had to be restrained on account of the neighbours,' and that he earns the nickname 'Playfair' at work for his repeated habit of involuntarily muttering 'You're not playing fair'. However, Garrett also makes clear that it is the economic impossibility of bringing a child into the world, and the way this looms over the couple's relationship, that is the real cause of their dilemma. One petulant remark of Harry's ('You're deliberately throwing me open to temptation,') may be open to a critical or satirical reading, as evidence of the mingled self-justification and self-deception characteristic of overblown male egotism, but Marie's tearful response: 'Why do you only think of yourself? Haven't I desires too?' abruptly brings home just how painful this situation is for them both. [15]

The opening pages of 'Firstborn' thus depict a young couple struggling to survive under the constant threat of destitution, and at first we cannot say whether love or poverty will prevail. It is instructive to read the work in the context of debates concerning the representation of romance in proletarian

[14] Michael Murphy, 'Introduction', Garrett, p. xviii.

[15] Garrett, p. 35.

fictions. Pamela A. Fox argues, in her discussion of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, that the function of love in fictions of this time can often be to offer a countervailing or redeeming force to set against social hardship and economic privation. Fox, like Montefiore, observes that 'British proletarian fiction traditionally operates as a masculine genre, largely concerned with public or transformative experience,' and suggests that 'women characters in such works 'operate generally as female subjects within a specific class culture.'[16] The privileging of individual love over collective experience 'comes into play not only to convey a longing for relations based on tenderness rather than exploitation, but also to represent a utopian private arena where one is valued for one's *gendered* "self" alone.' Fox states:

> Romance provides, it seems to me, a most revealing angle of entry into discussions of working-class political narrative; it functions as a complex resistance strategy for women writers, as well as a more obvious reinscription of a dominant convention governing class, gender and literary relations.[17]

It is possible, in this interpretation, to see how the love Marie brings to Harry empowers them to 'detach …[themselves]…from (stigmatizing) class markers and confinements.'[18] The new subject positions they assume stand in opposition to the misery associated with their class. For, just as the 'images of decay, poverty and corrupted sexuality'[19] that Michael Murphy observes are never far away, Garrett provides counterpoints to them in tiny but significant details: Harry and Marie sharing toffees, or Marie wondering to herself 'how such a strong fellow could be so bashfully tender, unaware that in him the new was wrestling with the old.'[20]

As the story progresses, however, 'Firstborn' takes a much darker turn. Working as a sewer-cleaner, Harry encounters the rotting corpse of a human baby blocking a pipe. His own economic situation forces him to remove and dispose of it by himself. To report the death would mean attending an inquest and losing a day's wages, money Harry cannot afford to sacrifice, while to leave the pipe blocked would mean losing his job and going days, possibly months or even years without wages. The duty Harry must therefore undertake in the sewer is powerfully described, an extraordinarily disturbing moment. Garrett details the baby's 'rat-eaten cheek'; its 'throat-tape [that] frayed in Harry's fingers';[21] its arm that Harry inadvertently wrenches off while trying to dislodge it; and the final torrent of sewer water from the unblocked pipe that deluges

16 Fox, p. 60.
17 Fox, p. 58.
18 Fox, p. 64.
19 Garrett, p. xviii.
20 Garrett, p. 34.
21 Garrett, p. 38.

Harry, extinguishing his candle and plunging him into darkness. Garrett moves from the familiar register of proletarian naturalism and romance to a genre more akin to horror or the gothic, a movement accentuated by the suggestion that the world around Harry is distorting into a monstrous intermediary stage between the man-made and the inhumanly 'natural'. Imagery associated with childbirth abounds: the pipe represents the channels of a mother's body, with the dead baby occupying it in a foetal position ('the head pressing hard on the doubled-up knees'), while the foul water of the drain takes the place of amniotic fluid. Harry, assuming the role of midwife in this perverse parody of surgical process, must 'deliver' the child by reaching into the opening, 'wedging his hands behind the buttocks,' and starting to 'drag forcibly.' While he is about this, Garrett notes, 'He could feel the thing moving,' a phrase which carries a disturbing double-meaning: is Harry managing to shift the baby along the pipe, or has his perception of reality been so shattered by this experience that he is beginning to imagine some semblance of life in the decomposing corpse? With the body's eventual extraction from the pipe, and the resultant barrage of filthy overspill (a suggestion of afterbirth?) the appalling episode is complete. Poverty has forced Harry's participation in the ordeal, just as we gather the baby was abandoned in the first place because of the poverty of its mother.

Afterwards Harry's trauma is deep and the story ends a few days later, when he is in a shop with a woman customer and her child:

> Unobserved, the little girl gradually edged her way along the counter. Suddenly she thrust an adventurous hand into Harry's.
>
> 'Hello, mister,' she said.
>
> Startled, he gave the child a terrified push. 'Get away! For God's sake! Don't touch me!' he roared.
>
> The irate mother ran to the doorstep. 'You big brute! If I see a policeman I'll give you in charge.'
>
> His contrition was pathetic. 'Really, I'm sorry, missus. Really! My nerves are gone,' he stammered, as he fumbled for a coin. Obeying its parent, the weeping child flung the sixpence into the street, where it rolled steadily towards a grid.[22]

This closing image of hard-earned wealth trundling down the drain is a clear enough metaphor for the working-class immiseration portrayed in this story. In contrast to the narrative modes of 'socialist realism', which often provided the conventions for proletarian fictions of the period, Garrett refuses to celebrate the values of 'workerism', whereby working-class heroism and solidarity, evidenced in strikes and other forms of protest, lead ultimately to a socialist political victory, with those values reinforced by a climactic resolution.

22 Garrett, pp. 39-40.

'Is anything decent?': James Hanley's *Stoker Bush*

James Hanley was a contemporary of Garrett's and, like him, of Liverpool-Irish origins.[23] He grew up in the working-class communities of Merseyside, and worked as a seaman in his early manhood. Unlike Garrett, however, he was a highly prolific writer and published some fifty books in his lifetime, the twelfth of which – and seventh novel – was *Stoker Bush* (1935). By the mid-1930s Hanley was making his living by his writing, and had a significant reputation. His novel *Boy* (1931), praised by John Cowper Powys and William Faulkner amongst others, was suppressed in 1934 as an 'obscene libel'. Counting such luminaries as Nancy Cunard, Richard Aldington, John Lehmann, T.E. Lawrence and E.M. Forster amongst his supporters, Hanley was recognized as an authentic voice of the working-class, even as he became increasingly displaced and distanced from his origins.

Stoker Bush, as Edward Stokes has argued, transposes the 'very simple and banal plot [of] the eternal triangle of wife, husband and other man' into the world of the working class, lending it 'a certain novelty from its setting in a seaport slum instead of upper-class drawing rooms'.[24] Chris Bush, the eponymous stoker, is married to Anne, a woman slightly his junior and, like him, of working-class origin. Anne is unhappy in the relationship and this is involved in an affair with a bosun's mate, Michael Davitt Rooney. *Stoker Bush* is the story of Chris's discovery of the affair, and of the inexorable break-up of the marriage. The novel ends with Anne finally escaping, leaving their two children with her father and fleeing to Cardiff with her lover.

The importance of *Stoker Bush* is in the way the representation of Anne subtly subverts and challenges the conventions and mores of the working-class community. In order to understand this effect, it is necessary first to offer an account of the force of what Gareth Steadman Jones has characterized as the 'cult of respectability' in this period.

What emerges from Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and other 'documentary' studies focusing on working-class life in the 1930s is a sense of how life was governed by strict conventions, even laws, of acceptable behaviour and proper conduct. Hoggart argues that a working-class wife and mother who embodied the perceived qualities of respectability would be considered laudable and worthy, and neighbours would be likely to compare other, less desirable residents of the same street unfavourably with her. In describing 'the great number of differences, the subtle shades, the class distinctions, within the working classes themselves,' one revealing contrast Hoggart draws is: 'the wife here is a good manager and very houseproud, whereas the one opposite is a slattern.'[25]

[23] John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).
[24] Edward Stokes, *The Novels of James Hanley* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1964), p. 103.
[25] Hoggart, p. 21.

Recent work, such as that by Chris Chinn, Lee Rainwater and Elizabeth Roberts, identifies something amounting to a 'schism' in the working class, a line dividing individuals and families into two categories, according to their perceived 'respectability.' Roberts gives a useful definition of the term:

> The origins of the all-powerful universal norm of respectability are much debated but little agreed upon. It would seem to have several roots: from the Bible, and especially the Ten Commandments, came the rejection of stealing, swearing and adultery; from the Pauline tradition came the suppression of sexuality; the by now well-established industrial discipline contributed the virtues of punctuality, obedience and rigid self-discipline; from the Methodist tradition came the maxim that 'Cleanliness is next to godliness.'[26]

Chinn remarks that the great importance of the working-class matriarch had much to do with the role she played in managing the home, maintaining cleanliness, and preserving respectability.[27]

That it was possible for women to fall into bad habits and find themselves on the other side of the schism was recognised by the working class of the time. Chinn reports the experience of Angela Rodaway, whose mother used this division as a threat, announcing that her daughter would have to become a 'factory girl' if she did not win her scholarship, and Rodaway recalls feeling a genuine fear of girls who worked in the mills, with their raucous behaviour, gaudy dressing and supposed loose morals.[28] As workplaces were, necessarily, dominated by males, the day-to-day contact female workers made with them was considered a spur to their increasing licentiousness. *Stoker Bush's* Anne is already a factory girl, or at least she was, before marrying Chris she worked at a rubber refinery, and this is apparently one of the foremost reasons why Chris's parents, especially his devoutly Christian father, look down on her and regard her and her family to be beneath their son. It is worth noting that most 'respectable' working-class men of the thirties did not believe it appropriate for their wives and daughters to go to work at all. The codes of 'respectability' support, or perhaps legitimate, the preconception of the man's proper role as breadwinner and the woman's as homemaker.

The arbitrary reasons why a woman might be thought to lack respectability were often connected to a complex series of ideas and prejudices rather than solid evidence, and this is where working-class social norms and mores start to become oppressive, conservative and reactionary. For example, Chinn can offer no concrete reason why 'it was not seen fit for a young, single woman to

[26] Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 5.
[27] Chris Chinn, *They Worked all Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 129.
[28] Chinn, p. 94.

drink alone, or with others of her kind, in a public or beer house. If she did she was regarded as "an old tail" or prostitute.'[29] Equally tenuous is the association of a woman who did not keep her house clean with prostitution or 'loose living.'[30] Such judgments on the moral character of woman were often based on nebulous assumptions, but the reactions of neighbours and workmates to perceived lapses in respectability could be severe. In an extreme case reported by Roberts, she describes how a pregnant bride was publicly stoned on her wedding-day.[31]

Hoggart, Chinn and Roberts agree that working-class neighbourhoods exhibited considerable scorn for women who were felt to have contravened acceptable codes of conduct relating to cleanliness, public behaviour or sex. Chinn writes:

> As a Birmingham woman commented of the 1920s and 1930s, a wife who was not clean would be hounded, especially if there was a row between two women. When this occurred, the distaste of the community in general would be publicly aired by the protagonist who was the cleaner.[32]

As Roberts observes, 'Working-class views were not, of course, identical; the class was not a monolithic mass.'[33] Yet these tacitly acknowledged codes of conduct were real enough, and held considerable sway over both communities and individuals. Hanley, who grew up amidst such social codes and prejudices, attempted in *Stoker Bush* to expose the constraints and shortcomings of such a culture.

There seems to be little good to say of Anne. Aside from her unfaithfulness to her husband, she is vain, superficial and uses her looks to influence others. She exercises control over Chris through sex and appears quite unconcerned about the upbringing of her children, hitting them for minor offences and leaving them to play in the gutter at all hours, to the disgust of the neighbours. Disparaging remarks are made constantly by Chris, his parents, Anne's father and the minor characters about the untidiness of the house, and about the young woman's failure to make any effort to keep it clean: 'My 'eart fair bled seein' the state of that 'ouse, which was a disgrace to a woman of her age, and also not fair to Chris, who turns up his money regular.'[34] The idea that respectable status was achieved by being honest and hardworking, while rejecting immorality and slovenliness, is enough to show that Anne Bush cannot boast of such status.

Hanley's reservations about these working-class conventions are displayed

[29] Chinn, p. 120.
[30] Chinn, p. 130.
[31] Roberts, p. 78.
[32] Chinn, p. 129.
[33] Roberts, p. 5.
[34] Hanley, p. 96.

most prominently near the middle of the novel, however, when Chris, having learned about Anne's affair, administers a beating to her in the hope it will teach her to be faithful. As disturbing as the domestic violence is in itself, perhaps equally so are the responses to the incident that we see from community members both before and after it occurs. Chris discusses his intentions with several others in advance, and his churchgoing father, for all that he comforts Anne after her beating, instructs his son to "It as 'ard as you can' before placidly returning to the wooden model boat he is carving.[35] Similarly Anne's father Harry tells Chris that Anne 'wants a bloody good thrashing every night for a week', although he goes to see Mr. Bush once the deed is done and complains about his son's actions.[36] Harry, speaking 'in tones of an injured father,' admits: 'let me tell you, as man to man, Mr. Bush…as man to man, I think 'e went too far. 'E nearly killed her. If I 'adn't been 'andy 'e would 'ave done.'[37] Chris himself, we are told by another character, was sorry afterwards and 'cried his heart out like a big kid'.[38] He also drinks heavily to forget his deed. When his father comes to bring him home from the public house he is quite drunk, 'grin[ning] blearily,' and apparently not in the least remorseful.[39]

Using violence towards women to 'correct' their alleged faults and preserve respectability, the novel implies, is seen as an acceptable practice within this working-class culture. There is, however, no sympathy in *Stoker Bush* for such notions nor anything to engender respect or even liking for the characters who endorse them. Rather, the effect is to provoke deep disgust at a community that encourages wife-beating while simultaneously pretending to care for and support the victims it creates. Hanley's representation of the event is unequivocally horrific, and depicts its perpetrator as monstrous. Despite a number of assertions from other characters that Chris is 'soft-hearted'[40] and 'wouldn't harm a fly,'[41] the thought that crosses his mind while watching her breasts just before commencing the beating ('He'd like to cut them things clean off her. Ruin her for good')[42] suggests a capacity for cold-blooded sadism rather than uncharacteristic anger at infidelity. The beating itself, viewed from Harry's perspective and depicted in the stark, spare manner typical of Hanley's earliest and bloodiest works, is more disturbing still:

> He looked closer. 'Ugh!' he said, pressing his nose to the window. He had her across the sofa, had her clothes off; already he could see the blood running from 'er back, and weals on her backside. Not a sound from her, nor Chris. It was like sudden power had come on his son-in-law, that

[35] Hanley, p. 94.
[36] Hanley, p. 84.
[37] Hanley, p. 111.
[38] Hanley, p. 120.
[39] Hanley, p. 120.
[40] Hanley, p. 211.
[41] Hanley, p. 6.
[42] Hanley, p. 99.

swam to hand and arm. It was like a powerful piston, rising, falling. There was no end to it. It was everlasting as if this *must* go on, and on, until all the energy left that arm. He was controlled by that power.[43]

The image of Chris's arm as a 'powerful piston,' which occurs repeatedly throughout the beating scene, dehumanises the man and suggests a machine has taken his place. Chris is indeed described as a 'crazy automaton': cold, unfeeling, relentless and terrible.[44]

It is tempting to conclude that *Stoker Bush's* critique of the working-class cult of respectability is indicative of Hanley's alienation from his own social class and his increasing pursuit of middle-class status. Both Edward Stokes and John Fordham have observed that many works written by Hanley around the time of *Stoker Bush* depict proletarian characters in a startlingly unflattering light. Such books, which include *The German Prisoner* (1930) and *Boy* (1931), can be seen as symptomatic of his growing class-displacement. Such inferences should be approached with caution, however. For a working-class novelist at the time, writing specifically for a bourgeois readership was often the only way to ensure publication. Storm Jameson in her 1937 essay 'Documents', published in *Fact* Magazine, is one of the most adroit observers of the tendency among middle-class readers and publishers of the time to take an interest in observing proletarian life. But Hanley had seen enough of the contemporary middle class by 1935 to harbour no illusions that they were above the types of hypocrisy Anne is subjected to in *Stoker Bush.* Rather, his aim was to show, as Elizabeth Roberts has observed (see above) that working-class communities were not homogeneous. To adhere to the preoccupations of respectability was to be conventional, but to transgress and be at odds with it, like many of Hanley's characters, was just as much a part of working class behaviour. Anne, of course, is foremost among these transgressors in the novel, and the leading voice of defiance. Her father Harry, with his 'I think 'e went too far,' reveals that his own assumptions about what constitutes respectable behaviour have been challenged by the unusual extremity of this violence. He represents the type of man who can accept violence against women only until he sees it inflicted on his own flesh and blood. And Rooney, like his lover, has seen beyond the constraints of working-class culture and recognises, as Anne does, that their future happiness lies in putting aside what others consider to be respectable. Briefly conversing with a shipmate about the affair, Rooney succinctly reveals his convictions to this end (the shipmate is the first to speak):

'What about 'er?'
'Well, what about her?'
'Is it exactly decent?'

[43] Hanley, pp. 100-1.
[44] Hanley, p. 101.

'Is anything decent?'
'Well, I don't know.'[45]

'Is anything decent?' This throwaway line is in fact central to the vision of *Stoker Bush,* and Orwell's fireside seems a long way distant at the end of the novel. The impression Hanley gives is that happiness can be achieved only by escape from the spiritually suffocating, claustrophobic neighbourhood in which his story is set, with its unending poverty and petty animosities, its contradictions and callous unwritten laws.

Hanley deliberately seizes on recognised working-class stereotypes of the unrespectable—untidy houses, factory girls, disreputable streets—in order to show those stereotypes for the invidious prejudices they are. The horrors Anne endures in *Stoker Bush* illustrate how the cult of the 'respectable' may serve to reinforce an unforgiving conformity, ignoring human frailties and individuality and legitimating violence, ostracism and abuse. Anne's experience presents an argument for wanting to abandon such a life, and though we might question the way she goes about gaining this freedom, she is hardly to be faulted for craving escape.

Conclusion

Garrett and Hanley both wrote stories that departed from the literary conventions associated with their class. They were, like D.H Lawrence before them and, later, Dylan Thomas, working-class men who craved new subject positions removed from the communities from which they emerged. Their social class nonetheless contributed to the reason why this became possible, for in working as seamen and visiting other countries and cultures they were able to discover new perspectives outside their own. Garrett's skill with Expressionist imagery, Hanley's ability to identify the flaws in his British working-class values by measuring them against different contemporary ideologies, arose from the experiences these authors underwent during their lives as working men. Indeed, in combining the roles of seaman and writer, Hanley and Garrett can be seen as simultaneously of their class and yet not in it, interstitial beings, between two worlds.

[45] Hanley, p. 181.

Raymond Williams, Cultural Materialism and the Break-Up of Britain

Hywel Dix

To Raymond Williams, the nation-state was fundamentally an institution of cultural modernity and imperialism. In his major work, *The Country and the City* (1973), he attempted an examination of the connections that exist between the capitalist order and the nation-state. Beginning with a look at the genre of country house writing, Williams was interested in how this writing both reflected the power of a late feudal aristocracy and actively contributed to augmenting its power. The idealisation of one particular class was accompanied by a mystification of national interest and national identity.

Williams pursued this analysis across a long historical period, from early modernity into the twentieth century. He explored the structural congruence that existed between the process of nation building in Britain and empire building overseas. In the last instance, he extended the metaphor of the country house, suggesting that, throughout the period of imperialism, the Western world has become something like an enormous country estate. It draws resources and labour from its (third world) hinterland, while also blinding itself to the injustices and violence on which this process is founded.

While writing *The Country and the City,* Williams was also at work on a detective novel, *The Volunteers* (1978). In what follows I shall offer a reading of *The Volunteers,* tied to a survey of *The Country and the City*. I wish to extrapolate the extent to which the tradition of country house writing which Williams analyses can be taken as a measure of the shifting imperial system. This is elevated in the work of Williams to a post-imperial theorising of that global process.

I shall then look at the transition that has occurred in country house writing since 1997, the year of devolution in Scotland and Wales. Historically, this transition is related to the end of imperial power overseas during the 1950s and 60s. The fact that Williams himself did not survive to witness the moment of devolution in no way weakens the impact of his writing. I shall argue that his work anticipates the moment of devolution and the break-up of the British state in important ways, with the result that Williams is a major figure in our understanding of British postcolonial cultures today.

Writing, Nation and Empire

Williams began *The Country and the City* by looking at the practice of country house writing as it was inaugurated during the Elizabethan period. The cultural practice at work was one in which instituted poets and artisans were

commissioned to produce specific pieces of work for specific landed patrons – usually aristocratic men. Within the context of Elizabethan England, and its nascent morality of virtue and improvement, to eulogise the country house was also taken somehow as eulogising the master. The house was well-kept because the master was a shrewd manager. The dinner hall was a place of great feasting and hospitality because the master was generous and giving. The parks and estates were beautifully maintained because the master was understood to be a kind of minor god, carefully controlling the natural order of his own little Eden. According to Williams, 'what we find … is an idealisation of feudal and immediately post-feudal values: of an order based on settled and reciprocal social and economic relations of an avowedly total kind.'[1]

It is a practice of mystification: the servants, labourers and outcasts on whom the entire system depends are entirely written out of the poems so that the only people who appear to matter are the aristocratic lords of the manner. This social order is related by the country house and estate metaphor to the natural landscape and thus presented as timeless, unchanging, natural. It is a mystification at work in the interest of the ruling landed class. As Williams says, 'it is then important that the poems coincide, in time, with a period in which another order – that of capitalist agriculture – was being successfully pioneered.'[2] The best-known examples Williams gives of these poems are Ben Jonson's *To Penshurst,* Thomas Carew's *To Saxham,* and Andrew Marvell's *Upon Appleton House.* Social and moral economy is mystified within these poems in order to ratify and support the class structure of the patrons.

The second stage of Williams's analysis in *The Country and the City* is to explore the connection between a mystified social capitalist order and an equally mystified concept of national identity and national interest. During the period Williams analysed in *The Country and the City,* the mystifying of the social order was achieved in part by the entrenched tradition of country house writing. This is particularly evident in the case of Tudor country house writing. The poems were powerful primarily because the landlords who commissioned them were powerful figures, commanding the capacity to dictate literary tastes along with more direct rules on how to govern the estates. At the same time, that authority was also in part derived from the idealisation performed in the poetry.

The magnificence of the country estates was taken to be a measure of the virtue and morality of the landowners, and, by a final extension, of the virtue and morality of the nation itself. As Peter de Bolla has written of *The Country and the City,* it shows the enlightenment and imperial attempt to create 'a specifically national heritage' through appeal to the virtue and morality of the system and associated invocation of a supposedly natural order.[3] A growing

[1] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973; London: Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 35.
[2] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 35.
[3] Peter de Bolla, 'Antipictorialism in the English Landscape Tradition: A Second Look at *The Country and the City*', in Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams*

interest in the English landscape was accompanied by an emotive appeal to the supposedly common origins of those who peopled that landscape, in an eternal and immutable social order, to create a hegemonic sense of united national identity.

If the literary texts analysed by Williams played a material part in augmenting the power of the country house system domestically, this process became even more strongly the case during the period of empire. Literary study was mobilised throughout the British empire to perform its ideological work. This had been the case since the moment at which the colonial project was inaugurated: the Elizabethan period. As Ania Loomba writes of the Tudor dynasty's most tenacious myth maker, 'Shakespeare lived and wrote at a time when English mercantile and colonial enterprise were just germinating ... the meaning of Shakespeare's plays were both derived from and used to establish colonial authority.'[4] Cultural materialism as Raymond Williams developed it in *The Country and the City* offers an insight into the connections that exist between nation building during the Tudor period, and the growth of empire overseas. It also provides a materialist reading of the part played by literature in those processes. The third stage of analysis in *The Country and the City* draws attention to the relation between domestic national culture in formation, and the role played by the colonies in that process:

> In *Wuthering Heights,* in *Great Expectations,* in *Alton Locke* and in many other novels of the period there is a way out from the struggle within English society to these distant lands; a way out that is not only the escape to a new land but as in some of the real history an acquisition of fortune to return and re-enter the struggle at a higher point ... The lands of the Empire were an idyllic retreat, an escape from debt or shame, or an opportunity for making a fortune.[5]

It is as though the colonies are the training ground for a domestic culture in formation. The metaphor of empire as 'idyllic retreat' extends the country house metaphor Williams had already detected in the poetics of nation building. Williams suggests that, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the imperial project was partly legitimised by its country house literature.

Implicit in this conclusion is the idea that, if literary texts have a material role in societal processes, then to produce and disseminate different kinds of texts is to take a step towards altering the structure of society. At the fourth stage of analysis in *The Country and the City*, Williams turns from national and imperial processes to postcolonial history. He is aware of the pressures towards political change inside late colonial societies, primarily as a result of his

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 182.

[4] Ania Loomba and Martin Okrin (eds.), *Post-Colonial Shakespeares* (London: Methuen, 1998), p. 1.

[5] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 281.

reading of the canonical late colonial authors: E. M. Forster, George Orwell, Joyce Cary.[6] 'But,' he writes, 'we have only to go across to the Indian and African and West Indian writers to get a different and necessary perspective.'[7]

Williams suggests that this perspective on colonial history can be gleaned in the work of writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Wilson Harris, R. K. Narayan, Chinua Achebe, Han Suyin and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. These writers challenge the model of country house dominance over hinterland/ colony. This can be seen particularly clearly in George Lamming's novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (published in 1960, the same year as Williams's own novel, *Border Country*).[8] Lamming and Naipaul render the metaphor of the country house all too literal, in dramatising the historical struggles of colonised peoples to gain effective political control over their own estates, their own country houses.

The literature Williams discusses at the end of *The Country and the City* does not simply follow, as it were passively, from the formal decolonising process. It also makes a crucial contribution to raising the critical anti-colonial consciousness of the colonised peoples and therefore plays a crucial active part in bringing that process about. By challenging the metaphor of country house dominance *in* their literature, Lamming, Naipaul, Suyin, Anand and Ngugi all contribute in their various ways to making change happen *outside* it.

The Country and the City relates the process of nation building in the early modern period to that of empire building throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The material role played by literature in imagining these large-scale communities into existence is comparable in each case. Likewise, the potential of literature to participate in changing those structures and re-imagining the community is equally prevalent. The important conjunction Williams makes is between nation building and imperialism: 'As we gain perspective from the long history of the literature of country and city, we see how much, at different times and in different places, it is a connecting process, in what has to be seen ultimately as a common history'.[9] If the history of nation is related to the formation of empire, then in the last instance, the break-up of empire must be related to the break-up of nation.

[6] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 285.

[7] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 285.

[8] Tony Pinkney has shown that *Border Country* is structured in such a way as to open a perspective from a very local Welsh community onto much broader postcolonial historical processes. See his *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991) pp. 3, 74-7.

[9] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 288.

Anti-Imperialism and *The Volunteers*

The conjunction between formal decolonisation overseas and political separatism domestically is raised in Williams's novel, *The Volunteers*. *The Volunteers* was published in 1978, and set in a then futuristic late twentieth-century Britain, under the control of an extreme nationalist government. Lewis Redfern, an investigative journalist for the Insatel broadcasting corporation, is assigned to investigate the shooting and wounding of the Secretary of State for Wales, Edmund Buxton, during a state visit to the Museum of Welsh Life at Saint Fagan's, outside Cardiff. Buxton has been involved in a government decision taken only a few months earlier, to use military force to break a strike at a steel works in Pontyrhiw. This decision has directly resulted in the death of a worker, Gareth Powell, and thus provokes great resentment against Buxton.

The Volunteers brings into relief two distinct events and explores the relation between them. Lewis Redfern's attempt to discover the relation between the breaking of the strike and the Buxton shooting forms the basis of the investigation plot. Suspecting a connection between resentment against Buxton over the death of Gareth Powell at Pontyrhiw and the symbolic shooting at Saint Fagan's, Lewis tries to trace anyone else present at both events. Media photographs enable him to trace Bill Chaney and Rosa Brant.[10] Rosa Brant turns out to be the sister of Sarah Brant, the young second wife of a politician, Mark Evans. Evans has previously served in the same cabinet as Buxton and is trying to make a populist political come back as an opponent of the repressive Buxton government. Finally it transpires that Evans has been recruited to join the same radical organisation, the Volunteers, as Rosa.

Lewis discovers that Rosa's supposed alibi for the Buxton shooting, a camping trip to Ireland, has been manufactured.[11] He discovers also that Mark Evans's son, David, has joined the radical underground organisation, the Volunteers, to try to resist the compromised sell-out of the political class. Rosa and her lover Bill Chaney are the ones who shot and wounded Buxton, aided by David Evans.

The mystery itself rapidly becomes redundant, empty of suspense because effortlessly solved. How can Williams think himself out of this impasse? From this point on, he uses the investigation plot to launch all sorts of wider and more complex questions which outflank the basic mystery plot altogether. For the question that most continually obtrudes into our reading is not, Who shot Buxton? Rather, it is, Who is Lewis? Although this character is the first-person narrator of the novel, we know surprisingly little about him. As his sympathy for the Welsh working classes and the subversive organisation the Volunteers deepens, we are bound to ask ourselves why this should be. Indeed, the novel insists on this question: 'For what, in the end, did I care about the Trust...?'

[10] Raymond Williams, *The Volunteers* (1978; London: Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 53.
[11] Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 104.

muses Lewis.[12] 'What is it you want?' Gareth Powell's widow asks him when he comes asking questions.[13] When Lewis finally learns that Mark Evans is working for the Volunteers and struggles to decide whether his loyalties lie with the capitalist establishment or this group of radical opponents, he asks Evans, 'Why should I [help the Volunteers]?'[14]

As Lewis Redfern's investigation gathers momentum, there are hints that final understanding will be directly related to his personal affiliations. The whole dilemma facing him is that, as an employee of Insatel, his job is to expose the Volunteers. His employer Friedmann is explicit about this. The Buxton affair ceases to be an interesting news story within a couple of days, he explains, 'but the Volunteers now, that's business.'[15] Moreover, the possibility that former cabinet minister Mark Evans might be involved with the Volunteers seems like the biggest media coup of all. Hence Friedmann's instructions, 'You zoom in on Evans. You go all out to break him.'[16]

On the other hand, having discovered that Evans is working for a political cause with which Lewis too sympathises, Lewis himself is reluctant to carry out this 'breaking.' If Lewis is really to endanger his career in this way (and after all, he does end up resigning from Insatel), we feel certain he must have a bigger reason for sympathising with Mark Evans.

Evans provides a clue as to why Lewis might withhold rather than publish. Lewis accuses him of involvement with the Volunteers and in the Buxton shooting. Evans seems unperturbed by this. He does not deny involvement because he does not regret it. He believes in the rightness of striking out against the oppressive nationalist state. This constitutes something of an anti-climax to Lewis Redfern's investigation. Moreover, Williams throws the real mystery back onto Lewis himself. The ostensibly guilty Evans fires a particular parting shot at Lewis:

> 'Just one thing before you go,' he said as we walked down the stairs. 'You research a lot of people. At least it's called research. It's an interesting process. We even tried it on you.'
>
> 'Don't rely on my past,' I said, irritably.
>
> 'No,' he said, laughing. 'There was never any danger of that. But it's interesting. It's especially interesting when the present connects.'
>
> We had got to the door.
>
> 'I'm not the problem,' I said stubbornly.[17]

[12] Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 142.
[13] Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 142.
[14] Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 178.
[15] Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 144.
[16] Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 145.
[17] Williams, *The Volunteers*, pp. 163-64.

The idea that Lewis could have a reliable past is presented as laughable. This seems ironic, given that it is Evans and not Lewis who has been shown to be a member of a terrorist organisation. Williams uses a technique to disadvantage the reader here. For though it is clear that Evans and Lewis are meant to understand each other, we as readers do not know what they are talking about. We cannot know what it is in Lewis's past that Evans is referring to - or how it connects to the present. Had the Volunteers considered Lewis a possible ally? A possible enemy? A possible target? There is an appearance of knowledge and answers, but it is continually frustrated. Lewis's personal involvement with the matter under investigation is both pointed up and continually deferred. Despite his assertion that 'I am not the problem,' for us as readers, Lewis *has* become the real object of the mystery, rather than the terrorist he is investigating.

The counter-research which the Volunteers have carried out on Lewis offers some conclusions. David tells Lewis:

> 'Your father was killed as a soldier in Kenya. As a national service soldier. But in one of the very worst of the last colonial wars.'
>
> I didn't answer for some moments. I avoided looking at him.
>
> 'He had no choice where he was sent.'
>
> 'Of course, Lewis. Imperialism killed him, whichever uniform he happened to be wearing. But you didn't think so. You told no one but Megan. You seemed bitterly ashamed.'
>
> 'Angry.'
>
> 'No, anger is public. You told none of your comrades. You wanted none of them to know. You let it fester under your exceptional activism. You divided yourself.'[18]

The clues click into place at last. Why does Lewis side with the Volunteers against the Buxton government? He hates the entire military-industrial construction of society for which that government stands. He hates it because it killed his father in Kenya. Yet he is also deeply ashamed by it, for his father died, fighting needlessly on its behalf. The Mau Mau uprising against British rule in Kenya in the 1950s was one of the most violent guerrilla wars of the whole colonial period. The imperial order tried to dig in and hold onto its own power and authority in the face of global dissolution, and Lewis's father was part of the digging. Lewis had earlier been a student radical, working against imperialism and social injustice. The death of his father fighting on behalf of that system seems to have made Lewis's own position untenable. As a defence mechanism he has 'divided' himself, becoming part radical investigator, part establishment lackey. That is why he has sympathised with the Volunteers all along, while at the same time working for an organisation hell-bent on their

[18] Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 195.

annihilation.

I stated above that one of the anti-colonial writers Raymond Williams most positively evaluates in *The Country and the City* is Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. Ngugi's political activities in opposition to continuing imperial oppression in Kenya, the contribution of his novels to that activism, and his own refusal to separate his activities into the demarcated spheres of *politics* and *letters*, distinctly parallel Williams's own work in Wales. It is interesting then to go to the work of Ngugi himself, to see this process of colonial split-subject formation at work.

Ngugi has written of his education and development in colonial Kenya in the 1950s. He was educated by a teacher who had been discharged from the Royal Air Force, in an English colonial school. The reading material he was given included the imperial boy's own adventures of *Captain Biggles* – a childhood hero of Ngugi's. Yet a crisis of loyalties occurred for Ngugi when the Mau Mau uprising against colonial rule broke out, and when his brother joined the revolutionaries. The Mau Mau fighters were defeated by the Royal Air Force, dropping bombs on the mountain strongholds of the revolutionaries. Ngugi's own brother and comrades were being bombed by people like his school teacher, and like his boyhood hero Captain Biggles. Thus, Ngugi concludes, his education in late colonial Kenya was 'a drama of contradictions', which rendered his unquestioning obedience to the imperial order impossible.[19]

The colonial split subjectivity that Williams portrays in Lewis Redfern in *The Volunteers* enables us to open a post-imperial perspective on Britain itself. As with Ngugi, this is done by suggesting a comparability between colonial processes at home and in Kenya. In *The Country and the City* Williams makes the conjunction in more depth:

> In Britain itself, within the home islands, the colonial process itself is so far back that it is in effect unrecorded, though there are late consequences of it in the rural literature of Scotland and Wales and especially of Ireland. It has become part of the long settlement which is idealised as Old England or the natural economy: the product of centuries of successive penetration and domination. What is important in this modern literature of the colonial peoples is that we can see the history happening, see it being made, from the base of an England which, within our own literature, has been so differently described.[20]

Williams's positive evaluation of anti-colonial literature is two-fold. First, it gives us a perspective on colonial history that would otherwise be completely unrecorded. Second, it then enables us to relate the construction of the British

[19] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (London: Heinemann, 1993), p. 138.

[20] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 285.

empire to the construction of the British state. This forces us to ask what happens to the state when the empire disintegrates.

The Country and the City illuminates the climax of *The Volunteers* by making these conjunctions. During the final section of *The Country and the City,* Williams extends his metaphor of the country house dominating its impoverished hinterland, to describe the relations between Europe and its colonies, first world and third. He then goes on to discuss resistance to the colonial system:

> Out of these country areas there eventually came, through blood and struggle, movements for political independence. At various stages, to protect such an order, young officers from the country-houses led other Englishmen, and the expropriated Irish and Scots and Welsh, to the colonial battles in which so many died. It is a strange fate.[21]

Out of the country houses of ruling class England, imperial military officers were sent to police the imperial order overseas, with some dying in the process. This is exactly the fate of Lewis's father in *The Volunteers.* Out of a disjointed series of clues as to Lewis's identity, suddenly there is coherence. His distrust of country estate owning Mark Evans, his interest in the shooting of Buxton inside the grounds of a country house/seat of power, can both be traced to this filial relation to the imperial system.

This understanding retrospectively underwrites the whole plot of *The Volunteers,* showing it to be a profoundly anti-imperialist work. Williams is in no doubt that the Welsh and Scots and Irish who died fighting on behalf of the imperial system were 'expropriated', forced into fighting. His novel thus implicitly questions that whole enforced kind of nationalism, and instead puts that unitary identity in question.

The conjunction Williams makes in *The Volunteers* is between the decolonising process overseas and the gradual break up of the British Union itself. For, although there are differences, Williams is clear that these processes are related. In the novel, after Lewis gives testimony at the Pontyrhiw tribunal, he drives to the steel works where Gareth Powell was shot, and sees bullet marks still on the walls:

> We stopped and looked at the gate of the depot. It was still shut. The fading chalk bullet-marks were still on the walls along the street. A street in Pontyrhiw. A dirt road in Kenya. I must have gone silent looking at them …[22]

Imperial violence in Kenya is juxtaposed directly with radical authoritarian violence back in Wales. This extraordinary and moving moment

[21] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 283.
[22] Williams, *The Volunteers*, p. 207.

retrospectively informs the whole construction of *The Volunteers.* As in previous novels by Williams, the investigation plot provides not answers, but questions. For, at this moment, we have left the Buxton-Powell mystery behind altogether. We are invited to ask much bigger questions: What is identity? What is nationality? What is loyalty? Williams's opposition to the imperial social order suddenly reveals the break up of the empire and the break up of the union to be part of the same process.

By imagining a Wales struggling for self-rule as early as 1978, Williams attempted to raise the levels of Welsh self-consciousness to a sufficiently high level for self-rule to become a reality in the 1979 devolution referendum. The 'no' vote in 1979 followed by the eventual 'yes' in 1997 shows that, all the time, this critical consciousness was on the rise. Devolution itself is an ongoing process, rather than an accomplished fact. As a result of his prescience into that process, Williams is a major figure in our understanding of postcolonial British cultures.

Cultural Materialism: The Welsh Example

In January 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government launched the Library of Wales book series. This initiative can be seen as a process of cultural reclamation. Twentieth century Welsh writing quickly becomes unfashionable and out of print.

The ostensible goal of the Library of Wales is to make some of the writing produced in Wales over the last century available again. The first five titles included Raymond Williams's novel, *Border Country* and a much earlier pair of working class novels from South Wales, Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy* (1937) and *We Live* (1939).[23]

The Library of Wales gives us a chance to rediscover or re-evaluate the tradition of Welsh industrial fiction that flowered in the 1930s – a tradition to which Raymond Williams as novelist consciously belonged. This rediscovery has only been possible because, since 1997, Wales has had some self-rule and hence the capacity to develop such projects in a way that it did not earlier.

On the other hand, it is also in a real sense true that Wales only has self-rule partly because writers like Williams spent time and effort exploring and asserting their identity and culture. This exploration resulted in an increase in the cultural confidence of a notoriously unconfident Wales. The drift can be seen by comparing the two referenda of 1979 and 1997. In 1979 the Welsh electorate overwhelmingly rejected the principle of self-rule. The narrow margin by which Wales then embraced devolution eighteen years later represented a 'huge shift' in Welsh opinion.[24]

[23] Raymond Williams, *Border Country* (Carmarthen: Parthian, 2006); Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy* and *We Live* (Carmarthen: Parthian, 2006).
[24] See Tom Nairn, *After Britain* (London: Granta, 2001), p. 82.

Clearly the real claim for the power of literature is a modest one: the two referenda are not caused only by the reading of novels, and may in fact owe a greater debt to more direct political campaigning. Yet the demarcation between the overtly political and the cultural spheres is not so clearly drawn, if we get rid of the idea of literature as an idealist realm, and explore its material properties. This is particularly clear in the case of Williams, who was for a time member of the Welsh political party, Plaid Cymru.[25] Thus he was a political activist within Wales on the one hand, Welsh novelist on the other, while all the time refusing to draw such a strict line between the two spheres.

The argument I wish to make here is an historical one. The growth of cultural self-confidence in the peripheral nations of Britain gives rise to the conditions in which it becomes possible to work for political self-determination. The achievement of political self-determination in turn makes it possible for Wales to foster its own cultural development – as in the Library of Wales. There is no straightforward cause and effect relationship between literature and social change. Each contributes to the other. Raymond Williams declared these twin elements of his work for Welsh consciousness when he wrote:

> The central point about Scottish and Welsh nationalism is perhaps this: that in Scotland and Wales we are beginning to find ways of expressing two kinds of impulse that are in fact very widely experienced throughout British society. First, we are trying to declare an identity, to discover in fact what we really have in common, in a world which is full of false identities… And second, but related to this, we are trying to discover political processes by which people really can govern themselves – that is, to determine the use of their own energies and resources – as distinct from being governed by an increasingly centralised, increasingly remote and also increasingly penetrating system: the system that those who run it, for their own interests, have decided to call 'Unity.'[26]

The process of discovering an identity, we might say, is in part the work of fiction and cultural production. The demand for politically separatist institutions then belongs to the more strictly political sphere. Yet Williams does not draw such a tight demarcation between the two. Instead, he makes an argument about the relation of culture and politics that is openly dialectical and mutually determining. Separatist political institutions create the conditions under which it becomes possible for Scotland and Wales to support their own cultural production: their own writers, dramatists and artists. At the same time,

[25] Williams explained in an interview with Philip Cooke that he was a member of Plaid Cymru for 'a year or two' during the 1970s, and only left because he found it 'difficult to discharge my obligations living at a distance from Wales'. See Raymond Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales?*, ed. Daniel Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 206.

[26] Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales?*, p. 188.

it is also partly because those cultural figures have the courage and confidence to explore their own identity with differential regard to the British whole that the nations in question develop the self-confidence required to demand political institutions of representation. In a way, therefore, Williams *was* campaigning for Welsh devolution while sitting at his desk writing novels. These contributed somewhat to the general rise in Welsh consciousness during the period 1979-97.

The relationship that exists between cultural production and social processes is a dialectical one. This can be gauged by examining the complex historical sequence in which these cultural emergences have occurred. On the face of it, it seems as though The Library of Wales (2006) was launched *after* political change had occurred (in 1997). This would suggest that cultural production is passively dependent on anterior political change, which it then reflects in a secondary manner. On the other hand, not only had a relative step towards devolution already been taken much earlier on, with the holding of a referendum in 1979, but some of the literature – the Lewis Jones novels - had also been published at an earlier period, in the 1930s. The question as to which came first, the Library or the Assembly, is then a very much more complex one that it may first appear.

The Welsh case is a particularly clear example of a more general materialist theory of culture. On the one hand, it has become possible to revalue Welsh writing of the 1930s (and since) because the Assembly exists to finance such projects. On the other hand, the fact that the Assembly itself exists is in part due to things like the writing. Cultural forms do not only reflect society. They play an active part in societal processes. Literature is both cause and effect of political change. Political change is both cause and effect of the kind of writing produced.

Devolving *Frankenstein*

When devolution was realised in Wales in the referendum of 1997, the large swing that had been required to overturn the defeat of 1979 was in part due to the raising of Welsh confidence that comes about through an exploration of Welsh culture and identity in writing, in film, and in other cultural forms.[27] Williams himself had been involved in this work, so that, although he did not survive to witness the moment of devolution, in some senses his lifetime *was* that moment. Thus it is perhaps no coincidence that at roughly the moment of devolution, the Library of Wales has brought Williams's own novel, *Border Country*, back into print. Williams, that is to say, *is* still present during the

[27] See Jane Aaron and M. Wynn Thomas, 'Pulling You Through Changes: Welsh Writing in English Before, Between and After Two Referenda', in M. Wynn Thomas (ed.), *Welsh Writing in English*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003). Aaron and Thomas discuss the impact of writing, film and popular music on Welsh self-confidence.

process of devolution – in his writing, which was a contribution to that process.

Williams was aware that all nations are at root imagined communities. The correlative of this is that the break-up of the nation is also largely an imagined event – hence the utility of considering that event through a fully historical reading of the literature which imagines it into existence. In Britain, this is most evident in relation to devolution in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Recent literature from these nations has emphasised a lack of united British-ness. In many cases, such as Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things* (1992), the literature imagined the break-up into being before the actual moment of devolution.[28]

Poor Things is an explicit re-writing of the Gothic classic *Frankenstein*, set in Victorian Glasgow. Interestingly, around the moment of devolution, we also find a re-worked Welsh *Frankenstein,* appearing in Malcolm Pryce's 2003 novel, *Last Tango in Aberystwyth*. Gray and Pryce have submitted *Frankenstein* to a process of devolution. Historically, this would not have been possible at an earlier date, because the literary consciousness of Scotland and Wales was too deeply submerged within the British mainstream.[29] With the increase of Scottish and Welsh confidence came a complicating of the ways in which the literature produced within those nations related to the British whole, because the ways in which the nations themselves related to one another were changing.

Since 1997, English literature has been devolved just as much as political power and representation has been devolved from Westminster to Edinburgh and Cardiff.[30] The general historical movement is one away from a direct and traceable repetition of English literary trends inside Scotland and Wales, towards a greater willingness to explore different forms. Alasdair Gray and Malcolm Pryce are not simply imitators of a literary aesthetic prescribed from literary London; they are typical of a later generation of writers in Scotland and Wales.[31] Although full analysis of a range of Scottish and Welsh writers falls outside the scope of this paper, it seems reasonable to suggest that what many recent writers in Scotland and Wales have in common is that their historic imagination is able to subvert the imagined harmony of an earlier period. This in turn can be read in tandem with the process of undoing to which the United Kingdom has more recently become subject. Since devolution has to be understood as an ongoing process rather than an accomplished fact, it can be

[28] Gray, *Poor Things* (London : Bloomsbury, 1992).

[29] One of the few commentators to relate the work of Williams to the growth of Welsh confidence generally is J.P. Ward. See his *Raymond Williams* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), pp. 9, 73.

[30] I have taken this phrase from Robert Crawford's *Devolving English Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

[31] Ian Bell discusses the relationship between recent Scottish writing and nationalist politics in his *Peripheral Visions: Images of nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), p. 3.

said that this writing plays a part in the continuing process.

Cultural materialism is the term Raymond Williams used to describe this relationship between writing and historical change. Williams himself had advocated nationalism in Wales. This was not out of abstract chauvinism or ethnic pride, but out of a strong sense of the need for democracy: finding the means by which people can direct their own lives. The question has then to be seen less as a matter of how English imperial institutions frustrate national aspirations in the peripheral areas of Scotland and Wales, and more a matter of how the ruling class version of nationhood hinders effective democracy at every level, including within England itself. Williams himself draws attention to the problem, and a potential solution:

> A friend from the north of England said to me recently that the Welsh and Scots were lucky to have these available national self-definitions, to help them find their way out of the dominance of English ruling-class minority culture. In the north, he said, we who are English are in the same sense denied; what the world knows as English is not our life and feelings, and yet we don't, like the Welsh or the Scots, have this simple thing, this national difference, to pit against it. [32]

Williams becomes aware of a problem faced by certain English people, wanting the same democratic institutions as the nationalist movements in Scotland and Wales, yet lacking the easy definition of nationhood. He suggests that this lack of national element should free those regions from an emotional burden, and allow them to get more directly to the heart of the real problems. The emotional pull of nationhood can be a barrier to the deeper issues of social class, and an alien and unequal social order. Lacking the national element, then, the English regions should be able to address these problems more – rather than less – directly than in Scotland and Wales. As Williams puts it in his late essay, 'Are We Becoming More Divided?', 'this means, among other things, that a nationalist movement isn't the only way, often isn't the way at all, to work for these things.'[33]

Questioning the unitary make-up of the British state is not merely a matter of devolution in Scotland and Wales. It is a matter of finding what Williams elsewhere calls 'specific and varying political units' for the different people on the island of Britain to represent themselves and control their own lives.[34] It is not quite clear what Williams has in mind when he uses the abstraction 'specific and variable.' On the surface it seems to refer to the inadequacy of the current system of 'all-purpose representation,'[35] and hints at its replacement

[32] Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales?*, p. 10. This friend is Fred Inglis, who recounts the same incident in his biography *Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 258.

[33] Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales?*, p. 189.

[34] Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), p. 125.

[35] Williams, *Towards 2000*, p. 125.

with a more supple alternative. Yet it is not clear what such an alternative system might look like. I am arguing that the great advantage of considering the renegotiation of British identity that occurs in contemporary and postmodernist fiction is that it gives us a sense of some of the different 'specific and variable' means by which people explore their identity. Cultural materialism tells us that literary products are not simply passive reflections on a set of anterior social relations. They also contribute actively to the formation of new relations.

The Break-Up of Britain

So far I have concentrated on an historical narrative, charting the relation between literature and society from late modernism, through the break-up of the empire and beyond into the period of devolution and self-rule in the different nations of Britain. I must stress, however, that I am not proposing a teleological narrative in which devolution could be staged as the logical end-point of empire. The imaginative break-up of the union that I am exploring in fiction is not simply a literary history of devolution. It also registers the break-down of national consensus and belonging along several other sets of co-ordinates. These include Celtic difference but are not limited to it. Other examples of such terrains include regional identity, feminism, and racial difference. These terrains of renegotiation can all be explored in the fiction that implicitly puts the deeper questions to the unitary state.

The break-up of Britain, then, is not solely a matter of devolution in Scotland and Wales. The danger in suggesting otherwise would be that it would invoke a linear history and strictly teleological mode of temporality where, implicitly, devolution would become synonymous with postmodernism in a manner that would leave England itself trailing in its wake. By emphasising the non-synchronous aspect of postmodernist literary creation I have avoided this distorted position.

Thus postmodernist fiction throws up an opportunity for explorations of the concept of Englishness quite as much as it offers the post-devolution nations of Britain an opportunity to develop their own voices.[36] There is an exploration of outdated class-bound notions of Englishness in Graham Swift's 1995 novel, *Last Orders*, and a parody of the stereotypical cultural artefacts of England in Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998).[37] From the feminist perspective, A.S. Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) is a satire of the

[36] Paul Gilroy discusses the need for the political break-up of the British state to be accompanied by a new definition of Englishness in *After Empire* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 105.
[37] On Swift's ironic critique of outmoded versions of Englishness, see Emma Parker, 'No Man's Land: Masculinity and Englishness in Graham Swift's *Last Orders*', in Berthold Schoene (ed.), *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 90-103. Tom Nairn discusses the Julian Barnes novel in *After Britain*, p. 85.

pageantry of monarchic culture. Shena Mackay's *Heligoland* (2003) retreats from the public sphere altogether, and withdraws into a smaller, private community. Andrea Levy's 2004 novel, *Small Island,* juxtaposes national myths of military heroism with a plot that is distinctly unheroic.

The Levy novel is worth pausing over for it hints at another important way in which the British identity has been renegotiated in postmodernist fiction – through the lens of specific ethnic communities. Williams has been accused of paying too little regard to the institutionalised racism experienced on a daily basis by members of Britain's ethnic sub-cultures.[38] In 'The Culture of Nations' Williams draws attention to a deeper theoretical problem:

> [T]he most active legal (and communal) defence of dislocated and exposed groups and minorities is essential. But it is a serious misunderstanding, when full social relations are in question, to suppose that the problems of social identity are resolved by formal definitions. For unevenly and at times precariously, but always through long experience substantially, an effective awareness of social identity depends on actual and sustained social relationships. To reduce social identity to formal legal definitions, at the level of the state, is to collude with the alienated superficialities of 'the nation' which are the limited functional terms of the modern ruling class.[39]

In one sense Williams could be said to be too keen to overlook the hard-won recognition and legal equality gained by members of Britain's immigrant population in the years after 1945. Yet his point is not that legal equality is not important. It is rather that a legal definition of identity alone is not enough to provide mature cultural expression and growth. In this sense, the purely 'passport' sense of Britishness is of vital legal importance in guaranteeing freedom and equality to members of Britain's ethnic minorities, while at the same time also being inadequate to answer any of the hard questions about democracy.

The problem can be more intuitively seen in Salman Rushdie's 1988 novel, *The Satanic Verses.* It is a great irony of Rushdie's novel that the Islamic controversy which surrounded its publication has deflected attention from the main thrust of its satire. *The Satanic Verses* is a committed satire on the lives and treatment of London's racial and ethnic communities during the Thatcher era, culminating in the Brixton race riots. The main protagonists, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, are Indian actors who have come to Britain because they admire its civilised culture, and reject their own. In other words, they are archetypal postcolonial split subjects – like Lewis Redfern in Raymond Williams's novel, *The Volunteers.*

Allowing for the well-documented innovation of Rushdie's magical realism,

[38] See Francis Mulhern, *'Towards 2000*, or News From You-Know-Where' in Terry Eagleton (ed.), *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 87-90.
[39] Williams, *Towards 2000*, p. 195.

there is a surprising congruence between Rushdie's novel and Williams's interests. Upon entry to Britain, Saladin is immediately seized by Inspector Stein's immigration police and beaten up. As Williams may have predicted, the discovery among the police that Saladin is in fact a British citizen and not an illegal immigrant does not solve his problems:

> Stein said: 'Better check him out.' Three and a half minutes later the Black Maria came to a halt and three immigration officers, five constables and one police driver held a crisis conference – *here's a pretty effing pickle* – and Chamcha noted that in their new mood all nine had begun to look alike, rendered equal and identical by their tension and fear. Nor was it long before he understood that the call to the Police National Computer, which had promptly identified him as a British citizen first class, had not improved his situation, but had placed him, if anything, in greater danger than before.[40]

A British passport is not the answer to Saladin's problems: it causes the police to fear recriminations for beating him. They thus beat him further and leave him abandoned. As Williams may have foreseen, Saladin then seeks a more substantive identity than its merely 'passport' version, by taking refuge at the Shaandaar Café, run by Mr and Mrs Sufyan, and home to a number of other racial outsiders in Margaret Thatcher's prosperous 80s London. A sub-cultural community is formed in this way, with Mrs Sufyan as its matriarch:

> And what was it that made them a living in this Vilayet of her exile, this Yuké of her sex-obsessed husband's vindictiveness? What? His book learning? His *Gitanjali, Eclogues,* or that play *Othello* that he explained was really Attallah or Attaullah except the writer couldn't spell, what sort of writer was that, anyway? [41]

The answer to this rhetorical question is that it is the cooking of Mrs Sufyan that keeps the business going financially. Moreover, at a much deeper cultural level it is also this process that keeps the sub-cultural community together in the face of disintegration – which culminates in Rushdie's dramatisation of the Brixton riots. It is significant that Rushdie's *Yuké* recalls Williams: 'that which should be spelled as it so barbarously sounds - the United Kingdom, the *Yookay*.'[42] *The Satanic Verses* performs in fiction what Williams attempted in *The Volunteers* and theorised in a more coherent way in his non-fiction, namely, a critique of the limiting and residually imperial construction of the United Kingdom, and a deeper exploration of precise local communities. This exploration could also be found in such novels as Zadie Smith's *White*

[40] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp. 163-64.
[41] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses,* p. 248.
[42] Williams, *Towards 2000*, p. 182.

Teeth (1999), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island.* The main shift is away from providing final answers and mastery, and towards an aesthetic of incomplete-ness, where the protagonists themselves are invariably shown to be the real object of the mystery. This forces us to ask: what is identity?; what is belonging? It is a technique that was already at work in *The Volunteers,* but without the formal innovation that I am characterising as postmodernist and which only became possible under subsequent historical conditions.

The Satanic Verses and *Small Island* both resemble *The Volunteers* at a strictly thematic level. Both deploy narrative techniques that I have been describing as postmodernist: parody, subversion, irony, and a deep-rooted commitment to questioning different forms of identity politics.[43] The fictional break-up of Britain affords a new opportunity, beyond the entrenched modes of the past, for an active re-imagining of the present.

I have argued that Raymond Williams can be understood as an early postcolonial writer, in the very particular sense that he anticipates the moment of devolution and the political break-up of Britain. His own novels have then to be understood as part of a much more general process of questioning the received unitary identity of Britain, which occurs along all sorts of other co-ordinates. The general movement is away from analysis of the cultural consciousness of *late* modern Britain, and the break-up of its empire. It is a movement towards analysis of *post*-modern Britain, and the break-up of the kingdom.

[43] For a theoretical discussion of these techniques see Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp. 44-59. Is Hutcheon's title a refrain of Raymond Williams's *The Politics of Modernism*?

'Committed to paper': Vacated Spaces and Phallogocentrism in Magnus Mills's *The Restraint of Beasts*

Ian Haywood

In this essay I want to investigate some of the ways in which the contemporary working-class novel opens up the representation of space to radical analysis. But I want to begin with a quotation from David Harvey, an exponent of the new discipline of 'labour geography':

> The geography we make must be a *people's geography*, not based on pious universalisms, ideals and good intents, but a more mundane enterprise that reflects earthly interests and claims, that confronts ideologies and prejudice as they really are, that faithfully mirrors the complex weave of competition, struggle, and co-operation within the shifting social and physical landscapes of the twentieth century. The world must be depicted, analyzed, and understood not as we would like it to be but as it really is, the material manifestation of human hopes and fears mediated by powerful and conflicting social processes of social reproduction.
>
> Such a people's geography must have a popular base, be threaded into the fabric of daily life with deep taproots into the well-springs of popular consciousness. But it must also open channels of communication, undermine parochialist world views, and confront or subvert the power of dominant classes or the state. It must penetrate the barriers to common understandings by identifying the material base to common interests. Where such a material base does not exist, it must frankly recognize and articulate the conflict of equal and competing rights that flows therefrom.[1]

One of the reasons I have cited Harvey is to indicate the importance of the theme of space for contemporary Marxist intellectuals. But another reason is that there are some striking resemblances between this blueprint and radical literary notions of realism: in order to see the world 'as it really is' there is a requirement to base one's vision on 'the fabric of daily life', a space which is constantly fought over by competing material and ideological interests. Moreover, this vision is not a static reflection of reality but a dynamic intervention into cultural politics, a means to 'subvert the power of the dominant classes or the state', to 'penetrate the barriers to common understanding' and affirm the 'material base to common interests'. There are echoes here of that 'long revolution' of Marxist literary theory which encompasses Engels's 'triumph of realism', Lukacs's critical realism and Raymond Williams's 'ordinary' culture, and which proposes modified naturalism as the most effective means to achieve the twin goals of popular assent and subversive politics. At the risk of over-simplification, this aesthetic can be summed up as a modest mode of defamiliarization: the sensuous ordinariness of 'daily life' is distorted and subverted once it is subjected to a working-class rather than a bourgeois point of view. Put another way, that familiar sense of place and time which underpins what Ian Watt called the 'formal realism' of the novel is subjected to the dramatic intensification of competing class forces. I would argue that, on the whole, the working-class novel has continued to work within this realist paradigm, despite important and effective forays into Modernist forms of narrative disruption by authors such as Robert Tressell, James Hanley, John Sommerfield, Lionel Britton and Alexander Trocchi.[2] However, as various critics have noted, the economic and social devastation of post-industrialism has propelled contemporary working-class writers towards the postmodernist narrative conventions of interiority, fragmentation and indeterminacy.[3] The most conspicuous representatives of this proletarian postmodernism are the Scottish writers Irvine Welsh and James Kelman. Welsh's Edinburgh and Kelman's Glasgow are two prime examples of the relocation and reassignment of literary realism to the Scottish underclass, an act of significant and continuing cultural appropriation. In this essay I want to look at a recent novel about Scottish workers by an English working-class writer who has received less critical attention than Kelman or Welsh, despite being equally committed to the re-imagining of working-class space.

Magnus Mills's first novel *The Restraint of Beasts* was published in 1998, one year after the election of Britain's first 'New Labour' government. The novel made an immediate impact on the literary scene, being nominated for the Booker prize and being widely and favourably reviewed. Mills was praised for introducing a unique voice into British fiction, a combination of working-class realism, deadpan social satire and Kafkaesque wit. Interestingly, reviews did not pick up on the most obvious target of the novel's satirical vision: the commencement of Scottish devolution in 1998. The novel's focus on a gang of Scottish workers who are forced to work across the border in England provides a downbeat assessment of Scotland's independence. Far from presenting a landscape of 'new' labour, the novel shows traditional skilled labour being subjected to an oppressive regime of modernization, an indignity

[1] David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 116-17; cited in Don Mitchell, 'Working-Class Geographies: Capital, Space, and Place', in John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon (eds.), *New Working-Class Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 96-7.

[2] Tony Davies, 'Unfinished Business: Realism and the Working-Class Writing', in Jeremy Hawthorne (ed.), *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984); John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002); Tony Shaw, *The Life and Work of Lionel Britton*, Ph.D thesis (Open University, 2007).

[3] Ian Haywood, *Working Class Fiction: From Chartism to 'Trainspotting'* (Northcote House: Writers and Their Work, 1997), Chapter 4; John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), Chapter 3; H. Gustav Klaus, *James Kelman* (Northcote House: Writers and Their Work, 2004).

which one of the central characters dismisses as 'efficiency shite'.[4] Neo-liberalism, the modern garb of the Taylorist speed-up, is the iron fist in devolution's velvet glove, and exploitation in the workplace is the classic exposure of mendacious state policy and fatuous political discourse. In one way, therefore, the novel follows a well-wrought vein of proletarian realism which foregrounds the workplace as the most 'typical' circumstance of social experience. The novelty of Mills's narrative method, as reviewers noted enthusiastically, is to transform this conventional realist structure into a darkly comic dystopian fable. The 'unliterary' material of mundane, alienated and repetitive work is given an allegorical force which recalls *The Trial*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *Animal Farm*. This is undoubtedly a substantial creative step forward for the working-class novel, and I want to give due recognition to Mills's comic talents in the following analysis, but drawing attention to these prominent narrative features hardly represents an equivalent advance in our interpretation of working-class writing. I want to suggest that behind the novel's surrealism there is another, more profound critique of working-class realism. The crucial distinction in this critique is not that between realism and surrealism but between speech and writing.

Before making any attempt to excavate these critical depths, however, it is appropriate at this juncture to summarise (and celebrate) the novel's plot. The story centres on three characters: two Scottish fence erectors called Tam and Richie and their unnamed English narrator-foreman. Much of the action is taken up with seemingly matter-of-fact descriptions of their daily work routine, but what turns the novel into a modern Gothic fable is a series of 'accidental' deaths of clients and bosses. It is impossible to know whether these deaths are actually class-conscious murders, as the narrative point of view is uniformly reticent and understated. Moreover, the gang simply dispose of the bodies and continue with their work as if nothing had happened. The overall effect is absurd, comic and disturbing. Any temptation to read these events as an expression of revolutionary solidarity with the working class is vitiated by the fact that the gang fall increasingly under the sway of an emergent, sinister corporate power in the form of the Hall Brothers, the owners of a monolithic meat factory. This prominent landmark stands out starkly in the bleak, socially denuded landscape, a space which resembles the vacated stage of a Beckett play. The Hall Brothers' factory is a comically terrifying image of capitalist power which is offset against the social backwardness of Tam and Richie: neither of them, for example, is on the telephone (p. 40). Scotland is also largely absent. Most of the action is set in England, and more importantly, the narrator is English. Typically, the novel uses a joke to foreground the issue of Scottish identity. Tam has a tattoo which declares 'I'm a Scot', but it has been badly done and looks more like 'I mascot' (p. 80). By exaggerating their

[4] Magnus Mills, *The Restraint of Beasts* (London: Flamingo, 1998), p. 146. All further page references to this text are given in parentheses after quotations.

isolation, the novel makes Tam, Richie and the narrator the 'mascots' of a chilling new work discipline and alienation. Though they are 'gang 3' they never see other gangs: 'I had no idea where Nos 1 and 2 gangs were working or when they expected to return. The company premises, as a result, always seemed quiet' (p. 15). This Kafkaesque logic is pressed further: for their 'final' job, their boss Donald announces that they are the 'last gang' (p. 187). He orders them to erect the posts of an electrified pen manually, by using stepladders. This absurd task is a stark image of the precarious position of skilled labour. The narrator's observation that a mechanical post hammer could finish the job prompts Tam to voice the quite reasonable comment that it would also make him redundant (p. 198). So manual labour is preserved, but at a very heavy price – possibly even the sacrifice of the soul. In the Hall Brothers' sinister sausage factory the other workers are only seen in the canteen, eating the sole fare of sausages: these workers of the future are silent, docile and robotic. The Gang of 3 has no idea where their colleagues reside.

This discarding of domestic space challenges the classical Marxist construction of the home as the antidote to the 'homelessness' of alienated labour.[5] It is worth a reminder just how far Mills's dystopian vision is removed from the sentimental celebration of the working-class home as the centre of working-class collective values. This space plays a central role in Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, but perhaps the most idealistic image can be found in Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

> In a working-class home – I am not thinking at the moment of the unemployed, but of comparatively prosperous homes – you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to find elsewhere. I should say that a manual worker, if he is in steady work and drawing good wages – an 'if' which gets bigger and bigger – has a better chance of being happy than an 'educated' man. His home life seems to fall more naturally into a sane and comely shape. I have often been struck by the peculiar easy completeness, the perfect symmetry as it were, of a working-class interior at its best. Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking-chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat – it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently *of* it to be taken for granted.[6]

[5] 'Hence the worker feels himself only when he is not working; when he is working he does not feel himself. He is at home when he is not working, and not at home when he is working' - Karl Marx, *Marx: Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 326.

[6] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937; Penguin, 1974), p. 104.

One definition of contemporary working-class realism could be the resistance to this construction of 'humbug' both in form and content. The aim of the working-class writer is to debunk 'the perfect symmetry as it were, of a working-class interior at its best' – in other words, to write asymmetrically. In *The Restraint of Beasts* there are no traces of that 'warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to find elsewhere'. The only trace of that legendary collectivity so cherished by Raymond Williams in the polemical 'Conclusion' to *Culture and Society* is the micro-community of the Gang of 3. There is no Hoggartian community, no 'earnest minority' of anxious proletarian intellectuals, no heroic worker, no trade unions, no state apparatus of any kind, and no history. This is a post-industrial cultural landscape writ large. As Frederic Jameson has noted, postmodern culture is 'peculiarly without transcendence and without perspective ...and indeed without plot in any traditional sense'.[7] The only 'plot' that exists in the novel is, literally, the plotting of territory and the making of plots for boundaries. The workers are erectors of 'high-tensile' fencing, and it is surely the case that the novel self-consciously plays with the metaphorical opportunities of this form of labour, building up clusters of ideas around the themes of tension and enclosure. The gang's first job is announced with the words 'Mr McCrindle's fence has gone slack' (p. 7). The wires are 'hanging limp', a comic, detumescent metaphor of the loss of masculine potency (a theme to which I will return). When McCrindle interferes with the job of restoring tension to his fence, one of these wires springs back and kills him, a wry metaphorical mirroring of the novel's technique of subverting notions of ego and power with violent twists of fate. McCrindle's 'sudden appearance' upsets Tam's footing - 'his balance had gone' (p. 31). Any demonstrations of dignified labour are fleeting: this is not a place of 'balance'. Notice that the company boss Donald is obsessed by the straightness of fencing, a quality he sums up as the 'pursuit of perfection' (p. 10). But the nature of the fencing work replaces this linear trope with the geometry of enclosure, possession, repetition and futility. The job for the English farmer Mr Perkins, for example, involves transforming a hill into four equal portions, an expression of territorialization and standardization. Tam's debt problems mean that when he is paid he owes all his earnings and finds himself economically 'back where I started' (p. 85). This Sisyphean cycle is only broken when the collision of class forces causes catastrophic releases of tension. Significantly, the three killings are like inverted industrial accidents which are triggered by a member of the employing class appearing unexpectedly (and unwelcomed) in the workplace.

The main reason that this surreal comic violence does not seem incongruous is that the novel is only tentatively a realist narrative. From the outset, it is clear that vacancy, emptiness, silence, and darkness are dominant

[7] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1990), cited in Kirk, p. 106.

tonal features (the novel contains numerous nocturnal scenes in which the characters are lost and vulnerable). Silence is class-inflected: for Tam and Richie, as we shall see, it can represent some degree of resistance, but the silence of the bosses is a signifier of implacable and opaque power. Donald, for example, is a silent sleeper: 'Donald, however, in the bunk closest to mine, was totally, totally, silent' (p. 139). Perhaps the joke is on Donald: in sleep he resembles a corpse, an apt metaphor for his devitalization and loss of identity. The detail recalls his 'mechanical' skill with the post hammer. When Richie remarks that Donald is 'a fucking robot' the narrator's unvocalised response is 'he quite possibly is' (p. 146).

In the denuded environment of the narrative, the erecting of markers, borders and boundaries is transformed from futile and alienated labour into a symbolic critique of class and power relations. The 'restraint of beasts' could easily refer to the subjugation of the working class or indeed any demonized minority group. Or it could refer to the Miltonic and philosophical 'hell within'. But the novel's metaphorical playfulness is also contradictory and troubling. The novel ends with the erection of a sinister electrified 'pen' with no gate – is this reference to a lethal 'pen' a defeatist metaphor for literature's collusion with dominant ideology? This interpretation is aided by the fact that the sides of the pen are in 'lines', but there may also be an echo of Adorno's famous jeremiad, that no art is possible after Auschwitz. There are clear allusions to the holocaust in this scene. Donald announces that the electric pen is the 'Final solution to the problem of the restraint of beasts' (p. 159); and when Donald orders the gang to be 'shipped off' to England, the narrator draws the obvious conclusion: 'it was as though we were being transported to some sort of penal colony or corrective camp' (p. 183). For much of the novel, the workers are, literally, the gravediggers of the bourgeoisie, but by the end of the story they are building a quasi-fascist enclosure.

The proliferation of tropes of confinement provides the framework for the novel's investigation of the relationship between speech and writing. The new, colonising capitalism represented by the Hall Brothers is the nemesis of the parochial culture which has produced Tam and Richie. Robert's remark that 'market forces do not recognize feudal boundaries' (p. 37) is an intentional echo (by Mills) of the historical materialism of classical Marxism. In fact, as already suggested, this transition from old to new forms of labour is imagined in the novel precisely in terms of the erection of new, more powerful and insidious boundaries. Mills is exposing a central irony of the rule of 'market forces': capitalism refuses to 'recognize' its own authoritarianism. Its aim is indeed to replace 'feudal boundaries' with its own instruments of power and control, but it attempts to naturalize this power as non-ideological and undialectical. A crucial aspect of this hegemonic drive is the colonization of representation, and one of the aims of radical writing is to expose this dehumanizing and denaturing of reality. The novel opens up this theme when the narrator receives his promotion in Donald's office, a location which

represents a crucible of the company's power: 'I noticed for the first time that there was no clock in that room. Nor was there a calendar on the wall. Even the limited daylight coming through the small recessed window was defeated by the glare of the light-bulb, further isolating the office interior from the world outside' (p. 9).

The connotations of interrogation and imprisonment transform this room into an absurdist icon of megalomania: note that the 'limited daylight' is 'defeated', as if the bosses control time. In this spatio-temporal void, a place of existential death, the company can exert its rule over its workers. But this reign of darkly comic terror is almost entirely non-verbal. As already noted, the reticence of the characters cannot be interpreted in realistic terms as a measure of working-class inarticulacy; on the contrary, silence is part of a rich symbolic language of absence. In this instance, the absence of speech is contrasted sharply with the ultimate expression of Donald's power: his typewriter. The hammering of the typewriter's keys recalls the workers' post hammers: both are marking out territory. As the narrator leaves the office, he hears his future being inscribed on the typewriter: 'The decision was probably being committed to paper at this very moment, so that was that' (pp. 2-3). That key phrase 'committed to paper' provides a critical opportunity to introduce the Derridean distinction between speech and writing. Derrida coined the term 'logocentrism' to describe the monumental error at the heart of western, rationalist attitudes towards language: the idea that words convey unequivocal meaning and 'the signification of *truth*'. For Derrida, this error is a consequence of the fallacy that speech, not writing, is the model for linguistic communication. Speech has a metaphysics of presence based on its supposed closeness to consciousness: 'the voice, producer of *the first symbols*, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind'. This authenticity is contrasted with the second-hand, premeditated nature of writing: 'The written signifier is always technical and representative. It has no constitutive meaning'. For Derrida, of course, the reverse is the case, and it is both the condition and practice of writing which conveys language's constant deferral and subversion of 'truth' and meaning. Derrida sums up the metaphysics of presence as 'logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being'.[8] I know of no critic who has sought to apply the deconstructive theory of 'phonocentrism' to working-class writing. Yet the unique qualities of this writing have often been based on a phonocentric discourse of authenticity. Working-class realism is frequently praised for its closeness to working-class speech. Gustav Klaus, for example, quotes James Kelman's view that 'Getting rid of that standard third party narrative voice is getting rid of a whole value system' to underpin an argument that Kelman 'has been singular in his determination to think through and carry over into literary practice the

[8] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 10-12.

implications of the use of voice in narrative texts in English: the voices of the characters in the dialogues, the voices in their heads and the voice of the narrator'.[9] Behind such critical judgments lies the assumption that the working-class writer personifies working-class culture, and that this culture is immersed in oral traditions. While the latter premise may be true, the former is highly debatable. Indeed, ever since Coleridge debunked Wordsworth's claim that he had written poetry out of the language 'really used by men', there has been a healthy scepticism towards the idea that actual speech and represented speech in literary texts have very much in common. Yet this logocentricism still exerts a powerful influence over working-class writing. In fact this bias can be called 'phallogocentrism,' as most of the 'voices' celebrated by Klaus are unambiguously masculine.

If Kelman and Klaus's phallogocentric requirements for radical realism are applied to *The Restraint of Beasts*, the novel fails miserably. By refusing to get rid of the English 'third party narrative voice', the novel becomes nothing less than a class collaborator, colluding in the hegemonic 'value system' which oppresses both the Scottish working class and the working-class novel. But this would be a naïve reading of the novel, as it clear that Mills deliberately suppresses working-class speech. This evacuation of discourse has the effect of defamiliarizing the 'third party narrative voice' by throwing it into stark relief and exposing its uncertainties and ambiguities. As I hope to show, this refusal of the phallogocentric paradigm of working-class realism can still achieve the aim of critiquing the 'whole value system' of dominant ideology, even though there is no obvious act of literary appropriation by the working-class 'voice'.

In fact it is difficult to imagine exactly how Tam and Richie would inhabit the role of narrator, as they have a grave resistance to being 'committed to paper'. Mills confronts this issue in the form of a characteristic joke. While *en route* to a job, Tam has a cursory look at a folder containing their job details. Faced with a significant 'pile' of paper, his response is instinctive: 'in one movement, Tam transformed Donald's neat pile into a crumpled wedge' (p. 52). For all the anarchic energy of this symbolic violence, it is hard to see how a 'crumpled wedge' of paper is reconcilable with the 'neat pile' of novelistic narrative (we can note here that even B. S. Johnson's unbound novel *The Unfortunates* was not a bundle of crumpled pages – the material form of the book remains conservative, no matter how chaotic the organization of the narrative).[10] But the thorny critical question remains: why does Mills give the narrative to a foreman? Classically, such an authority figure attracts little sympathy in working-class writing. In Alan Sillitoe's novella *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, for example, the borstal-boy narrator Smith defines his identity against the tyranny of the prison governor:

[9] Klaus, p. 2.
[10] B. S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (London: Picador, 1999).

> At the moment it's dead blokes like him as have the whip-hand over blokes like me, and I'm almost dead sure it'll always be like that, but even so, by Christ, I'd rather be like I am – always on the run and breaking into shops for a packet of fags and a jar of jam – than have the whip-hand over somebody else and be dead from the toenails up. Maybe as soon as you get the whip-hand over somebody you go dead. By God, to say that last sentence has needed a few hundred miles of long-distance running.[11]

This defiant vernacular is also a powerful instance of the proletarian 'use of voice', but that fiercely comic last sentence highlights the fact that phallogocentrism is a method of writing – the substitution of 'say' for 'write' deconstructs rather than naturalizes the relationship between speaking and writing (Smith may think he is speaking, but we know he is writing, despite his scorn for 'pen pushers').

But Mills's decision to use 'him as have the whip-hand' as the narrator is clearly provocative, and in order to unsettle the 'value system' normally associated with such a figure, he raises questions about the narrator's occupation of space. To begin with, the narrator's job places him in an ambiguous class position between workers and bosses. He inhabits the awkward space between comradeship and authority, persuasion and coercion, hand work and brain work. He is a kind of fence, a boundary of language and representation, but the wires of this fence are often slack. The novel pokes metaphorical fun at his new 'post'. At times he is little more than a postman, ferrying round messages to Tam and Richie (usually in the dark) and collecting their wages when they are in England. Though he colludes in covering up the three deaths, he also has every reason to be wary of the fate of his colleagues, all of whom are killed by the erecting of posts. There is even a throwaway feminist remark by the woman he sleeps with: 'I'm not a fence post' (p. 105). In fact all the characters resemble fence posts in so far as they are constructed with minimum information and absurdly primitive sensibilities. The narrator is no exception to this Kafkaesque reification. He does not seem to be driven by the gratifications of power and authority. He bears little resemblance to Tressell's Crass and Slyme; indeed, in Mills's novel the consequences of sneaking up on the workers are lethal. Far from being a panoptic lackey, the narrator of *The Restraint of Beasts* spends most of his time with his two underlings. By the end of the novel he uses the plural pronoun 'we' and has far more in common with Tam and Richie than his employers. This gradual abandoning of the 'whip-hand' may be one reason for Mills's choice of a 'third-party' narrator. If the narrator represents the non-committal 'voice' of middle England, or even the politically quiescent condition of the mainstream novel, we can interpret his growing solidarity with the workers as a wake-up call.

[11] Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (London: Grafton, 1986), p. 14.

For much of the novel, however, the narrator has difficulty finding his workers:

> They seemed to have disappeared without trace. From what I'd heard this was the sort of thing they did all the time. They'd just go off somewhere for no apparent reason. And when they came back they wouldn't have an excuse or anything. (p. 3)

These absences are of course explicable in terms of Tam and Richie's work-shyness, but the menacing allusion to murder ('disappeared without trace') suggests the existence of a Godot-like wilderness of non-signification, a place outside of representation. This dead-zone is presided over by menacing patriarchal figures. Tam's father Mr Finlayson, for example, who is the keeper of a golf-course, appears suddenly out of pre-dawn darkness and attacks the gang, believing they are intruders. Similarly, when Mr Pringle greets the gang as they arrive at his farm, he is described as a 'voice in the gloom' (p. 55). The landscape of the novel is haunted by an existential blight, a nightmare space occupied by capitalism's zombies, descendants of Marx's 'dead generations' weighing down on the present, or perhaps those who are 'dead from the toenails up'. But even when Tam and Richie do materialise, they are still largely defined by verbal vacancy. Unlike Beckett's existentially marooned heroes, Tam and Richie have almost nothing to say. It is difficult to know whether this silence represents an absence of intelligence (thick as a post?), conscious resistance, or simply boorish and boring male self-sufficiency. Tam's occasional nationalistic outbursts are easily deflated. The narrator's response to Tam's favourite insult 'English bastards' is to note 'the odd way he kept going on about "bastards" in the plural. This suggested it was nothing personal' (p. 27).

In the workplace, the narrator suffers the same alienation, isolation and dislocation as Tam and Richie. The job for Mr Perkins becomes absurdly difficult when they are denied walkie-talkies, and have to traipse up and down the hill to communicate with each other. Tam and Richie are often reduced to the mere glow of cigarettes in darkness (as in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*, smoking seems to be an existential prop for the beleaguered).[12] When the narrator is working some distance away from the other two, the sound delay makes it seem as if they were 'moving in a different world to me' (p. 74). After being 'more or less cut off from the rest of the world all day' (p. 90), they return from work one day to find that the Hall Brothers have erected a new fence near their caravan – a clear warning of things to come. When the narrator first meets John Hall, who is inspecting their workmanship, he feels 'like a mere fixture or fitting' (p. 106).

[12] Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar* (London: Vintage, 1996).

Nor is there much consolation in that traditional working-class institution of conviviality, the pub. In the final stages of this article, I want to focus on four aspects of Mills's characteristically ironic construction of this social space: gender, popular culture, community, and neo-feudal power. Beginning with gender, it is a commonplace that the pub is traditionally a space where the virile working-class hero excels. The classic expression of this is the drinking contest which opens Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.[13] In Mills's novel, however, the emphasis is on masculine insecurity, implacability, and homo-sociality. For Tam and Richie, the pub is a merely a continuation of the male-exclusive experience of the workplace. Early in the novel, the narrator makes the tactical decision to join Tam in the pub. When he remarks that Richie is absent, Tam retorts 'We're not married you know' (p. 25). Tam and Richie are often shown sitting side by side: in the truck, in Donald's office during the 'interrogation' scene, and in the pub scenes. At one point on the Perkins job, the narrator makes the 'cardinal error of separating Tam and Richie' (p. 63), and when Richie is later forced to work with Donald, he 'looked as if he was embarking on a death march' (p. 140). Tam and Richie make no attempt to mix with locals, or to pick up women. Significantly, it is the narrator who makes a romantic conquest, though this is hardly a victory for his masculine prowess: 'I felt as if I was alone with this girl on a remote and distant planet' (p. 104). This lack of potency is an ironic comment on phallogocentricism. The almost complete absence of mothers, wives and girlfriends from the narrative could, similarly, be seen as an ironic comment on the post-industrial feminization of labour. Rather than sentimentalize or eulogise the passing of the era of Arthur Seaton, Mills exaggerates the perils and insecurities of male-exclusive labour. As John Kirk has noted, the typical working-class male of post-industrial culture is emasculated: 'Men are seen as occupying enclosed or empty spaces…Paid work is absent, or about to be: working-class masculinity can no longer be reaffirmed in older codes linked to collective agency within the public sphere'.[14] This represents a devastating loss for a whole radical politics which was built around the idea of the productive male worker. Kirk's assessment would have seemed unthinkable as recently as the 1970s, before the Thatcherite neo-liberal revolution launched a frontal assault on the 'older codes' of 'collective agency'. In a key collection of essays published in 1979, Paul Willis expressed a confident belief in the workplace as a 'central point of reference' for the way we think about the working class as a whole:

> Production is not simply the engine house of the social totality producing, somehow, its 'effects' elsewhere on the social plane. Production, and its relations, is social and cultural to its very roots, to its very surface. It is the

[13] Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958; London: Flamingo, 1993).
[14] Kirk, p. 20.

> privileged site and generator of working-class culture both because of its massive presence and also because the struggle there *fixes*, organises in a particular combination, those discourses and external influences which play over the surface of work – helping to develop them in a particular way, clinching certain features, even when appearing manifestly outside of production. Work is where the demands of capital must be met but from the resources not simply of potential abstract labour but from concrete, cultural forms of labour power. Whatever 'free' play there is in cultural forms always articulates around this central point of reference.[15]

Willis summarises his position: 'One of the marks of the lived and contemporary culture of the shop-floor is a development of this half-mythical confrontation with *the task*.'

Mills's debunking of this 'half-mythical confrontation with *the task*' is both a comment on post-industrialism and recognition that the figure of the heroic male worker was always vulnerable to a feminist critique. Willis shows the impact of feminism on Marxism when in the same essay he revises his definition of the mythic 'task':

> We may say that where the principle of general abstract labour has emptied work of significance from the inside, a transformed patriarchy has filled it with significance from the outside. Discontent with work is turned away from a political discontent and confused in its logic by a huge detour into the symbolic sexual realm…The brutality of the working situation is partially reinterpreted into a heroic exercise of manly confrontation with 'the task'. (p. 196)

In this reconfiguration, masculinity is a form of false consciousness, a 'huge detour' from true, gender-aware class-consciousness. *The Restraint of Beasts* projects the 'brutality of the working situation' to a Dystopian extreme: all the workers at the Hall Brothers factory are male. As Virginia Woolf noted in *Three Guineas*, there is a close correlation between fascism and over-valued ideals of masculinity.[16] When the secretary Morag appears from Scotland to give the gang their sinister new uniforms, she is only allowed to on the premises for a short time: 'The men would have found it too disturbing' (p. 215).

But this is a novel which delights in 'disturbing' premises. I want to comment briefly on three other ways in which the pub fails to function as a place of working-class agency. These three aspects – popular culture, community and neo-feudal power – can be mapped onto Raymond Williams's synchronic analysis of culture as a dynamic combination of three forces, the

[15] Paul Willis, 'Shop floor culture, masculinity and the wage form', in John Clarke, ed, *Working-Class Culture: Studies in history and theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 190.
[16] Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth, 1986).

dominant, the residual, and the emergent.[17] The dominant contemporary notion of the pub is a place of popular leisure, but in Mills's novel popular culture does not fill up the voids left by post-industrial consciousness. In one scene a pub singer is totally ignored, and all the characters, including the narrator, are completely incurious about culture. The pub also fails in its older, residual function as a site of community values. Tam's father drinks alone at the bar even though Tam is present, and there is no suggestion that the pub generates working-class consciousness. But, as Williams showed, residual culture can be either resistant or reactionary. There is a persistence of a different, conservative idea of community in the way in which the Hall Brothers command a neo-feudal, forelock-tugging loyalty whenever they enter a pub. But the Hall Brothers also represent an extreme, fascistic version of an emergent corporate capitalism. This combination of English parochial pomposity and menacing entrepreneurialism is satirically highly effective. It is only on the last page that the Hall Brothers consolidate their power over the gang by revealing their omniscient knowledge of the three deaths. The future is symbolised by their sinister 'pen', a symbol of literary nemesis.

It is undeniable that Mills has introduced a new 'voice' into the canon of working-class writing, but the contention of the essay is that 'voice' needs to be understood as a sophisticated tool of writing, a means of probing and subverting the relationship between representation and meaning. The nameless 'third party' English narrator can be interpreted as a metonymy of the uncertain authority of literary narrative in general, and the contemporary working-class novel in particular. The central statement of the novel is both comically profound and disturbingly cynical: 'The decision was probably being committed to paper at this very moment, so that was that'. Is this Mills's postmodern answer to the radical tradition represented by Robbie Burns? To commit to paper, and to make paper commit: does that guarantee a man's a man for a' that?

> Then let us pray that come it may,
> As come it will for a' that,
> That Sense and Worth o'er a' the earth
> Shall bear the gree an' a' that.
> For a' that, an a' that,
> It's comin yet for a' that,
> That Man to Man the warld, o'er
> Shall brithers be for a' that.[18]

[17] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
[18] Robert Burns, 'A Man's a Man for A' That' (1795), in *The Canongate Burns*, ed. Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 512.

The Restraint of Beasts provides a rather different conception of the rule of 'brithers'. The only certain antidote to Terror is a precarious existential contingency. One of the gang's bosses is compared to 'a powerless head of state paying a visit to foreign subjects about whom he knew little. He stayed a while just to remind us he existed, and then he went away again' (p. 23). It may be easier to debunk authority than to assume it.

Orchestrating Chaos: Clutter, Rhythm and Everyday Life

Tracey Potts

The wind is a-whistling
The wind is a-whistling
Through the house [1]

(Kate Bush)

Keeping things tidy has, in recent years, become a matter for professionals. As the consumer universe expands, the notion of the storage solution assumes a new level of importance. This goes beyond a need for more cupboards: putting things away and, crucially, retrieving them efficiently, requires increasingly technologised management. With this, special talents have emerged together with new pathologies: as IBM celebrate their appointment of a 'storage guru', lifestyle TV castigates those who succumb to 'clutteritis' in the home. The imperative to manage information and objects successfully, in its charismatic guise, becomes a moral issue. Professional organisers are by no means simply concerned with stowage, storage and retrieval. Specialist practices such as space clearing, feng shui and Getting Things Done® aim, in restoring order, to enhance energy flow, cure illness, improve productivity and relationships, relieve stress, increase annual turnover and add value to our property.

From the vantage point offered by the work of Zygmunt Bauman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Henri Lefebvre, euphemised discourses expressing a concern with health and well being become unmasked and their capital interests exposed. Couched in medicalised terms (symptoms, diagnosis, cure and rehabilitation), the minimalist design for living recommended by professionals operates, I argue, as a disguise for the manufacture of spaces, agents and economies calculated to secure new forms of social distinction together with new rhythms of living and working. This article, aims to untidy the professionalised view of 'clutter' in order to show how 'de-cluttering' advice is above all concerned with money. Beginning with a sustained exploration of professional storage advice (including popular UK TV programmes such as *The Life Laundry*) I argue that the pathologisation of what becomes viewed as disorder is itself symptomatic of a social condition that masks social conditioning. Having exposed some of the interests at stake in the production of clutter as an obstacle to successful living, I move on to consider how the 'stuffiness' of everyday life introduces substantial tactical resistance into office and household management schemes and, consequently, into consumption circuitry. Disturbing what becomes demarcated as 'clutter', enabling its liberation into dynamic heterogeneity (what Judy Attfield determines as 'wild'

[1] Kate Bush, 'King of the Mountain', *Aerial* (EMI, 2005).

objects),[2] illuminates both possibilities of resistance and aspects of consumption (the stage between use and disposal) that, hitherto, have been overlooked.

Euphemistically expressed, progress has engendered a storage crisis. Circuits of consumption are shortening and accelerating; obsolescence is invented more inventively[3] and we're even starting to fill up the sky.[4] Jean Baudrillard's macro viewpoint constitutes one of his least controversial statements and serves us well as a portrait of our current situation:

> I am amazed by the obesity of all current systems, this incarnation of evil, as Susan Sontag said of cancer, that is represented by our means of communication, memory, storage, production, and destruction, means that have been expanded and overburdened so much that their uselessness is a forgone conclusion. It is not we ourselves who have put an end to their utility in theory; the system itself has liquidated it through overproduction. So many things are being manufactured and piled up that they will simply never find more time to serve anyone.[5]

Such 'atrocious uselessness' is exemplified by the nuclear arms race – the accumulation of 'sophisticated weapons that do not lead to war!' Morbidly obese, 'bloated and excrescent',[6] consumer culture is determined by chronic yet obligatory overproduction, a fact appreciated by Walter Benjamin, whose thought-image for modernity – the angel of history[7] – anticipates Baudrillard's vision of the end of utility (which it is tempting to term the era of futility). Progress (coded as the relentless and aggressive pursuit of the new, and the newer!) inevitably produces the obsolete and the outmoded, landing as wreckage, and *becoming* clutter, leftovers, gluts, surplus (army and catalogue), or rubbish in the system of value that is oriented toward the future.

Viewed from the ground, rather than from the angel's perspective, the debris piling up towards the heavens blocks the stairs, fills up handbags, car

[2] Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday life* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

[3] See Couze Venn, 'Rubbish, the Remnant, Etcetera', *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, 2-3 (March-May 2006), pp. 44-6, (p. 44) and also Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000) on the acceleration of consumption patterns.

[4] The NASA Orbital Debris Program Office statistics on recovered space junk (i.e. catalogued debris that re-enters the Earth's atmosphere) report an average of one piece falling 'back to Earth every day for more than 40 years', **http://www.orbitaldebris.jsc.nasa.gov/reentry/recovered.html**. LEO (low Earth orbit) images depict a halo of clutter circling the planet. See **http://www.orbitaldebris.jsc.nasa.gov/photogallery/beehives.html#leo** for details.

[5] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Anorexic Ruins' in *Looking Back at the End of the World*, ed. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (New York: Semiotexte, 1989), p. 30.

[6] Baudrillard, p. 30.

[7] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *Selected Writings: 1938-1940, Volume 4*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 253.

boots and hard drives, covers tables, gets sent to China, given to charity, and necessitates mundane action or denial (which is a complex form of psychic action). It is safe to assume that we all have things in our possession, pushed into cupboards, attics, drawers, under beds and stored on obsolete floppy disks, which as my mother used to say are 'neither use nor ornament.' Even Monica, Courtney Cox's character in the popular US sitcom *Friends*,[8] who obsessively categorises towels into 'Everyday use', 'Guest', 'Fancy' and 'Fancy Guest' and who hoovers her vacuum cleaner, is revealed to have a secret cupboard filled to the ceiling with undifferentiated 'stuff'. We might well apprehend overproduction, at the level of the everyday, as a storage crisis: as an issue of space where we fight with the saucepan cupboard and curse the in-tray and the memory stick. Macrological portents are experienced as micrological irritations. What does it mean to live through modernity's storms? Where can we put the ironing board?[9]

Interior Magic: How to Perfect the Art of Modern Household Management, Control the Chaos and Create the Miracles in Your Life That You Deserve, Step by Step![10]

Meanwhile, a specialist group of professionals seems to have come to our rescue. The 'organising consultant', the 'storage guru' and the 'house doctor' are there to offer us guidance in dealing with our possessions and harmonising our environments.[11] This is by no means mere practical advice; clutter busters

[8] See *Friends,* 'The One with the Embryos', season 4, episode 12 (first broadcast 15 January, 1998), and 'The One with the Secret Closet', season 8, episode 14 (first broadcast 31 January 2002).

[9] While this article is not expressly concerned with gendered implications of clutter, focusing more upon the manufacture of class distinction, the question of putting away the ironing board is utterly overburdened as a gender issue. Keeping order in the house is still regarded as women's work, regardless of putative equalities outside the home. Ben Highmore's summary of gender relations exemplified in *The Life Laundry* is more than instructive here: '*Life Laundry* is desperately unsymmetrical in terms of gender. The life launders, for the most part, speak a rationalized language of efficiency and order, which positions the inefficient, blocked, and irrational hosts (both male and female) as feminine and in need of masculine direction. Yet the actual men in the programme, who almost unfailingly talk a language of unsentimental pragmatism, simply fall into the background, consigned to the role of hapless simpletons. The women take centre stage, and they do so as both spectacle of modern female neurosis, and as its antidote. It is the soothing council of the female presenter, the new-age guru of space and energy that will free the neurotic of obsession and usher in a new world of energy flows and extra cupboard space' - Ben Highmore, 'Cupboard Love', *Things* 17-18 (2004), pp. 139-40.

[10] The titles of decluttering guides are cluttered with promises. Karen Rauch Carter's *Move Your Stuff, Change your life: How to Use Feng Shui to Get love, Money, Respect and Happiness* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000) is exemplary here.

[11] Professional organisers publish books, websites, offer consultancy services and life coaching, send e-mail alerts and provide personalised support in helping to organise lives. Amazon.co.uk lists 139 titles, selected highlights include: Karen Kingston, *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui: Space*

are tough on clutter and tough on the causes of clutter. Clutter busters are psychopathologists, assisting technically, spiritually and even medically to sort out our selves as we sort our files. The key to harmonisation lies in our relationship to our things. Professional organisers define clutter in functionalist terms as objects that are neither loved nor useful.[12] Sue Kay, author of the best-selling *No More Clutter*, elaborates:

> It's too much stuff and furniture for the space you live in. It's disorganised things like unfiled paperwork. It's broken electrical equipment. It's clothes that are two sizes too big or make you feel frumpy. It's junk in the loft. It's the books you'll never read again. It's useless things like old keys you keep just in case. It's unwanted presents you feel too guilty to give away. It's cards and photos that remind you of unhappy times in your life. It's unfinished projects like the button you've been meaning to sew on for months or the mound of unsorted photos shoved into the bottom of your wardrobe.[13]

The necessary rationalisation of our object relationships promises huge dividends; the presence of clutter acts as a drain on our resources, ridding

Clearing Can Change your Life (London: Piatkus Books, 1998); Barb Rogers, *Clutter Junkie No More! Stepping Up to Recovery* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 2007); Cynthia Townley Ewer, *Cut the Clutter: Speed Your Cleaning and Calm the Chaos* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2006); Inge ven der Ploeg and Naomi Perlzweig, *Clear the Clutter: Make Space for Your Life* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2003); Meryl Starr, *Home Organizing Planner: Clearing Your Clutter Step by Step* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2004); Skye Alexander, *10-Minute Clutter Control Room by Room: Hundreds of Easy, Effective Tips for Every Room in the House: 400 All-new Tips for Every Room!* (Beverly, MA: Fair Winds Press 2005); Sara Hunter, *10-minute Organizing: 400 Fabulous Tips to Organize Every Room of Your House - In Spite of Your Family!* (Beverly, MA: Fair Winds Press, 2006); Harriet Schechter, *Let Go of Clutter!* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001); Susan Wright, *Clear Away the Clutter: Getting Rid of Excess Stuff That Clogs Your Life* (New York: Gramercy Books, 2003); Donna Smallin, *Organizing Plain and Simple: A Ready Reference Guide with Hundreds of Solutions to Your Everyday Clutter Challenges* (North Adams, MA: Storey Books, 2004); Joyce Anderson, *Help, I'm Knee-deep in Clutter!* (New York: Amacom, 2007). Websites include: *Clutter Wizard* (**http://www.clutterbuster.net/ index.htm**), *House Doctor.* Ann Maurice's personal advice, property presentation and home staging consultancy (**http://www.housedoctor.co.uk**), *Website magic* (**http://www.wholisticwebdesign.ca articles/001/clearclutter.html**), *Life Laundry* (**http://www. lifelaundry.net**), *FlyLady:* personal on-line coach (**http://www.flylady.net**). TV programmes (and TV tie-in publications) include *Anthea Turner: Perfect Housewife* (BBC3); *The Life Laundry* (BBC2); *Cash in the Attic* (BBC1); *The House Doctor, The House Doctor: Interior Rivalry, The House Doctor: Inside and Out, The House Doctor: The A-Z of Design, The House Doctor: Designs for Living, How Not to Decorate* (all Channel 5); *Colin and Justin on the Estate* (The Lifestyle Channel); most shows on The Lifestyle Channel.

[12] Declutterers and interior designers alike have embraced an arts and crafts attitude to the interior, ostensibly following William Morris's decree to 'have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful', *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. May Morris (1910; London: Routledge, 1992, 24 vols.), vol. 22, p.76

[13] Sue Kay, *No More Clutter: How to Clear Your Space and Free Your Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), p. 2.

ourselves of excess baggage ushers in a 'lifestyle that will bring health and joy'[14] and a permanent release from stress.

In the business world, clutter collects in the in-tray and in the mind. Sluggish productivity results from a build-up of unsorted and un-actioned things – 'open loops' to borrow David Allen's term, literally unfinished business. Closing loops consists in finding efficient ways to process 'stuff' with the promise of enhanced freedom and energy. Allen's *Getting Things Done®* system (consisting of business and corporate services, a seminar series, software products and a best-selling series of books) aims to streamline business practice and boost personal productivity, enabling a holistic and integrated approach to living and working: 'a new practice for a new reality'.[15] The mind, correlated in computing terms, as composed of a finite unit of 'psychic RAM', 'is a focusing tool, not a storage space'.[16] Action and intention is, then, necessarily emptied from the mind and onto the page into a 'total inventory of commitments', which is then subject to data processing techniques. Advocating a context-based approach to tasks organised according to *where* they might be carried out: at home, at the computer, on the phone for instance, Allen maintains that flow between home and office is the key to success in both:

> If you make [this] a characteristic of your ongoing life- and work style, and you maintain it across all areas of your life (not just the most "urgent"), you'll be practicing the kind of black belt management style I'm describing.[17]

With wireless networks and mobile communications technologies having freed offices from premises, business can be conducted from a car, a service station, or a queue in a bank. The expansion of contexts from which it is possible to operate, results in an expansion of opportunity to master workflow. Offices can materialise with the twist of a lipstick: for Allen waiting for one's spouse to get ready to go out offers a perfect opportunity to 'crank down' the phone call list.[18]

'Clutter is stuck energy', according to Feng Shui consultant Karen Kingston who claims to be able to smell clutter even if it is 'hidden away from sight'.[19] The cluttered home tells of other blockages too. For many consultants there is

[14] See Flylady's, Body Clutter Release Contract (**http://flylady. com/images/bc_release. pdf**).
[15] See in particular: David Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress Free Productivity* (London: Piatkus, 2002); David Allen, *Ready For Anything: 52 Productivity Principles for Work and Life* (London: Piatkus, 2004) and The David Allen website: **http://www.davidco.com** (quotation from *Getting Things Done*, p. 3).
[16] Allen, *Getting Things Done*, p. 22.
[17] Allen, *Getting Things Done*, p. 22.
[18] Allen, *Ready For Anything*, p. 4.
[19] Karen Kingston, *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui* (London: Piaktus, 1998), p. 5.

absolute continuity between the domestic and bodily interior:

> People who collect clutter on the outside tend to collect it on the inside too, but whereas clutter on the outside can hamper your progress in life, clutter on the inside can have even more serious health-threatening or even life-threatening consequences. [20]

The build up of stuff in the hallway or in the kitchen drawer finds its counterpart in the intestine and on the thighs: 'Body Clutter', to borrow the title of Marla Cilley and Leanne Ely's self-help guide.[21] Decluttering these spaces, effectively performing a colonic irrigation of the house,[22] helps us potentially to change our entire lives by clearing blockages and flushing out toxins.

Not all of this is new. The blueprint of the house – determined in the late nineteenth century as 'the plastic expression of the personality'[23] – has long been seen to give us away and the modernist interior in particular is organised around a concern with hygiene.[24] Not surprisingly, the meaningful house coincides with the birth of detective fiction: Sherlock Holmes reads the interior for clues to a murder: 'furnished man' as Benjamin termed him, left his physical, hence traceable, impression on the upholstery.[25] In the contemporary view, however, the interior speaks of that other interior space – the psyche – and constitutes the material by which we act out what Monica and her friends would call our 'issues'. Today's house is, hence, the site of everyday psychopathology. Interiors become crime scenes,[26] symptoms of personality disorder, mental breakdown, even dementia: the film biography of Iris Murdoch, for instance, materialises the progress of the writer's Alzheimer's through reference to an increasingly cluttered interior.[27] 'Who lives in a house like this?' asked Loyd Grossman in the 1980s, looking for clues to a celebrity's personality; 'what does your loo say about you?' asks an advertisement for

[20] Kingston, p. 134.
[21] Marla Cilley and Leanne Ely, *Body Clutter: Love Your Body, Love Yourself* (London: Simon and Shuster, 2007) 'I _____ being of clear mind, and with a renewed commitment to release the Body Clutter I have collected in my mind and on my thighs, do hereby declare that I will take BabySteps to ensure lifelong changes. These BabySteps will include changes in my food, movement and overall attitude toward them and me' (**http://flylady.com/images/bc_release.pdf**).
[22] I am not alone in imagining decluttering as colonic irrigation. See Highmore, 'Cupboard Love', p. 139.
[23] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 20.
[24] Highmore, 'Cupboard Love', p. 139.
[25] Ben Highmore illuminates Benjamin's constellatory practice, linking the interior to the detective novel in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 73.
[26] Kim and Aggie – the Cagney and Lacey of cleaning – offer a camp parody of the crime scene (declared grime scenes) as houses are roped off with yellow and black DO NOT CROSS tape in their show *How Clean is Your House* (Channel 4).
[27] *Iris* (2002), dir: Richard Eyre.

Harpic Max®.[28] The meaningful house has turned informant and our relation to it is potentially one of paranoia (understandably given its tendency to grass us up to our neighbours), guilt and shame. What does our perceived untidiness reveal? Whose is this room? What are they like? Are they a mess too?

Constituted as a *symptom*, as an obstruction to successful living and working, clutter demands treatment. In 12 Step style, clutterholics (described often as addicts or junkies) must confront 'the real issues that cause [them] to hold onto things.'[29] Presenter of BBC2's *The Life Laundry*, Dawna Walter favours an encounter therapy approach and literally spreads the contents of the house outside on the lawn. Possessions and emotions are simultaneously exposed: 'There were often tears of remembrance, sadness and joy as they let go of the past and decided to make a fresh start.'[30] Loved and useful things are then sifted out and allowed to return indoors, whilst the saleable and recyclable are separated from the remainder, which is pulverised in a crusher. The violent destruction of stuff is seen as essential to the process of liberation:

> One of our most emotional programmes involved a contributor who had a terrible time letting go of her sentimental things . . . the physical act of throwing these items in the crusher allowed a major blockage of energy in her home and life to be released.[31]

Cleansed of emotional defilement, the clutterholic is free to move on to embrace the life she or he 'deserves'.[32]

Resisting the irresistible pull of things toward each other requires the setting of a household current that pushes things in the same direction. The temporal re-orientation of the clutterholic – looking forward – sets the trajectory of the flow of objects through the house in that the new pushes the old through the home's digestive tract. The de-clutterer's mantra 'one in, one out' is particularly revealing of the law establishing the movement of objects as being from front to back door; appropriation is followed by disposal in a smooth arc of depleting value (most organisers recommend throwing

[28] *Through the Keyhole* (ITV) took the detective format into the interior as the basis for a gameshow. See **http://www.ukgameshows.com/page/index.php/Through_the_Keyhole** for details. See also **http://www.tellyads.com/show_movie.php?filename=TA2185&advertiser= Harpic**.

[29] Sue Kay offers a 12 point plan in *No More Clutter*; Dawna Walters, Reiki informed approach self-consciously mirrors 12 step programmes in *The Life Laundry: How to De-junk Your Life* (London: BBC Books, 2002). Maria Gracia's 'Organize Your Desk in 12 Simple Steps' (**http://www.librarysupportstaff.com/paperclutter.html**) and Clutterers Anonymous 'spiritual' self-help site (**http://www.clutterersanonymous.net/cla-faqs.html**) are but two example of countless 12-step decluttering programmes that can be found online.

[30] Walters, *The Life Laundry*, p. 9.

[31] Walters, *The Life Laundry*, p. 104.

[32] As FlyLady puts it: 'I commit to showing myself the love that I deserve. Actions speak louder than words. Everything that I do is a reflection of the love that I have for me! I am so proud of me!' (**http://flylady.com/images/bc_release.pdf**).

something away everyday). Book purchases, for instance, must be accompanied, like for like, by book disposal. Shelf space remains constant and stocks are culled to fit available space, resulting in a storage solution where books drop off the end as new titles are brought in. Healthy living and working is determined in terms of flow, of engineering the perpetual motion of objects and information as a means of disturbing their perceived inherent tendency to congeal.

Such control of the course of interior space is achieved through perpetual surveillance. Post-blitz reconstruction involves a pledge to remain clutter-free for life.[33] Once 'in recovery' the patient must endeavour to stay focused and oriented toward the future: taking 'one day at a time' (advice usually given to the terminally ill).[34] With one eye fixed on what's ahead the other attends to the present. Rather than be tempted by the quick fix of dumping keys or post on the hall table, things must be marched directly to their designated homes. Vigilance must be constant as things entice other things. Clutter starts with a single misplaced object:

> Think of those mysterious piles of junk that appear on the corner of city streets. It all started with one dumped mattress. Similarly, the first magazine dropped on to the bedroom floor will act as clutter magnet for other stuff.[35]

The home or office is required to surrender its secrets and present itself fully. As Cwerner and Metcalfe note, successful storage and household management '...is based on principles of opening the home up to vision and systematic knowledge so the spaces and times of the home constructs an order of flows in which everything is made present.'[36] The idea of the hidden or unconsidered becomes constituted as *unheimlich*,[37] ('unhomely/uncanny'); with dust operating as evidence of neglect of certain corners, the untidy house is potentially possessed by demons. Clutter busting is, therefore, also ghost-busting. To committed declutterers the home contains some terrifying spaces: Anthea Turner, host of BBC4's *The Perfect Housewife*, is frightened of cupboards, Dawna Water is wary of lofts ('the scariest hiding place in the house'), and under the

[33] Dawna Walters, *The Life Laundry 2: How to Stay De-junked Forever* (London: BBC Books, 2003).

[34] Walters' advice to readers of Sainsbury's magazine is 'you should focus on what you want rather than what might have been' - Dawna Walters, 'Spring Clean Your Life', *Sainsbury's Magazine*, April 2003, p. 118. Likewise Flylady's pledge recommends a similar stance: 'I make a commitment to forgive myself for the Body Clutter I have collected. I will not look back in disgust, but only forward to the new changes in my way of living, celebrating each new day.' (**http://flylady.com/images/bc_release.pdf**).

[35] Kay, *No More Clutter*, p. 195

[36] Saulo B. Cwerner and Alan Metcalfe, 'Storage and Clutter: Discourses and Practices of Order in the Domestic World', *Journal of Design History* 16, 3 (2003), p. 230.

[37] Cwerner and Metcalfe, 'Storage and Clutter', p. 233.

stairs ('doubly scary').[38] Such spaces are typically perceived as graveyards, the last resting-place of dead and broken things, which become decidedly un-dead, though, once interred, feeding off the energy of the living. In the office, 'uncoralled' items assume the shape of monsters and gremlins which, when we're not looking, turn around and bite. Office nightmares resemble a scene from Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, where Jonathan Pryce's character, Sam Lowry, is literally attacked by bureaucracy and is almost suffocated by paper.[39] With this, metaphors of martial arts training and heroic conquest abound: from Allen's notion of blackbelt personal management techniques to injunctions to 'slay the raging paper beast, and take control.'[40]

'Social Magic':[41] How to Mask Scenes of Symbolic Capital Manufacture, Use Symbolic Violence Effectively, and Blame Social Conditions on Individual Depravities (Including a Step by Step Guide to Training Your Body for Liquid Modern Times!)

From the sociologist's point of view, the unreserved identification of material disorder with personality disorder can be read in turn as a symptom: in particular, of the belligerent individualisation of what are fundamentally social 'issues'. One of the more pernicious features of Zygmunt Bauman's 'liquid modernity' is the dissolution of state and community responsibility for welfare. The blame for social conditions is laid squarely at the door of the individual who is offered consumer choice, to borrow Bauman's words, as 'an honourable exit from trouble.'[42] The marketplace of solutions and the self-help industry in particular peddles barbed advice that positions the consumer as utterly responsible for the state of their homes, minds, children, bodies and pets:[43] 'They are told daily that what is wrong with their own lives comes from their own mistakes, has been their own fault and ought to be repaired with their own tools and by their own efforts.'[44]

The illusion of democracy conjured by consumer choice and the assumed openness of the market acts as an alibi for the judgment that is meted out to

[38] Walters, *The Life Laundry*, pp. 96, 98.
[39] *Brazil* (1985), dir: Terry Gilliam.
[40] **http://www.librarysupportstaff.com/paperclutter.html.**
[41] 'Social magic' is Bourdieu's phrase used to refer to the concrete social effects of charismatic ideologies and arbitrary distinctions. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), and also, for a full explanation, Toril Moi, 'Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture', *New Literary History* 22, 4 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 1017-1049.
[42] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 68.
[43] Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualised Society* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000), p. 71. On the evidence of shows from *Homes Behaving Badly* (BBC1) to *DIY: SOS* (BBC1) to *Brat Camp* (Channel 4) to *It's Me or the Dog* (Channel 4) a state of emergency seems to have been declared against certain 'lifestyles'.
[44] Bauman, *The Individualised Society*, p. 47.

those who fail to avail themselves of the help that can be purchased through subscription to lifestyle TV channels, interiors magazines, and household management publications.[45] In place of environmental critique or politics is the pathologisation of the individual for 'lifestyle' failure. Those who succumb to the paper beast and allow dust to build in their homes, in the absence of anything but individualised explanations, only have themselves to blame.

Pierre Bourdieu would view the moral injunction to declutter as so much 'charismatic ideology':[46] as a smoke screen obfuscating scenes of particularised capital interest and investment. Charismatic discourses of taste emphasising a naturalised order of things (an 'eye' or talent for interior design, for instance) mask the manufacture of revenues and rewards for living in sanctioned ways. Clutter wizards, then, literally *are* magicians. Professional organisers can be seen to be involved in the conjuring of symbolic value around styles of household management and interior design. Property presentations skills thus operate as strategies of 'performative magic'[47] aimed toward making money but through the deployment of taste actions (for instance, home staging decisions that are determined as the result of 'working magic' and delivering the 'wow factor').[48] A crucial element in the process of symbolic capital manufacture is the deployment of symbolic violence. In order to secure the exchange rate of symbolic revenue as precisely a disguised currency – we must not see how it is made, or how it changes hands, it must appear as an 'eye' for form or aesthetics – it is important to establish a class of those of who lack the requisite taste or style sense. Those who 'hold on' are subjected to a smart attack that strikes at the very fibres of the self. Stubborn homes and homeowners are constituted as challenges for professionals and as such provide the frisson of much *design for living* programming: House Doctor, Ann Maurice is often billed as facing her 'toughest challenge yet' in TV listings and programme briefings, for instance.[49]

Bauman would see the pathologisation of holding on as the pathologisation of the poor, in that the ability to let go of things is conditional upon the ability to relinquish their embedded capital value. Bauman shows how the capacity to travel light – letting go of heavy investments particularly in material goods – is the new attribute of the powerful who move through the world with laptop and mobile phone in hand.[50] The ability to lose tomorrow what is valued today, to move on in order to improve ourselves thus making our lives more

[45] I have argued this elsewhere. See Tracey Potts, 'Creating "Modern Tendencies": The Symbolic Economics of Furnishing' in *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s*, ed. David Bell and Joanne Hollows (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 156-172.
[46] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 11.
[47] See Judith Butler, 'Performativity's Social Magic', in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
[48] **See http://www.housedoctor.co.uk/tv-series/000213.php.**
[49] Again, see **http://www.housedoctor.co.uk/tv-series/000213.php.**
[50] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 54.

productive and rewarding chimes precisely with the space clearer's plea for us to *Lighten Up!* to borrow the title of Michelle Passof's decluttering manual.[51] Free of the baggage that holds us back we open ourselves to the opportunities of a bountiful universe. As Bauman comments on the pursuit of fitness, the message is one of self-responsibility:

> you *owe* your body thought and care, and if you neglect that duty you should feel guilty and ashamed. Imperfections of *your* body are *your* guilt and *your* shame. But the redemption of sins is in the hands of the sinner and in his or her hands alone.[52]

FlyLady exemplifies Bauman's concerns:

> I will be aware that I am my greatest saboteur; I will be mindful of all the lies I tell myself to keep change from occurring. I realize that how I have been living is not good for me and I am ready for my new attitude of health.[53]

If we think back to the injunction to only keep what we love or use, we might well believe that love is enough of a justification to hold onto the old and trust in our capacity to introduce new loves without ending long established relationships. In the world of the clutter-free, though, not all loves are equal. Anthea Turner makes this explicit, urging the reader to 'be careful with the category' of 'anything you remember with love and good feelings.'[54] Sue Kay, likewise warns the budding declutterer not to 'be a slave to sentiment.'[55] One *Life Laundry* participant was forced to throw her dead baby's identification bracelet into the crusher, whilst another, a grandfather, was forced to part with a collection of Smurfs, which, according to Walter, was interfering with his ability to care for his new grandchild. Normative considerations clearly dictate the suitability of our love objects. Good love is photographs stored or displayed appropriately: in albums and frames and not stuffed under beds in shoes boxes, whilst wrong love is Smurf love or beer mat love or Manchester United love. Even good love has a shelf life though and sanctioned things are not safe from the periodic attacks that now feature as a permanent part of the practice of living: photographs need regularly to be reviewed and rehung; personal letters and cards need to be disposed of several weeks after their arrival.

[51] Michelle Passof, *Lighten Up! Free Yourself From Clutter: Create the Space for miracles by Freeing Yourself from Too Much Stuff* (London: HarperCollins, 2000).
[52] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 67
[53] **http://flylady.com/images/bc_release.pdf.**
[54] Anthea Turner, *How to be the Perfect Housewife: Become a Domestic Goddess and a Queen of Clean: Lessons in the Art of Modern Household Management* (London: Virgin Books, 2007), p. 10.
[55] Sue Kay, *Hoarder or Order* (Bath: Hodder Arnold, 2006), p. 139.

Smurf love, examined from Bourdieu's point of view, is the love that yields little profit and which halts capital transactions; a display of little blue plastic people operates outside key mechanisms of symbolic exchange.[56] Charismatic explanations detailing how the display of wrong loves puts buyers off mask the fact that currencies are being minted through the sanctioning of certain aesthetic blueprints and taste economies. Potential vendors are assumed to be unable to see through a collection of horse brasses, an antique sword display or a floor strewn with socks to imagine their own schemes of inhabiting. Ensuring a good match between self and property, consists in cultivating loves that are recognisable by the right demographic (aspiring, upwardly mobile) and dropping suitors that fail to project the correct image. In a world where mobile phones are portrayed as boyfriends, who we are supposed to dump as soon as a better -looking one arrives on the scene, we are urged to love promiscuously and with self-serving intent. The stripping of what is determined as 'the personality' from the house together with the exhortation to decorate in neutral tones gives further clues as to the manufacture of symbolic economic value. White walls and a clutter-free environment give both the illusion of space, which is the estate agent's prime commodity, whilst dealing in a symbolic currency organised against notions of conspicuous or idiosyncratic consumption (marked as vulgar). The designed, controlled and staged interior accrues value that translates ultimately into hard cash: a de-cluttered, professionally staged house is said to achieve a quick sale and substantially increase its market value.[57]

It should be clear then that business logic by far outweighs eco-logic in the declutterer's blueprint. While recycling makes an appearance in many repertoires it is usually given scant attention and presented alongside other strategies for getting rid of things such as the euphemised practice of 'regifting'[58] (dumping your unwanted presents on friends) and auctioning (converting stuff into cash to buy new things). The restoration of energy flow promised by space clearing without doubt restores the flow of capital; in addition to creating symbolic value – in this respect *The Life Laundry* launders money – the establishment of daily routines is recommended in terms of the *revenue* they potentially yield in increased time (which became money at the end of the nineteenth century) and energy (which enhances profitability in that we can cram more into each day).

.Space-clearing authorises what Wendy Wheeler terms a managerial approach to living: 'managerial choice is dictated by what is efficacious, by

[56] Smurf lovers aside, who might manufacture value amongst themselves in the form of sub-cultural capital (a rare baseball Smurfette is at the time of writing for sale on eBay for £70 together with a still rarer 'Polish Schtroumpf, Schlumpf, transvestite Smurf', starting bid £30), such commodities are generally located outside of culturally sanctified markets. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) for an account of the process of symbolic value manufacture.
[57] See **http://www.homestagingconsultants.co.uk/?gclid=CPasxonw74wCFQqBQAodQyBD9A.**
[58] Walters, *The Life Laundry*, p. 72.

what enables one to live an effective or effecting or efficient life – normally in terms of material profit or ease.'[59] Living effectively requires the perfection of the business manager's stance to everyday tasks; the tools and designs for living the approved life are taken – unmodified – straight from the office. Meticulous organisation necessitates filing systems, labels, colour codes, databases, card indexes, specialist storage systems, action trays, to-do lists, memo boards, and deadlines. Routines and timetables are set up to continue the results achieved by the blitz ranging from '60 second sort-its' and 5 minute daily plans[60] to weekly and monthly targeted tasks (the blitz is an annual event if maintenance is successful). As Bauman points out 'mastery over time'[61] constitutes a prime source of managerial power and household managers must endeavour to make every second productive. The micromanagement of the everyday now extends into what Theodor Adorno once called 'free time.'[62] Flylady's 'My Control Journal' can be purchased with a sticker pack which moves beyond old divisions between work and leisure: enabling time to be 'zoned' into family fun time, weekly home blessing, school event, make menu, birthday, no school, desk time, doctor, dentist, vet, date night, me time, free time, anniversary, sports, vacation, and renew your spirit time.[63] GTD®, likewise, advocates the inclusion of what in the 1980s – usually jokingly and with reference to the imagined personal lives of yuppies – we called 'quality time' in the inventory of commitments, together with dreams, wishes and vague hopes for the future (filed under 'someday/maybe').

As Lefebvre states 'Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm,'[64] managerialism, therefore, implies the imposition of a particular tempo. The workplace sets priorities of profitability, efficient expenditure of energy and resources but simultaneously, and crucially, the *pace* of such priorities. What Lefebvre terms 'the concrete modalities of social time'[65] respond irresistibly to the division of labour as the practical consequences of particular arrangements make themselves known on the body. The rhythms of the workplace – of factory or office – regulated by clock or linear time interfere with what are understood as the cyclical rhythms of the cosmos: of 'days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea, monthly cycles, etc.'[66] Circadian rhythms traverse, adjust and

[59] Wendy Wheeler, *A New Modernity? Change in science, literature and politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), p. 103.
[60] For instance, 'Every day I simply focus on one task for five minutes – or I pick up, put away or throw out five items from one drawer, shelf or closet. I call it The Five Minutes or Five Things Plan!' Heloise's Household Helpline, Good Housekeeping (**http:// magazines.ivillage.com/goodhousekeeping/heloise/heloise/articles/0,,167096_294366,00.html**).
[61] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 10.
[62] Theodor Adorno, 'Free Time', *The Culture Industry: Selected essays on mass culture*, ed. J. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 187.
[63] **http://www.flylady.net/pages/FlyShop_calendar.asp#ultworks.**
[64] Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 15.
[65] Lefebvre, p. 73.
[66] Lefebvre, p. 8.

conflict with those demanded by commodity capitalism. Lefebvre looks on bodily training (*dressage*) in ways similar to Foucault as exacting docility. The establishment of a commanding rhythm is the key to establishing dominance: 'objectively, for there to be change, a social group, a class or a caste must intervene by imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner.'[67]

Matching lifestyle to the beat of workstyle represents one such victory by insinuation; imposing domestic drills complementary to those of work operates as a form of charismatic practice, i.e. as a *surreptitious* means of securing control. Post-millennial dressage, effectively a bodily and psychic retraining for liquid modernity, requires a 'permanent state of readiness'; the 'mind like water'[68] constitutes the perfect attitude for a world where solids and certain certainties (secure markets, careers, incomes) have melted. Where once free time was 'shackled to its opposite,'[69] functioning as a palliative to work, clear distinctions between work and leisure are eroding along with office walls. In place of time off, we are encouraged to want to win 'at the game of work and the business of life' – for GTD® practitioners especially, relaxation is replaced by the revenues of 'relaxed productivity.'[70] The mantra of demand culture: 'always on', potentially replaces 'Thank God It's Friday.'

The blueprint of the decluttered environment, where, unimpeded by 'stuff', we are permitted to go with the flow, threatens to accelerate the obesity identified by Baudrillard. The declutterer's design ideal paints a picture of the house less as a place of dwelling than as a wind tunnel, where modernity's storm of progress is allowed to whistle through. The 'one in, one out rule' determines tunnel traffic as a one-way street. The logic of decluttering thus commands us to keep step with the progressive rhythms of capitalist modernity; to keep the system from backing up; to keep the tunnel clear and goods flowing through. In this sense, decluttering replicates the tempo of the conveyor belt – a familiar Frankfurt School nightmare[71] – as the householder guards the tunnel awaiting the appearance of objects entering its portals, objects which are born to be used up, worn out and replaced. Modern household management techniques respond to 'the times of brutal repetitions,'[72] where perfect housewives of either gender are invited to mimic the residents of Italo Calvino's continuous city, Leonia, who everyday dispose of yesterday's things with alacrity, so much so that the narrator begins to 'wonder if Leonia's true passion is really, as they say, the enjoyment of new and different things, and not, instead, the joy of expelling, discarding, cleansing itself of a recurrent impurity.'[73]

[67] Lefebvre, p. 14.
[68] Both phrases taken from Allen, *Getting Things Done*, pp. 34, 37.
[69] Adorno, p. 187.
[70] **http://www.davidco.com.**
[71] See Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1982), pp. 157-202.
[72] Lefebvre, p. 73.
[73] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 114.

This house without corners permits no rest. The sensuous and poetic aspects of dwelling are cast out of the efficient home, or are else invited back in the stage-managed form of fake fur throws at the end of the bed (always folded or draped and never rucked up and full of crisps) or vintage collectables or simply designed lamps (which 'can produce the cosiest and people-friendly glow').[74] Such performances are profoundly fragile – aromatherapy candles in the wind – when considered in the light of aesthetic 'progress' (interior design advice which invites us to reinvent black as brown or to chuck out the chintz). The performativity of lifestyle is relentless and hysterical as will be evident for anyone who reads *Elle Decoration*, where the new eclecticism – 'curated clutter' – recently became the new minimalism.[75] The restless vigilance needed to maintain the home's equilibrium and harmony contradicts its promise as sanctuary or refuge. The capacity to dwell, to inhabit, to light a candle and *sit* (usually viewed by declutterers as a sanctioned 'spiritual' practice), competes with a deranged surveillance of the interior. The spaces we clear in anticipation of relaxation and enjoyment are undermined by the ever-present threat of attack by our own possessions. The domestic interior becomes subjected to an aggressive autoimmune response.

'Rough Magic':[76] How to Create Your Own Personal Ecosystem of Objects, Loving and Preserving their Dynamic Heterogeneity and Mundane Marvellousness!

The demented portrait of obsessive cleaning and tidying found in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* dramatises something of this sense of being attacked by one's own stuff. Warhol is having one of his daily phone conversations ('I call it checking-in') with the unnamed B who regales him with details of her fastidious household routines:

> Then I start doing the drawers of the desk. I have a lot of tapes in the top drawer so I have to see that all the cassettes are in order. I take a whole line of them out and put them on newspaper. Then I spray Fantastik down that space and with my Handi-Wipes I wipe that up. And then I take each cassette and I dust and wipe each one with a tiny bit of Windex, which is good for their plastic coverings. I never get them out of line or out of order, they stay right in line because once I mixed up two years and it took me a long time to put it back together line by line, date by date. And then I usually get a little distracted because I see a tape and think, 'Oh gosh, that

[74] *Elle Decoration*, January 2005, p. 164.

[75] *Elle Decoration*, May 2006, special storage supplement, p. 3.

[76] *Rough Magic* is the title of a series of four radio programmes presented by Steven Connor (BBC Radio 4, 9-30 January 2000) exploring the mundane enchantments of common everyday objects (bags, wires, sweets and screens). See **http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/magic/** for expanded transcripts. 'Rough Magic: Bags' is also reprinted in Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 346-51.

> person's dead. I should listen to it for a minute.' So I just quickly get that done (...) Then I go through the envelopes.

B moves on to talk about her unique methods of disposal (which were prompted by an incident where pornographic self-portraits were discovered by a maintenance worker in her bin):

> I don't want to put [things] in the waste-paper basket because I want that EMPTY so I sit on the edge of the bathtub and I take two pages of TV Guide at a time and I tear it up into four or five pieces, put it in the toilet, flush, and I go through that with the whole TV Guide. You know, if I've come back from emptying the trash and I see, 'Oh, that's last Saturday's Guide.' Then I do it with an empty box of cigarettes. I take the silver paper out and I crumple that in a ball - I put that in the toilet - then I take the little box of Marlboros and make it into little pieces...[77]

Comically paranoid, the conversation in its obsessive and exhaustive specificity (it continues for 27 pages) draws attention simultaneously to an *immanent* everyday world of stuff and to the energy and attention needed to bring it under control. The build-up or even the threat of clutter provides something of an immanent critique, then, where the everyday *material* world of things fights back.

What might appear, from a normative standpoint, as a catalogue of fixations can be seen to operate as a form of productive description. As Ben Highmore suggests, given that the everyday usually operates between the lines of sanctioned representation, the first task of the critic is one of bringing the effect of normalising norms into focus, beginning with forms of thick description of things that usually escape notice or are congealed in conceptual remnants (as waste, for instance). Any critique of that which is yet to be adequately represented is, then, premature;[78] 'clutter' needs to be broken out of a moralising discourse founded in the prescriptive standards of modernity, which in privileging a progressive, streamlined, efficient use of space inevitably remainder certain schemes of inhabiting. As Cwerner and Metcalfe argue 'the reality of clutter cannot be assumed as it has often been used as a metaphor for certain moral values.'[79] Clutter is *produced*: rationally organised materials for writing an academic article (an iBook G4™, index cards, a fountain pen, notebooks, old cups of tea, a glasses case, journal articles, books, a book rest, two propelling pencils and a mobile phone) sitting on a dining room table *become* clutter once a meal is about to be served. Clutter is, then, brought into existence precisely by the impulse to gather, discipline and order and so pertains to the face of modernity that, as Tim Edensor notes, determines 'a

[77] Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (Orlando, FA: Harcourt, 1977), pp. 204-5, 214.

[78] Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, p. 27.

[79] Cwerner and Metcalfe, p. 231.

place for everything' and demands that 'everything [be] in it's place.'[80]

Productive descriptions, consequently, untidy and disturb as they bring new everyday vistas into being; liberated from being determined as clutter, objects that 'hang about' in unsanctioned ways in handbags, on hillsides, desks, desktops, in lay-byes, streets, hard drives, colons, and wardrobes can be made to speak back to moral injunctions to de-clutter. Productive description entails respecting the heterogeneity of the things that find themselves flung together in casual and chance relationships and allows us to think about the motivations and processes by which they assemble and part company. Judy Attfield conceives of the material culture of everyday life as 'personal ecologies of possessions' that are informed by a relentless struggle between 'designer's utopian plans and the realities of living in human spaces.'[81] Translated into Michel de Certeau's terms, 'pre-established geograph[ies]' are met by 'treatments of space.'[82] We animate and use our things in controlled and uncontrolled circumstances; as we dump, love, ignore and curate the objects that come into our possession we simultaneously testify to battles fought out in the face of 'the apparently relentless change imposed by modernisation.'[83] Personal ecologies of things, tactically diverted and organised where ever we go, vie with strategic designs for living.

As a productive description of disposal without bins – resting places for rubbish – Warhol's friend's personal ecology of evacuation lends shape to the logic of flushing that rules the ideal decluttered house. Just as Homer Simpson worries about the possibility of new thought pushing old thoughts out of his brain (one in one out),[84] the perfect house offers limited accommodation. The perfect house devours and defecates at the same time. The perfect house is Elvis sitting on the toilet eating a burger, 'bloated and excrescent'. In another of Calvino's imagined cities, a place governed by 'a grim mania to fill the empty vessel of itself' and blind to its 'treasury of cast-off things', defecation is figured as kind of generosity; Beersheba is 'a city which only when it shits is not miserly, calculating, greedy.'[85] Decluttering potentially negates even this promise of relaxation and release; peristalsis, rhythmic digestion and evacuation, is outmoded in favour of a perpetual emptying of the bowels.

In the context of turbo-capitalist incitements to 'shop and go', clutter introduces static into the consumption circuitry. Failing to drop our purchases in the way that we're told, holding onto things allowing them to stack up in hallways, hibernate in garages and lofts or rest awhile on the way to their

[80] Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 97.
[81] Attfield, p. 155.
[82] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984) p. 122.
[83] Attfield, p. 173.
[84] '...how is "education" supposed to make me feel smarter? Besides, every time I learn something new, it pushes some old stuff out of my brain. Remember when I took that home wine-making course and I forgot how to drive?' *The Simpsons*, 'Secrets of a Successful Marriage', season 5, episode 22 (first broadcast 19 May 1994).
[85] Calvino, p. 113.

proper destinations operates as a gesture of resistance to the exhortation to use it up and wear it out. Operating as a literal obstruction to the smooth consumption trajectories intended by producers, clutter tactically blocks the passageway, and effectively draws attention the wreckage heaping up at the angel of history's feet. The narrative of progress that marks capitalist modernity is impeded at least temporarily in that the idea of growth and improvement must confront (or disavow which is a form of acknowledgement) its material fallout. While the immanent build-up of stuff operates in the manner of de Certeau's 'tactics' as a 'weak' form of critique,[86] bringing it into some sort of focus is a necessary place to start. Artists and writers have the edge over theorists in this respect. In addition to his autobiographical writings, Warhol's meditation on everyday material culture extends into his collection of *Time Capsules*: 610 boxes containing letters, photobooth pictures, dinner invitations, photographs, greetings cards, magazine cuttings, phone messages, assorted ephemera and artefacts, collected from the 1960s to the 1980s, now housed in a dedicated archive in Pittsburg.[87] Wolfgang Tillmans, similarly, illuminates a wild, 'below-the-radar' everyday world of jeans draped on banisters, socks rolled up on sofas and drying on radiators, dropped shorts, television shrines, fruit bowls and window sills.[88] These works alone brings with them a world of wrong and right loves, labours of love, irritations, guilt, class and gender relations, investments, expenditures, hopes, and regrets: an affective universe apart from the irrigated interior and more than enough for a chapter in the biography of the social life of things.[89]

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[86] While De Certeau's distinction between the strategic and the tactical determines tactics as the 'art of the weak', everyday actions and operations are granted the power to bring about 'victories of the weak over the strong'. 'Clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, "hunter's cunning," maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries' are viewed as forms of wily intelligence that disrupt the imposition of strategic designs for living and being. See de Certeau, pp. 37, xxi.
[87] **http://www.warhol.org/collections/archives.html.**
[88] Wolfgang Tillmans, *if one thing matters, everything matters* (London: Tate, 2003).
[89] Arun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambrdige: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

An Interview with Richard Hoggart

Sean Matthews

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

Tennyson, 'Ulysses'.

'Richard Hoggart in Conversation' was the Key Note Plenary session at 'Reading Worlds', the British Council's 19th Oxford Conference on the Teaching of Literature, 4 April 2004. The transcript has been lightly edited and annotated for publication.[1] *The recording of the event has been deposited at the Hoggart Archive in the Special Collections at the University of Sheffield: see* **www.shef.ac.uk/library/special/**.

SM We're honoured and delighted that you are able to join us today, but perhaps we should start with a note of apprehension, even anxiety, that has marked our preparation. During our planning of this conversation you made clear your scepticism about the vogue for 'Author Readings', and that you would much prefer a dialogue about your work to such an event.

RH It took some persuading to get me here, I can tell you. I'm still a bit uneasy. The whole process of an 'Author Reading' is quite different from the process of talking and discussing, and I got fed up watching David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury going round England, doing lectures at literary festivals – I thought it was a bit like robbing the poor to give them that stuff. The business of reading is so internal, internalised, it's simply not comparable speaking it out to people. You are the first – and last!

SM If we might start with a passage from *A Sort of Clowning*, the second volume of Richard's three volume life and times, which offers a magnificent assessment of the century, the culture of the century, and of Richard's extraordinary life within that period.[2] The passage considers practical things that he learnt from teaching and from the experience of starting out as a teacher within the adult education service and extra-mural work in Hull, then

[1] We would like to thank x of the BBC/British Council, and Jenny Hyams of the University of East Anglia, for assistance in the recording and transcription of the event.

[2] Richard Hoggart, *A Sort of Clowning: Life and Times 1940-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

moving into intramural university teaching in English, which led him to become dissatisfied with the shape of English Studies as it was in the 1950s and 1960s.

RH What I say in these couple of pages is that you learn so much, you learn how a class 'gels' and becomes a unit of its own organically, and I talk about that – I'm not going to read all that – and then I talk about how, especially if you have all the time in the world because you're not working to an examination syllabus, your classes become slower and slower because you start on, say, the 1st of October reading *King Lear* and by the time you've had a few years at the job you discover that at Christmas you've got through Act 1 and you keep going back to it because there's so much of depth there. And yet the idea with which I started out when I left the Army in Italy to come and start work in England, I just thought, well, we'll do *Jane Eyre* the first week, we'll do *Wuthering Heights* the second week, we'll give *Middlemarch* two weeks – and so it would go on. I didn't do that for long. The key to the teaching of literature in adult education is that the students are not conscripted, they're not eighteen years old to twenty-one, they've come because they want to and they're all working by day and come to you at night. So they don't *have* to come, they can vote with their feet if they want, and on the other hand *you* have to take care not to woo them and say, this isn't going to hurt a bit, so as to keep them because that's what gives you your wages. You have to gradually introduce them to the idea that this is a worthwhile thing, which is worth effort. You *invite* them to read a lot and to write essays, and you mark them. So that was a wonderful introduction to teaching but what it led to most importantly of all, for me, was the idea that literature alone, although it's important, obviously, and there must be scholars of literature, is not everything. Most students go back from the books out into society; they are not professionally involved in literature.

I learned a great deal from those great, not Oxford but Cambridge, figures, the Leavises. Mrs Leavis – Queenie Leavis - wrote a remarkable book called *Fiction and the Reading Public,* which influenced all of us in the field, but at the same time we were very uneasy about it because, as I used to say, rather insolently, she talked about popular culture and popular novels, especially novels read by women, as though she had a peg on her nose to avoid the rank smell that was coming off them.[3] She was distant from them. That made me think that one can't really discuss popular culture without knowing the people to whom it's directed and what sort of background they have, and indeed what they make of it, because it wasn't just what Mrs Leavis thought. So my book *The Uses of Literacy* (which was my second book, after a study of Auden) began as a Leavisite book in which I discussed popular culture, magazines, newspapers, sex novels, violent novels and so on, but my feeling grew all the

[3] Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932; London: Bellow, 1990).

time – it took seven years – that I couldn't talk about these things without relating them to the people to whom they were addressed because even I didn't know what they made of them.[4] My background was useless because I was pure working class, brought up by my grandmother, being orphaned, and some aunts, and miscellaneous nephews and nieces, and we hadn't a book in the house, though we did have some magazines like *Red Letter* and women's magazines – I'm curling *my* nose now and I shouldn't do but they were pretty rough.

Incidentally, the driver bringing me over here today had a copy of *The People,* the Sunday newspaper, and I haven't seen it for years and it is *appalling.* I hadn't realised how bad it's got, it's terrible.

So I began to think that I had to relate reading and readership like this, and that project really took off from Mrs Leavis (I'm not reading, am I!). She later told one of her Indian postgraduate students that Williams and Hoggart rode to fame and fortune on her shoulders. Well, I don't know about the fortune, and there's very little fame, and I don't want to be on Mrs Leavis's shoulders anyway. She was wrong, of course, but she was miffed because we took a turn that she wouldn't have taken and didn't want to take. I thought that this is not for everybody: if you want to be a Dr Johnson scholar, or a seventeenth century specialist, so be it. It's valuable, it's necessary, but more people should take off from the literature to the society around it and the people in that society, and that gave birth to the idea of a Cultural Studies course, of which there were then none in England.

I was offered a Chair at Birmingham. It's a big university – I was by then at Leicester, a small one – and I told the Vice-Chancellor that I would take the Chair if I could do what I wanted with postgraduates.[5] And he was a wonderfully laconic New Zealand medical, very tall, and he said, 'You can do what you want if you're a professor, so long as we get the money,' so I said, 'OK, I'll do that,' and I wrote to Allen Lane, who in a way owed me a debt for *Lady Chatterley.* Allen Lane knew that in those days you could give people a seven-year covenant and it was tax-free, and he said 'the tax is so high under this Labour government that I'll only pay sixpence in the pound for you, so here you are'. And he took out an envelope and said, 'How much do you want?' I said '£7,000 a year' – it was a lot in those days, for seven years - and he said, 'You'll have it on Tuesday,' and that's how the Birmingham Centre started. I think it's fair to say that it became the centre, the growth centre, the fertile bed for that kind of work in England and in many other places as well, so that starting from a class in a little mining town up North one comes eventually into Cultural Studies, which are now international. That's what I really would have read if I'd been reading that bit!

[4] Richard Hoggart, *Auden: An Introductory Essay* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951); *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of working-class life, with special reference to communications and entertainments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957).

[5] Sir Robert Aitken (1901-1997).

SM You mentioned in passing the Chatterley Trial (1960), which was, after the publication of *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), a key moment in your emergence as a public intellectual.

RH Yes, that was a turning point. Allen Lane was the producer, the inventor, the father of Penguins. He wasn't a scholarly man but he was a man with great imagination and a kind of wicked glee in doing things, and he wanted all Lawrence's books in something like 30,000 copies each – Lawrence sold enormously. Lane wanted the whole lot and the one he hadn't got was *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* which wasn't available in England at that time – it was in Paris – but he was determined to do it. He knew what the risks were so he printed it and he sent it to the book sellers and said, 'Hold this, or there'll be trouble, till it's clear.' The Police in those days used to go to Charing Cross Road in London and buy three copies and then carry them back to Scotland Yard. Allen Lane rang them and said, 'Don't bother about Charing Cross Road, I'll give you a dozen if you call in,' which they did. I mean, I like this curious English amateurish way of going on – *apparently* amateurish, it's not really. So he printed these, and they duly prosecuted him. And that's done by a person called the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), who's usually a mature QC, Queen's Counsel, a barrister. There were all sorts of jokes that arose immediately. One was, 'How did they decide to prosecute Lady Chatterley?' The answer is that the DPP gets the book, puts his feet up on the desk in the Home Office – or wherever it is – and reads it, and if he gets an erection he shouts, 'Prosecute!'

So he did, and I was still at Leicester University, as a senior lecturer, and I'd just finished a class, and the solicitor [Michael Rubinstein] rang and said, 'Can you get down, and quickly, because we're in trouble. The prosecution' – it was about the third day – 'is making hay with the defence.' There was a Cambridge lady professor who was in tears.[6] The Prosecuting Counsel was a monster, a horrible man called GriffithhyphenJones. So I went down and I was met in the corridor – it was about a quarter to four, and they rise, I think, at four every day – and this Rubinstein said, 'Get in there and hold the fort because it's crumbling.'[7] So I went in and I wasn't feeling anything particular, I just felt it was rather curious. Number One Court at the Old Bailey is really something out of Dickens, or was then, and I had to go in the Witness Box and this man Griffith-Jones started. I mustn't go on too long because he was such a monster, I must write him up sometime. He said to me, 'Wouldn't you agree that this is a terrible, libellous, sexual book which should be banned?' – and so

[6] Presumably Joan Bennett. See C H Rolph, ed., *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Limited* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), pp. 62-3. For Hoggart's testimony, which runs from the second to the third days (27-28 October 1960), see pp. 91-104.

[7] See Steven Hare, ed., *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970* (Harmondswoth: Penguin, 1995), pp. 231-249, for further details of the legal wranglings.

on – 'Just a book which revels in sex?' He said 'sex' as though he had a frog caught in his mouth.

I said – and I have a tendency to over-egg the pudding – 'No, I don't think it's sexy, I think if anything it's *puritanical*,' and at that moment I thought, 'God, you've really done it this time.'[8] If you say that to an English court! The judge, incidentally, was an Irish Roman Catholic and his wife was sitting at the back – I didn't realise they could – and she had a little sachet, and in it she had *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, for which she had knitted this sachet so that it wouldn't be seen in public! The thing is full of the most remarkable oddities and comedies.

So when I said 'puritanical' I could see a gleam getting in Griffith-Jones's eyes ('I've got him now, you know, how can anyone prove it's a puritanical book?'), but then he said, 'Well, we must finish now, but I will take you up on that.' And somebody said, 'All rise,' and we all rose, and went back home.

I've learnt since that the two lawyers concerned – two wonderful defence lawyers – that they were so bothered about what Hoggart had said the night before, they had a special meeting and they said, 'Can we trust him to get out of this himself, or do we have to stage something, like a fire?'[9] They decided I was okay, I might manage it, so I went in and then I was told afterwards by Jeremy Hutchinson, the second defence counsel, that it was the longest session of a witness in the history of Court One of the Old Bailey. It was about two and three quarter hours. Griffith-Jones went at me in every way he possibly could. He had a range of voices, you see, he said things like, 'You're at Leicester University, is it?', as though that was something you dragged out of the sewers, and *he'd* be Oxbridge, of course he would, and then the Inns of Court in London, and then a lawyer's career, terrible stuff.

He went on and at a certain point he said, 'Now, you used the word "puritanical". I think most of us would not understand that in this context. Would you mind enlightening us?' – very curious phraseology. So I enlightened them in one sentence, which I thought wasn't bad. I said, 'Well, to be puritanical is to be responsible for your own conscience.' He said, 'You're not lecturing at Leicester University now,' and I knew I'd got him at that point because he'd gone down to sarcasm, but he soldiered on anyway and then in

[8] Hoggart's recollection is slightly astray. In fact, he first introduced the word 'puritanical' under questioning from Counsel for the Defence, Jeremy Hutchinson. It is Mr Justice Byrne, the judge presiding, who then interrupts with an astonished remark, as the transcript makes clear. Needless to say, Griffith-Jones does indeed subject Hoggart to a long and increasingly rude and exasperated cross-examination the following morning (Rolph, p. 92):

> [Hutchinson] 'The book has also been described as little more than vicious indulgence in sex and sensuality. In your view is that a valid description of this novel?' – [Hoggart] 'I think it is invalid on all three counts. It is not in any sense vicious; it is highly virtuous and if anything, puritanical.'
>
> 'Did you say "virtuous and puritanical"?' interrupted Mr Justice Byrne. And Mr Hoggart, who was a self-composed, determined, and unshakeable witness, said that he did.

[9] The Defence team was composed of the Penguin solicitor, Rubinstein, with barristers Gerald Gardiner, QC, and Jeremy Hutchinson, QC.

the end he gave up, and that was that.[10]

The pay-off was very interesting because the next day (when you've been in court and given evidence you can sit in, so I sat in, on the Penguin side) the Usher said, 'Call Edwin Morgan Forster' and, you know, the greatest living English novelist appeared and he was smaller than I am, and he had a little clean mackintosh on (it was glorious stuff!) and he wandered very slowly up – he was very old – and he just came over the edge of the dock, and the judge said, 'You're very old, would you like to sit down?' and he said 'Thank you, my Lord, no.' Jeremy Hutchinson then put his boat out, he risked it, it was a really difficult moment, and he said, 'A previous witness has said that this book, far from being sexually abusive, is puritanical. What would you say to that?' I thought, gosh, if he says, 'Well that's a load or rubbish,' I'll disappear through the floor. Forster looked up – he had a lovely King's College, Cambridge voice – and he said, 'I can see that some people might think it's somewhat paradoxical, but on reflection I think it is just,' and I thought this was wonderful![11]

Afterwards he took me to dinner. We ate at his club, which English people know as the Reform Club, which was a Liberal club, and we sat and he said to me, 'Have the chops, they do chops very well here.' So I said, 'Okay,' and we chatted away and we talked about the idiocies of the Prosecuting Counsel and – this is pure King's College, which never minds being vulgar if it does it in the right words – he said, 'That's enough of that, let's talk about something else, they're all a load of shits.' Perfect King's College, that! My son went up to King's subsequently and Forster gave him tea and was very nice to him. These are little offshoots, but the point about the Chatterley Trial was that it was full of oddities of English *mores* and class and all that sort of thing, and the contest between him and me – it's no arrogance to say mine was the chief contest because everybody else said so, it was, because that's what stopped him in his tracks. But it was a *class* fight, between him and me, and I didn't have a fancy accent, and I was at Leicester of all places, you know, and so it went on.

But the real questions then are, what did the Chatterley Trial do for English literature? And the answer is, 'Nothing.' It did quite a lot to illustrate changes in British culture, that was obvious, it was like a little volcano with spouts, but it would have happened anyway. As for literature, it didn't matter that one could say 'fuck' like that. I was supposed to be the first to say 'fuck' in Court,

[10] See Rolph pp. 99-100. [Griffith-Jones] 'I thought I had lived my life under a misapprehension as to the meaning of the word "puritanical". Will you help me?' Mr Hoggart took this as a genuine cry for help. 'Yes,' he said, 'many people do live their lives under a misapprehension of the meaning of the word "puritanical". This is the way in which language decays. In England today and for a long time the word "puritanical" has been extended to mean somebody who is against anything which is pleasurable, particularly sex. The proper meaning of it, to a literary man or a linguist, is somebody who belongs to the tradition of British Puritanism generally, and the distinguishing feature of that is an intense sense of responsibility for one's conscience. In this sense this book is puritanical.' [Griffith-Jones] 'I am obliged for that lecture upon it.'

[11] Rolph, p. 112.

and certainly on television, and there seemed to be nothing else for it. I said to the Court, when I was walking up to the Court in the morning of the second day, I passed a group of builders, workmen, and they never finished a sentence without saying 'fucking this' and 'fucking that' – in fact you were lucky if you got away with three 'fuckings' in a sentence – they really are extraordinary people.

Anyway, it didn't matter. Various books then went ahead and were published with all this language in and the publishers all asked me to defend them and I refused absolutely to have anything to do with it. But what the Trial did, if you wanted to think about it, was to illustrate that you don't need dirty words, as they were called, to write erotically. I always think of *Madame Bovary* – remember when Emma Bovary first meets Charles? He's come to the farm because her father's damaged his arm, and it's raining, it's warm rain, and she stands in the doorway holding an umbrella which is being dropped on, drop by drop, and it's warm rain, and he's looking at her and suddenly – though nothing's done suddenly there – all of a sudden she wipes her lips with her tongue, and it's most erotic because you know that at that moment Charles is captured.[12] There are many moments like that in Hardy – I've never found any in George Eliot – but you don't need words, you just picture it. So, that's very little *literary* impact from the Trial except that a lot of rotten books were published, but that was the price. It was quite important as a social moment.

SM Your definition of 'puritanical' as 'an intense sense of responsibility towards one's conscience' is a phrase which might just as readily describe your own character as that of D. H. Lawrence. In all of your work, but especially in your most recent book, *Mass Media in a Mass Society*, it is apparent how strong that kind of *moral* concern is, the question of how we should live, how our society ought to be organised, and specifically how the media and communications ought to be organised. Throughout your career you have been practically involved in the formation of public policy, and indeed the management of public institutions. After the Chatterley Trial, you were a key

[12] Hoggart conflates two, possibly three, scenes in this recollection of Emma Bovary. When Charles Bovary first meets Emma Rouault, following her father's accident, she offers him food before he returns home, and he notices 'her full lips, which she had a habit of biting in her silent moments'. The moment in the rain is during a later visit: 'Once when the thaw had set in, and the bark of the trees was running with water and the snow melting on the roofs of the farm buildings, she turned back at the door and went to fetch her parasol. She opened it out; it was of shot silk, and the sun shining through it cast flickering lights over the white skin of her face. She smiled in the moist warmth beneath it, and they heard the drops of water dripping on to the taut silk one by one.' On a further occasion, Bovary surprises Emma in the kitchen, 'She had nothing round her neck, and little drops of perspiration stood on her bare shoulders.' Later in the same passage, they drink together and Emma drains her glass. 'As there was practically nothing in it, she tilted her head right back to drink. With her head right back and her lips rounded and the skin of her neck stretched tight, she laughed at her own vain efforts, and slid the top of her tongue between her fine teeth to lick, drop by drop, the bottom of the glass.' Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* trans. Alan Russell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 28; 30; 35.

member of the Pilkington Committee, the Committee in the early 1960s which was charged by the government to make recommendations, at that crucial point, on the future of broadcasting. What was that experience like, again cast as the representative of the world beyond the culture and knowledge of the Establishment?

RH I'm quite fond of this way of working, these are things we call quangos, *quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations*. They're committees, set up by the government to think for them on a certain topic. The government doesn't *promise* to follow their proposals but will listen to them carefully, and I think they're very good. They're now in disrepute, in decline, and are being derided all over, and it's wrong. The ones I was on were excellent. You're never paid, of course, but you're given your train fare and if you ask for too much for your lunch they'll send you a little note in impeccable Civil Service English saying that lunches only cost five shillings and you've claimed seven-and-sixpence. It's all right, it's good, I like that.

I was asked to be on the Pilkington Committee. How do these things happen? There are always wheels within wheels in England – and elsewhere, I suppose. I had written a long article in *Encounter* about broadcasting in England, and the Civil Servant who was chosen to be Secretary to the Pilkington Committee had read that article, that was the key.[13] A highly intelligent Civil Servant had read this 5,000 word article and thought, 'I'd like that man on this Committee because he has at least been thinking about broadcasting'. Lawrence told me he was in a taxi with the Director General of ITV[14] and he, the head of commercial broadcasting, said, 'Of course, we know why Hoggart's on that Committee, it was that piece in *Encounter*.' It's all so interwoven. So, that's why I went on it, and the others – most of them didn't know much about broadcasting, and the chairman, Sir Harry (later Lord) Pilkington, rode round England on a bicycle (his firm was the biggest firm at making glass in the world at that time), he grew roses, he didn't watch television - roses and his bicycle were all for Sir Harry. He was a nice fellow, but he knew he couldn't add anything to that, he'd just have to steer, and it was a Committee which had to consider some important issues about broadcasting and its social duties. It was at a time when the commercial people were coming up very hard and fast because they wanted to make money out of adverts, and they fought us like mad.

They came to give evidence before the Committee and they showed off. They were the big cheeses, they were tycoons with money, going into commercial, and we were just this silly little Committee, with a woman called Joyce Grenfell, who was a performer on the stage – she told me she lost

[13] Richard Hoggart, 'The Uses of Television', *Encounter* 14, 1 (January 1960). The Secretary to the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting was the civil servant Denis Lawrence.

[14] Probably Sir Robert Fraser (1904-1985), first Director-General of the Independent Television Authority.

several thousand pounds that year by not doing performances, that's the sort of commitment people make, to be on quangos – but Joyce was lovely, and she was very bright, too. We set the hearings up as a series of demonstrations of what was happening in England. We called in T. S. Eliot and he was in defence of Radio 3, the highbrow – one might say – channel, and we said to him, 'What do you think about the present movement of broadcasting towards popularisation?' He was wonderful – he had a new panama hat on, he looked impeccable. He said, and he looked like someone who was writing on tablets, he said, 'Those who claim to give the public what the public want begin by underestimating the public; they end by debauching it.' That went straight into the Report, of course, as you may imagine.

Later, I had an hour with Eliot in his office one day and he said to me, 'I do remember you,' (he had a very sonorous voice), 'it was the Committee with the glass-maker, wasn't it?' He then went on to tell me that he was convinced his mother-in-law (he had married again, his wife had been in a lunatic asylum, later he married his secretary, Valerie, a Leeds girl), and *my* grandmother were buddies, and I could not stop him. Because my grandmother lived in the slum part of Leeds, where I grew up, and Eliot's in-laws were in the northern part of Leeds.

I wonder if I can tell you a very nice story, it's off the theme, about Eliot. He used to go up to Leeds and go for walks with his mother-in-law, and just near by there was a butcher's which was owned by the parents of Alan Bennett, the English writer and comic, and Alan remembers this: his mother came into the shop, the butcher's shop, and said, 'I've just seen Mrs,' (I've forgotten her name, we'll call her Smith), 'Eliot's mother-in-law, coming down the road with a very distinguished-looking man and he had a *lovely* overcoat on.' That's pure Leeds for you, what's his overcoat got to do with it? And Alan Bennett said, 'It's a very famous poet, he's in for the Nobel Prize.' 'I shouldn't wonder,' says his mother, 'with an overcoat like that!'

Anyway, getting back to the Pilkington Committee, what happened then was that it was the crux of the time when the pressures from commercial interests, which would weaken the BBC, were really very strong, and we were not having that. We argued that if there was to be a third channel it should become BBC2 and not Commercial 2. The damage to the whole status of excellent public service broadcasting – whatever their faults, the BBC is a marvellous organisation – that would be weakened. The other thing was, what about when a *fourth* channel came – and most people don't realise that it was Pilkington that argued most for Channel 4? We said we *must* have a fourth channel, and separate the advertising revenue function from the broadcasting production, because if you tie them together they will go for the crowds. That's now attributed to Anthony Smith, and he did do a lot for it, but we were first there. So that fight existed.

People always thought I'd written that Report, by the way, but I hadn't, I did have a hand in it, and I even wrote some sentences which I was rather

proud of, but they're all lost. The main thing was that the highly intelligent Secretary picked up the arguments and of course took what suited him – in a way they do – and of course what suited him was to preserve the idea of public service. And it was preserved, but it's now taken a beating.

SM That 'idea of public service' leads into another question concerning your career, which has been dedicated to public service in a variety of different forms. After the time at Birmingham you went to UNESCO, which you have referred to as a sort of pause in your career.

RH Most people begin by saying, 'Why did you go?' I went because, as a friend of mine said, there are some things where you're invited to walk the plank for the public good, and you walk, and I did have that feeling of duty. Also I thought it would be curious and interesting. UNESCO, you know, is the cultural arm of the United Nations. All its culture is in Paris, which the French think is only natural, and I was in charge of all cultural matters and anything else they could think of and couldn't find a home for, like environment, human rights, population, enforced female circumcision – they all came rolling in. I had seventeen departments and each of them had three divisions - and so on and so forth. It was a wonderful experience; it was *very* hard work. There were 4,000 people in the building and somebody at the start said to me, 'If thirty people were taken out of this building, it would collapse, the whole operation would collapse'. That was exaggerated, but there was a lot of corruption, of course there was, and one reason was that most governments, although they send their people to work in UNESCO for so many years, and they become international Civil Servants, and that's their duty, most of them don't bother with that at all. If you don't do what's right, when you get back home you find yourself either in prison or in Azerbaidzhan looking after traffic lights, or something of that kind.

I was first of all thought of as a bit pure, which I was in a way because I just wouldn't tolerate this kind of thing. The Director-General was in some senses a monster; in other words he was a highly intelligent Frenchman.[15] He'd been Cultural Attaché to England and spoke perfect English, like Maurice Chevalier, but he had mistresses, his wife was in a mental home. One mistress produced children for him, then he had another mistress and without asking me he put her into my section so she became one of my staff. She was a Mme de la Rochefoucault and she was as dumb as a brush, she really was, she was an idiot, and luckily her fellows would push stuff towards me so that I could stop it before she sent it out across a hundred and sixty-two nations.

Anyway, that was part of the atmosphere, but I'll just give you one more instance of what the atmosphere was like, and it shows how I was a stiff neck,

[15] Rene Maheu (1905-1975), Director-General of UNESCO 1962-1974. See Richard Hoggart, *An Imagined Life: Life and Times 1959-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

there's no question of that. It was in the days of Communism, of course, Marxism, the Soviet Union. I had a member of staff on the cultural policy side, he was a Slav, he was from Bratislava, and he'd edited the Bratislavan edition of a thing like *Horizon* in England, a literary magazine, and he came to me one day, weeping – he'd drunk a lot of Scotch because he was so frightened – to say that he'd had a message from Personnel that he was to leave the organisation. So I enquired, and what had happened was that the Czech Communist government, who were pretty rough, wanted to get one back to show that they weren't going to stay very long. There was another Czech – there were only about three in the organisation – the other Czech was in charge of all conferences. Now that is a huge job and very tricky indeed, protocol and all that, and this man was first-rate, and the Director-General was not going to let him go, so he wanted to let go of my man, to buy off and keep the other man. I should have been politically aware enough, I suppose, to say, 'Well, I understand the plight you're in and goodbye, Vladimir.' But I didn't, because he was a good man, he wasn't a bad officer, functionary, and he had a wife with one leg – she'd been run over by a tram car in Glasgow, it sounds unlikely but it did happen – and they were living in Paris and they were happy and settled there and he was doing a good job, and I thought it just wasn't on. So I refused to let him go and the Director-General was *furious*, obviously, and said, 'Since you don't appear to understand, I will go over your head and he's out.' The man then took it to Geneva, where there's an Appeal Board for United Nations Civil Servants, and he asked me to speak for him, and I thought, I can't not speak, that's it.

I rang the Deputy Director-General, a good American, and he said, 'Well, okay, Richard, you go and say how good he is, but don't say anything against the Director-General because that would be wrong of you, you're not in that kind of fight. But say the man is not due for sacking.' So I went and spoke in that sense and he won his case, not possibly for what I said; but anyway, he did win his case, and the Director-General was told either to pay one hundred thousand dollars to him or keep him on. Well, the Director-General was too proud to keep him on so they paid him one hundred thousand dollars and he immediately became Foreign Relations Adviser to the Pompidou operation, you know, the big thing in the middle of the market area. I was in Bratislava a couple of years back and I rang him up and he'd just died, but he did go easily into a proper job. The Director-General, true to form, said, 'Huh, so that's what Hoggart's done, is it?' He said to the Deputy Director-General, 'He'll pay for this, I'll take my time.' I applied for a job in England and he wrote me a marvellous reference and it was a job in which I would have been working towards a chairman who was notoriously thin-skinned. At the bottom the Director-General put, 'In spite of all this, Hoggart is rather too aware of his moral integrity.' That was absolutely a death sentence, you see, so that was one job I didn't get.

It went on for another year or so and he was very ill with cancer and I went

to see him the week he died and we were quite good friends, we'd learnt to settle our things. His mistress – the main mistress – wrote to me. I saw her letter the other day because Sheffield is looking after my archive, and she begins, 'Dear Richard, you had a lot of good fights between you but you earned his great mutual respect,' and I felt, well, that's okay. But that will tell you something about UNESCO. You don't have battles like that in an English school or University, they're another order. But, you know, when we left, the staff all waved me down the road when the car was loaded, so it was all right.

They asked me to stay – oh, that's another thread, you see, this is how you go – the next Director-General was a Senegalese and the Senegalese are politicians, African politicians, politics is their life.[16] He'd been Minister of something and he came to me when I was leaving at Christmas and said, 'Would you stay at least a year because you're the most experienced chap on the top Board of seven and, you know, I'd like you behind me, with me?' So I said, 'Yes, I'll stay six months then.'

At that time the first big trouble between Israel and Palestine broke out and I had to send a team to Palestine and Jerusalem and all those places to meet objections from all the African Muslim states, saying that the Israelis were committing all sorts of ills: censoring all the newspapers, ruining the ancient monuments, ruining education. You have to be careful who you send, of course. I sent an elderly Dutchman, who was wonderful, and a middle-aged Belgian – you couldn't send an English or American. They came back and said, obviously the Palestinians hate being under Occupation, but their education is better than it was before, they Israelis are looking after the monuments extremely well, and they're not bothering with the newspapers, so those things don't stand. It was the job of the Director-General to make that report to the full Board, the full plenary conference, and he had what you might call a 'political cold' on that day and I had to do it. I did it and I did it absolutely flat-faced, you know, that's what's in the report. I went back to my office and my secretary said, 'Well, we've just had a death threat – the Palestinians are going to kill you before the day's out.' So I said, 'That's because I've been in the conference.' Then she said, 'There's a young Jewish group who've got hold of the wrong end of the stick and they're going to kill you tonight.' So then, just before we closed, she said, 'If you look out, there's the French CRS round there, they're running through the cellars because they say they've planted bombs under here, to get you.'

Nothing happened of course, but every day after that I had to get under the car to see if they'd been there. Then I wrote a two-page memo for the Director-General, saying it's a tricky situation but our investigation should be done within the next year and we should then pull out as far as UNESCO's concerned. He couldn't tolerate it because he was a Muslim and he'd been put in on the Muslim vote. I went on for a few weeks and then I suddenly realised

[16] Amadou-Mahtar M'bow (1921-), Director-General of UNESCO 1974-1987.

that I wasn't getting Palestinian-Israeli stuff across my desk any more, so I rang my friend the American Deputy Director-General and said, 'What's up?' and he said, 'Well, the Director-General can't stand it, you see, you writing these objective memos, he says that you're obviously an agent of the British Foreign Office.' I said, 'Well, tell him I've never even been *in* the Foreign Office.' But that was that, I wasn't staying with half a limb amputated, so I left within a fortnight. It wasn't a bad leaving, it was very cordial – not with him, but with everybody else. So UNESCO was a hornet's nest, or something like that, and if you weren't careful you'd have been yielding in every direction and people would secretly despise you, and with me they didn't at least do that. If you asked me, would you go again, or advise anybody else to go, I would say yes, so long as you've got a belly of iron, or something like that, and then you might enjoy yourself! It's hard work.[17]

SM You then came back to Britain and you had a period at Goldsmiths College, part of the University of London. This also marked the moment when you reconnected with your writing, which, when you retired from Goldsmiths in 1984, became a whole third stage of your career. I wanted to talk a bit now about the ways in which you increasingly think of yourself as a writer, the importance of writing for you.

RH I'd always written, but always in the corners of time, because of what you might call my moral conscience. I would never sell the students short in marking their written work or whatever it was, and so I was a good teacher and a conscientious one. Writing had to be at weekends, if that – there were a lot of weekend conferences, too. There was no writing when you were at UNESCO – oh, I did the Reith Lectures and they were printed but they were relatively small.[18] When I came back, I just had two jobs I would have liked to have: one was the Director-Generalship of the Arts Council, but that was the one where the Chairman was to have shudders when he saw that this man was applying out of moral conscience. The English leak like sieves for peas – a Minister rang me the evening before the interviews and said, 'Richard, you're not going to get that job.' I said, 'Look, I rather gather not.' He said, 'He couldn't *bear* you, you know, you'd be too strong for him, that's all, so go if you want to but you won't get the job.' So I said, 'Thank you' - and they gave the job to my best friend, so that was all right.[19]

The other one was Goldsmiths, because Goldsmiths College, you might not know, had almost entirely begun with students in the evening, at about the

[17] See Malcolm Hadley, 'Promoting International Understanding and Cooperation: Richard Hoggart's UNESCO years (1970-1975)', in Sue Owen, ed., *The Uses of Richard Hoggart* (Cambridge: Scholar Press, forthcoming, 2008).
[18] Richard Hoggart, *Only Connect: On Culture and Communication. The Reith Lectures* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972).
[19] Sir Roy Shaw was the first Secretary-General of the Arts Council 1975-1983.

turn of the century, in a deprived part of London, and it only later began to occupy itself with full-time students.[20] It was owned entirely by the University of London and by my time it had 10,000 students, roughly half and half, part-time and full-time, in a really tough area, and it had some extraordinarily good departments. Its Cultural Studies department was first-rate, but it was fine on music then, and good on literature, not first-rate but good, music especially, art certainly, and then some sciences. So it was a very good place to be, but you couldn't write there, there was just too much to do, especially fight the University of London, which was constantly trying to keep us below the salt, but we beat them and won, and we're up there now.[21] I left in 1984, and I've written ten books since and I don't know how, I mean I just suddenly started writing books because I'd never been *able* to do it, not without having five years a book, and that's too much. So I just went on and I'm in the middle of another one now. I will die with my boots on, as they say in England, or with my hand on my computer, on the mouse.

SM It is interesting to compare your own, three-volume 'Life and Times' with Noel Annan's *Our Age*.[22] The tone is so very different throughout the works, although it is even apparent in the respective titles. For Noel Annan, the story he tells is very much, 'Noel and his friends run Britain', from the point of view of someone with a strong sense of responsibility, yes, but also entitlement. Whereas Richard Hoggart's life and times is very much experienced and written from a different perspective, and a perspective that you've talked about already to a degree in terms of class, and in terms of where you came from. Given the trajectory of your life and career, to what class would you feel you belong *now*? Your characterisation of a generation of the 'uprooted and anxious', in *The Uses of Literacy*, to refer to the Scholarship Boys, caught the structure of feeling of that moment: how would you define your class situation now?

RH So long as you don't call me a meritocrat, I'll bear it. You know, Michael Young's book.[23] I'm part working class still, you can never get rid of that and you don't want to get rid of it: kinds of neighbourliness and tolerance and family sense, they're not *better* than the upper classes or the middle classes, but they're of a kind, and that kind that I'm used to, and I like it. That's still there. I'm certainly not middle class – I mean, if you put me in a room with the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* I would die within minutes of oxygen starvation! I'm a real old Liberal, Leftie, Guardian-reader – you know the sort,

[20] Goldsmiths is situated in New Cross. Hoggart was Rector from 1975-1984.
[21] Hoggart's principal achievement while Rector was to oversee the institution's successful disaggregation from the University of London.
[22] Noel Annan, *Our Age: The Generation that Made Postwar Britain* (1990; London: Fontana, 1991).
[23] Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870-2023* (1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961). Young coined the term 'meritocracy'.

soft as putty, people think. But we're not, we're quite tough really. So, curiously, I'm very much aware of class, very much aware of it, even now, but I feel detached from most identifiable sorts of class in England and in that I think I'm not in any way unique. I feel like one of those people – it's a bit laudatory, and I don't mean it to be, but it's what Matthew Arnold called 'the saving remnant'.[24] He meant the consciousness of society. Arthur Koestler called them 'the anxious corporals', or 'thoughtful corporals' because during the War they always looked anxious, and had a Penguin non-fiction book sticking out of their battledress, and the ignorant sergeant would say, 'What's that sticking out yer back?' and you'd say, 'Sorry, Sarg,' and you hid it, as far as you could. So that's really it, it's a form of classlessness but also part of, one hopes, the anxious group, as it were.

SM Mention of Arnold returns us again to a sense of values, and the values that you mentioned there as class values that you grew up with, are certainly values that resound through the book that you've just written, *Mass Media in a Mass Society* (2004), which I'm hoping you might read from. I wonder if I could persuade you to read a little bit, maybe from the 'Words and Morals' section?

RH I'll do that if I can do two funny bits first, here we go. It's a fairly curious incident. I was talking about populism and the lack of interest in the intellectual, the imagination, especially today in England, and I came across this extraordinary thing about the zoo in the middle nineteenth century, the London Zoo, and I will read that, it's the first bit of reading I've done. This was John Clare, the poet, in 1824, who wrote: 'Whilst I was in London, the melancholy death of Lord Byron was announced in the public papers. The common people felt his merits and his powers, and the common people of a country are the best feelings of a prophecy of the future.'[25]

Now, isn't that lovely ? And how one couldn't say it today, about anybody, but then we go on:

> In 1850 Macaulay described in a letter to a friend, after having it from Thackeray, a moving moment. There were at the time queues at the zoo to see the strange new animal, the hippopotamus: 'Thackeray swears that he was eyewitness and ear witness of the proudest event of my life. Two damsels ['Damsels' is a wonderful word!] were just about to pass that doorway which we, on Monday, in vain attempted to enter, when I was pointed out to them. "Mr Macaulay!" cried the lovely pair, "Is that Mr Macaulay? Never mind the hippopotamus." And having paid a shilling to see the Behemoth, they left him at the very moment at which he was about

[24] Matthew Arnold coins the term 'saving remnant' in the lecture 'Numbers', in *Discourses in America* (London: Macmillan, 1885).
[25] Richard Hoggart, *Mass Media in a Mass Society* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 89-90.

> to display himself to them, in order to see – but spare my modesty' [this is Thackeray].
>
> In such an instance comparisons can be very tricky, but can go some way. Perhaps those who could afford a shilling in 1850 (it was later reduced to sixpence) were largely middle class, obviously they were, middle class and upwards, and so the girls were, perhaps, educated and well-read. The first two volumes of Macaulay's *History of England*, issued in 1849, had made Macaulay – avoiding the word 'celebrity' – celebrated. The young ladies were well aware of that, as well perhaps, as it was not a good year for new English fiction, it was a lousy year for poetry: What we got in that year was Browning's *Sordello*, which nobody's ever read right through, I think. But then, they would know about it. Their lack of hesitation in giving up the hippopotamus in favour of a heavy-weight writer is still surprising. Macaulay himself seems surprised and proud by his new-found fame and its remarkable spread. Now, what would be the modern equivalent? Giving up queuing to see the first panda to reach England because you've caught sight of T S Eliot in the queue? Well, that wouldn't do at all, it would only work if they saw Paul McCartney of the *Beatles* – and then they might run across![26]

SM When we discussed your resistance to public reading, one aspect we didn't really mention was that your prose has always retained such a strongly *conversational* voice, which becomes so evident now as you do, at last, read to us. I find extraordinary how much that writing achieves the rhythm and effect of an ordinary voice talking to us, entirely continuous with your voice in conversation.

RM Let me read now the passage called 'Words and Morals'. In this chapter I've talked about relativism, you know - everything being relative, there being no grounds or defence for moral judgments:

> Behind this abuse of language which is typical of mass societies is a condition whose presence has run through these pages. In a time of relativism, we have no language for judgment, except for those judgments which are echoes of easy and unchallenging popular presentations; which let us down lightly as to a verbal feather-bed; no uncomfortable parts. Since there's no comfortable place for the noun 'judgment', we deter attempts at it by invoking the handy adverb 'judgmental', which indicates a thoroughly unpleasant and unacceptable attitude. [If you make *judgments*, you're not making a *judgment,* you're *judgmental*, which is pretty wicked.]
>
> Any writer who wishes to draw on the concept of traditional morality has

[26] Hoggart repeatedly digresses from the printed text. In this transcription we have reproduced his spoken version. Where he comments on, or augments, his own text, the words are presented in square brackets. Where he cuts material, excisions are marked by ellipses in square brackets.

to try to forge his own words, or insist that old ones are still currency, defining and re-defining them on the run, through repeated use in particular senses; old words may be brushed up so as to enter the New World, with weight. Such words as 'decent', which I find myself too often tempted to use both for itself, as a very good word, with a distinguished history in both our literature and our everyday language, and for its particular connotations from my own experience. It was a pivotal word of choice in my childhood. We trusted it and those to whom it could be applied. We said, 'he's decent', 'that's not fair', or 'that's not right', with assurance, as though we were invoking an external register. [...]

Such words if used in earnest are likely to draw dismissive rejoinders of the sort, 'Oh, that's just old-fashioned', 'fuddy-duddy', 'stodgy', 'spoil-sport'. They have to be rejected, or else the dismissers' own kind of chaos will threaten. Current unpleasant phrases from that world are 'get a life' [it's a horrible expression. Somebody who says something you don't like because it's making a judgment, they say, 'Oh, get a life.' I've heard it in Parliament] and of course, 'you aren't living in the real world'. [That's a favourite.]

At such times one remembers, for instance, Tawney's [Tawney was a marvellous lecturer at the London School of Economics, in Social History, a wonderful lecturer, started the Workers' Educational Association] magisterial dismissal: not of explicit evil but of something more insidious 'triviality'. [He said triviality's worse for the soul than wickedness, a very good expression, worth chewing over. And there's one by Scott, the great editor of the *Manchester Guardian,* who said that facts are sacred, opinions are free – or words to that effect, one of the great remarks by a great editor.]

Not that this judgment will be accepted by defenders of the present state of things. Too much is at stake in their comfortable view of the world to allow that kind of re-thinking. Tawney on triviality was quoted in the Pilkington Report on broadcasting. [I put that in, yes, some years before we thought of the likely appearance of the dumbing down of the BBC] Now at that time when the report came out, in 1962, a very celebrated smart journalist had a wonderful time talking about Hoggart's 'high-minded Puritan thinking'. [Oh, high-minded, too – he died quite early, I wonder what he would have said today. I hope he would have suddenly sort of eaten some humble pie, but I don't think he would; these people don't change so easily.]

Language is a moral instrument. It is important to avoid its trivial uses and to try to reinstate its organic relations with judgment.[27]

[27] Hoggart, *Mass Media,* pp. 155-157.

SM I think that's magnificent: 'Language is a moral instrument; it's important to avoid its trivial uses and to try to reinstate its organic relations with judgment.' It's a thought which resonates into discussions we've been having at the conference this week. One question a delegate wished to put to you was about your sense of the way in which the British State has changed in its relation to questions of culture. There has been a profound change, not just in terms of political administration, actually in terms of the way in which the State, for example, perceives Higher Education, or Education of all. I know you've commented on this – I just wondered if you would say a bit more about it.

RH I think we're in a period now, especially with this Tory government, this *Labour* government, I should say – I am a Labour voter and I expect I will be until I die, but I'm going to find it a little difficult next time because it's clear that Tony Blair and his acolytes round him are functionalists and populists and that insofar as they think of the universities, they think of them basically as contributing to the economy. They have very little idea of Newman's idea of a university, or my belief that universities will stand for nothing unless they stand for a substantive social morality. Say that to most British universities or this government today and they won't understand it. I'm going to Leeds University in mid-May because it's my old university and it's celebrating its centenary and I've got to give the opening speech and I'm going to talk about that and it'll be Esperanto to them. They won't know. I've never met the Prime Minister but everything he says suggests that his mind is sharp, active, well-stocked in some ways, but almost entirely without what you might call the social and personal imagination, and issues like that. He represents a great deal in British society today. I don't expect any more from the Tories, and the Social Democrats, they don't count, obviously. In some ways they're admirable people but they can't. Is that anywhere near what you were thinking?

SM Yes, following up on that, given that is the state of the society now, you are nonetheless going to be making a speech later, and you're here, too, talking to us, and you *are* writing about these ideas. Do you see that there *is* a place in society, amongst institutions, or between institutions, where resistance comes from?

RH There is a readership, there is an audience, there are people. They're fighting against the tide, of course they are, but you just have to go on. You can't really rely on the Church to help. I would hate to think one would die just still a minority as ever. There's a nice passage from Wordsworth at the end of the book, about his inalienable sense of the dignity of the human condition, and so on, which I take as a very good thing, and in which he's saying, in the

end, 'I believe in people.'[28] But if you say something like that, it sounds so corny, and it *is* corny. We all are just constantly struggling with the capacity for evil in human beings. Sometimes it'll make you weep when you open the papers and you see all these things, day after day, which of course they pick. And yet, I think of George Eliot's wonderful passage towards the end of *Middlemarch,* isn't it, where she talks about those who quietly go on doing good, a lovely passage – that's still true, but one shouldn't expect a sudden rise of virtue.[29] You do your best with families, too, with kids.

SM This leads directly to another important question, again from a delegate here, who made the point that for *his* generation, you and E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams were of course the intellectual heroes of the time, and they saw you as great ideological and also *idealistic* figures. He wanted to know whether you were influencing each other at the time, and also if you think your influence is still there?

RH That's two questions really, isn't it? The easy one is the first one! The funny thing is that we all three of us wrote long, difficult books. We wrote them from the beginning of the fifties and they came out towards the end of the fifties: Edward's wonderful book, *The Making of the English Working Class,* which is a triumphant book - he never did anything by halves, his books always weighed pounds; Raymond's *Culture and Society.*[30] We were all three adult education tutors: Raymond was down in the South, Edward was in Halifax, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and I was in Hull, and we all knew each other and not one of us knew that we were writing a book - isn't that funny, I mean, it really is very funny. We should have smelled it somehow, but we didn't. Then when they came out, we all reviewed each other's books, rather nicely, of course.[31] We felt part of something, but we were very different.

Edward was much more theoretical that I would ever be. Edward was an active man, a marvellous man. I mean, he looked like Savonarola – did you

[28] "'Reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with a dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind." Wordsworth, preface to *Lyrical Ballads*' (Hoggart, *Mass Media*, p. 177).

[29] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.896: '[T]he growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts: and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.'

[30] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).

[31] Richard Hoggart, 'An Important Book', *Essays in Criticism* 9, 2 (April 1959), pp. 171-179 [on *Culture and Society*]; Raymond Williams, 'The Uses of Literacy: Working-Class Culture', *Universities and Left Review* 1, 2 (1957), pp. 29-32 and 'Fiction and the Writing Public', *Essays in Criticism* 7, 4 (October 1957), pp. 422-428, repr. In Frances Mulhern, ed., *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), pp. 24-9. Thompson was far less gentle on Williams: see the long review in *New Left Review* 9 & 10 (May-June & July-August 1961), pp. 24-33; 33-49.

ever see him? – he was about your height, and he had this mass of white hair and he looked as though he was going to introduce us to Christ. He was a great speaker. He was hugely influenced by his brother, Frank, who'd been the lover of Iris Murdoch at Oxford. Frank went to Romania to fight with the partisans and he was captured, and lined up with the other partisans against the railway station in Romania and shot, and his last words were, 'Vive la Revolution!' The railway station is now called the 'Frank Thompson Station', and Frank haunted, in a good way, Edward, all his life. His widow's still living in Worcester.[32] The other half of the question – is your influence still alive? – I've no idea.

SM I would say yes. I would want to approach this question of influence with a little anecdote of my own. We have an undergraduate course that involves Hoggart, Williams and Thompson's work, and the continuing significance, or influence, of Richard's writing became powerfully evident in the way that group really engaged with questions of class, culture and education. When he came in to talk to the seminar group, he ended up spending half the day in the student café, after the formal session, chatting with these students, who were clearly absolutely engaged with his positions, his writing.

RH Yes, in *The Uses of Literacy* there's a chapter called 'The Uprooted and the Anxious', which is about the effect on people from poor backgrounds who go to universities like here and still love their parents, but can't get back, as it were, and are much embarrassed by these ivory towers and, you know, dreaming spires and all that sort of thing. They're coming into a new world of the mind, but at the same time it carries a lot of class baggage and they're having to get rid of their baggage but they don't really want to anyway. So they find themselves deeply uncertain. I looked at it again because I thought I might read it today, but I realised there's too much anyway, and it's an affecting passage. I realise how much I was involved in it myself when I wrote it. But Sean's students had been given assignments to write, which I read, which particularly reflected on 'The Uprooted and the Anxious', and also a conversation I had with Raymond Williams, which was published in the first number of the *New Left Review*, called 'Working-Class Attitudes'.[33] A number of them talked, movingly, about how relevant it was to them today. One I remember was from a working-class background, the other was from something *un*literate-but-middle-class-ish. It cheers me up no end because it clearly still was virtually as relevant as ever. You wouldn't have thought that, in the twenty-first century, but it is there, it's the strength of the British class system, which I bang on about too often, but it *is* there.

[32] The historian Dorothy Thompson (1923-).

[33] Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, 'Working-Class Attitudes', *New Left Review* 1 (Jan-Feb 1960), pp. 26-30.

SM We're nearly out of time but I do want to have a chance for you to read from your very latest work.

RH Yes, I'm going to read a little bit from chapter one and then the last bit, in a rough form, from chapter seven, the final chapter. The book has got the working title of *Old Age* and I'm enjoying it no end now I've got into it.[34]

The book begins with a couple of quotations, one from T. S. Eliot's 'Gerontion' and the other from *King Lear*, when he says, 'I am a very foolish fond old man'. Then: 'Tolstoy in his diary says old age is the most unexpected of all things that happen to a man, and he's dead right, I can tell you. Old age came very suddenly for the two of us.' Then I go on, that's just the very introductory paragraph. Further on now:

> Where do you want to be – if you're in distress at the idea of going into any kind of institution? Imagine it – where you all sit round in easy chairs, watching the telly and dribbling slowly. It's possible that your children would take you in; ours would, I know, but it's not a real option. You love each other very much across the generations but the gesture would eventually be likely to prove emotionally too costly for both of you. So, what do I want? A place detached, but preferably in a quiet enclave, near a medium-sized city centre, with a large sitting-room, two bedrooms or three, full facilities, lots of books, a phone, a telly, a hi-fi, a pc, a printer, some booze – what a lot of baggage we need now if we're retiring in comfort. I mean, think of all of those things going – oh, and an alarm buzzer, in case you need it. Meals and company if you wanted them, no rules other than those which are for safety, and the convenience of others require. It's a modern cushioned equivalent of – some of you will know it – what Montaigne said, that what he'd like to do at the end was to retire to a room at the back of the shop. I love that phrase, 'a room at the back of the shop' – so that's my modern equivalent of it.

This is a bit longer:

> I go for a brief afternoon walk along pavements full of school children of all ages, just coming out, heading for home, most of them continuously laughing and joshing [do you know that English word? it's a lovely one, *joshing*, it means making jokes and poking each other in the elbow, a very good word that]. I don't envy them. There's a slight regret, one kept in hand. I remember that time warmly enough, indeed happily, and I try dispassionately to imagine how they see me, the slow old man with a stick, and some of them look at me as though I'm from another planet, to which they can't *conceive* themselves as ever arriving. A very few look at me as though I'm occupying useful space. Hardly any of them will see me as a survivor because that would link them emotionally with one who was once their age but now occupies a point in space and time towards which they do not yet recognise that they are slowly moving. Hazlitt, one of our best coiners of aphorisms, caught the dominant mood: 'No young man feels he shall ever die.' Which is true, of course. Those of you who sympathise with old people are rare and wonderful types. Another one I remember from many years ago remarked, at about seventeen, that she couldn't accept the thought of being thirty – obviously that would be unbearably joyless; and clearly perhaps most at twenty assume that all passion will be spent when they do arrive at that third decade. Then one remembers George Moore, who celebrated the sexual attraction of women of a certain age - he said, thirty. The confidence of many young people today is that of Lords of the Earth, that's what they're told all the time, of course. Certainly the Ad men and the PR men have a special interest in youth, it's in the saddle and we're reminded of it. It's a long time since a phrase like 'the Wisdom of Age' was common currency. Do we wish to be younger again? No. I remember Jonathan Swift – the English writers really are wonderful at producing aphorisms like this – 'No wise man ever wishes to be younger.'

The other one is where I'm playing about with the ending of the book and it's about death and the thought of death. One of those wonderful Tennyson poems, which are not so much read nowadays, one of the most wonderful is 'Ulysses', about death coming, and I've already quoted some of the passages that I'll never forget, you know: 'Tho' much is taken, much abides', 'I cannot rest from travel: I will drink/Life to the lees', 'I am a part of all that I have met'. Then he talks about following knowledge:

> And this gray spirit yearning in desire
> To follow knowledge like a sinking star
> Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

And then, again:

> Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
> Death closes all: but something ere the end,
> Some work of noble note, may yet be done[35]

It's great Tennyson. We can make jokes about it if we want, but it is a great poem, it astonishingly gathers together. That's the beginning of my attempt to

[34] Richard Hoggart, *Promises to Keep: Thoughts in Old Age* (London: Continuum, 2005). Hoggart reads from a manuscript.

[35] Hoggart breaks off the rest of the phrase – 'Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods'.

talk about death itself, but then I become much more modern and I talk about Elias Canetti – does anybody read Canetti nowadays? He was a nasty man in many ways. He was one of Iris Murdoch's many lovers, and the stories about that are horrible. They made love – that's a silly phrase to use – she had sex with Canetti while his wife was making tea in the other room, at the Canettis' household in Hampstead, I think. But anyway, he had a tough mind and he said something that I can't help remembering. He talked about being *resistant* in your stance before death: 'It is important that a man still plans at the end. It shows the measure of injustice in his death.' That's an extraordinary expression.

The other one is – I'm sure most of you will know this, anyway – the magnificent end of Kafka's *The Trial*, where K is taken out with those two men, they're just called 'the Partners', and he refuses their proposal, which they courteously make, that he kill himself. He refuses it; he has some dignity. So they have to do it:

> The hands of one of the partners were already at K's throat, while the other thrust the knife into his heart and turned it there twice. With failing eyes K could still see the two of them, cheek leaning against cheek, immediately before his face, watching the final act. 'Like a dog,' he said: It was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him.[36]

It's a magnificent resistance. He makes his judgment on death at the very end. It *is* a shameful thing, the process, the event, it's been made as meaningless as a dog's, but because he can see that and find words for it, and images, he can judge it and surmount it. I think that's one of the finest endings in English literature – well, Czech literature, of course.

But then the last one of all, which I've discovered only quite late. One discovers in Shakespeare all the time things that one never ever thought of. It's towards the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* – not a play we much think of. It's when Berowne wants to woo the Princess, as she's called, and he's told that he must go and serve a year doing good things, and to go into a hospital where the dying are.[37] Shakespeare produces a line which, God, you know, the *nice* old aunt used to say of things like this, in music, 'It's enough to make you want to give all your money away', and it was, it has that kind of force. He's told to go into the hospital where the dying are and 'move wild laughter in the throat of death'. Fancy being able to create a line like that: '*To move wild laughter in the throat of death*'. I'd give all my money away to be able to create a line like that. It's that kind of thing which expresses, in spite of all the dread which must accompany death, that there's a brave, wild energy, something that doesn't demand to be pitied, that says, 'Well, I've had a good run and I'm ready to go.'

[36] Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (1925; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 251.
[37] *Love's Labour's Lost*, V.ii.843.

Your mind can still express courage, and more than that, it could enjoy a laugh, even to the end. So that, I think, is going to be the last bit of the book. Thank you.

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Jennifer Birkett and Chiara Briganti, eds., Margaret Storm Jameson: Writing in Dialogue. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 214 pp. £34.99 hb. ISBN 978 1 847181 824

For someone who published so many novels, among them ones of real distinction, Storm Jameson was unusually prone to self doubt. 'Its singular badness proves that I was not a born novelist', she remarked of her early and very interesting novel, *The Pot Boils* (1919), and in her autobiography, *Journey From the North*, she more than once suggests that her chosen career was a mistake, or at all events led to no great achievement. That she rarely made much money from her novels is true. Yet as every page of the autobiography shows, and as a cache of letters included in the present book further reveals, Jameson was a born writer. These letters, which have never before been published and which perhaps provide the book's high point, were written over a period of some fifty years to her close friends, Hilary Newitt Brown and Harrison Brown, an English couple who, foreseeing the coming of the Second World War, in 1937 settled in British Columbia and to whom Jameson could talk with unabashed candour – for example, of her fearful loathing of Hitler and fascism, of her contempt for most politicians, and of her sense of outrage at the pusillanimity, backsliding and ill faith of officialdom in wavering about whether to grant refugee status to writers and intellectuals she was trying to get out of continental Europe before the Nazis got to them. Jameson was deeply involved in P.E.N., whose English president she became in 1939, but this alone won't account for her hard work on behalf of other writers. These letters are vivid testimony of the tensions, fears and difficulties of the times, both before, during and after the war. But what makes them so appealing is Jameson's often excoriating wit. Of Chamberlain's relationship with the French government in 1938, she remarks: 'it isn't true C let the French down. He didn't have to this time. They were taking the lift down so fast he had to run to get into it' (p.185). And, in 1940, with Britain under siege, she notes, 'I don't know where the Munich spirit is, I mean, what stone it has crawled under. No doubt you could lift a stone or two and find things come crawling out. I know where one or two such stones lie. But the ordinary people are fine' (p.193).

The essays that make up *Writing in Dialogue* rightly consider some of the ways in which Jameson finds fictional form in which to explore her awareness that the worth of 'ordinary people' is threatened by forces that they must try to control or be controlled and oppressed by. Her writing career more or less coincides with what Eric Hobsbawm has called 'The Age of Extremes' – that is, 1913-1989 – and her novels try to account for the age's dark, violent forces, and at the same time, and despite a period as a

pacifist and although she was a committed socialist, try not to buy into any of what Orwell, with pugnacious relish, called 'the smelly little orthodoxies that contend daily for our souls.'

As the editors remark in their Introduction, 'Jameson has suffered from the tendency in feminist scholarship to focus solely on female writing for its representation of women's lives and to ignore their political work except in terms of their feminism' (p. 3). In this context, it is notable that Rosamond Lehmann is quoted as finding Jameson's 'Munich' novel, *Europe to Let*, 'electrifying and ferocious', and motivated by a 'a passionate disgust and indignation combined with a masculine intelligence.' I'm surprised that Kate McLoughlin, who quotes this in her interesting essay, 'Voices and Values: Storm Jameson's *Europe to Let* and the Munich Pact', doesn't consider the implications of that phrase 'masculine intelligence'; but other essays engage with the formal consequences of Jameson's determination to produce novels of ideas. Hence, Briganti's 'Mirroring the Darkness: Storm Jameson and the Collective Novel' – though in any discussion of the trilogy *Mirror in Darkness* (1934-36) I would have thought it worthwhile to consider Dos Passos's 1920s *U.S.A.* trilogy, given the impact it made overseas as well as in America, and in view of its author's professed communist sympathies. Hence, too, Sharon Ouditt's valuable essay on 'Men, Women and World War I in the Fiction of Storm Jameson' – though, if, as Ouditt shows, Jameson had to overcome the prejudice against women being non-combatants and thus 'at best peripheral to war' (p. 57), I don't see why Arnold Bennett's *The Pretty Lady* (1918) shouldn't come into the reckoning, given that Bennett was also a non-combatant and yet for my money produced one of the very best novels to emerge from that period, one that deals quite brilliantly with the effects of war on the home front. Hence, too, Jennifer Birkett's insistence that Jameson looked to writers outside England for her peers. In her pages on 'The Shape of Evil: *Before the Crossing* and *The Black Laurel*', and especially in her telling remark on Jameson's 'self-flagellating insight into the necessary cruelty of authorial vision' (p. 130), Birkett as good as buries Angus Wilson's contention in *The Wild Garden* (1963) that English novelists have been unable to write about evil. Given Dickens's novels, this was anyway a fairly daft claim. But Wilson's intention was to rebuke English readers not so much for a complacent humanism as for their indifference to those novels of ideas he associated with continental Europe. As a corrective to such indifference he could have looked closer to home. He could and indeed should have looked to Jameson. And as someone who himself could be properly satiric about the pretensions and venality of the literary life, Wilson should have been much taken by Jameson's 1962 novel, *The Road From the Monument*, a most subtle dissection of male vanity, egoism, and self-deception.

This late novel isn't discussed in *Writing in Dialogue*. Nor are quite a few others. I grant that not all are important. Others however are, and it would have been good to see them at least mentioned. (The so-called comedies are

for the most part ignored.) Still, you can't have everything and *Writing in Dialogue* gives us a good deal. The essays are consistently interesting, readable, informative, and without an air of special pleading. With their publication we can reasonably hope that the reputation of this important novelist is now on the mend.

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Dai Smith, *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale.* Cardigan: Parthian Books, forthcoming. (This preview is based on research materials released in advance to the reviewer.)

Dai Smith's *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale* is very much in keeping with Williams's own writing, presenting not an already finished person but rather a subject in process of formation, historically, intellectually and personally. Yet this is also an unfinished life. Stopping around 1960, the biography ends at the point where all too often Williams has been seen to start. This is not the Raymond Williams of later decades, when a complex, if ultimately uncompleted project was unfolding. *A Warrior's Tale* is a more difficult study, disclosing how that Raymond Williams came into being. Beginning shortly after Williams's death, Smith has unearthed a mass of archival data, much previously unknown. Of these, two sources are the most important, and together offer a previously unfamiliar picture of Williams. The first of these is the notebooks which Raymond Williams compiled over several years, which record not only his own researches but his personal reflections and introspections. As such they take Dai Smith into a depth of intimacy with his subject which enriches the biographical picture. It is however the second discovery which is at the heart of Smith's work. In the years between World War II and the appearance of *Border Country*, Raymond Williams wrote a series of novels. It is the excavation of these which perhaps more than anything will surprise many readers who previously had only a hazy sense of their existence. The writing of these novels, and the manner in which they contribute to the formation of Williams's self-identity, is central to the second half of this biography. Two of the novels, *Brynllwyd* and *Between Two Worlds*, will be published next year by Parthian Books, under the guidance of Dai Smith, and there is little doubt but that they will attract much interest.

The research for this biography goes well beyond these discoveries from after the War. The early chapters offer a social history of south-east Wales, tracing hitherto little-known family relationships as well as the travels of the young Raymond, across England and beyond. Dai Smith also identifies a prospective wife, Margaret Fallas, a source of deep tension to which I return later. Behind the pivotal stories of war experiences are researches extending

from Normandy across Europe in the path of the regiment in which Williams served. Discovered are new people and new writings and in the process a Raymond Williams previously known only to those who were then his comrades and friends.

Dai Smith's biography depicts a subject who is not given and complete but who was forged through some of the most traumatic years of modern history. In the limited space that follows the emphasis is with the first half of *A Warrior's Tale* where much of the biographical story lies. The writing that came after the war requires another response and is likely to be the emphasis given by some when the book appears. Yet what Williams wrote only makes full sense if the experiences that shaped it are given due attention.

In 1955 Raymond Williams wrote 'Only the line of a life, hardly anything of its area, can be articulated, and reduced to grammar'. The line comes from an unpublished novel, *The Grasshoppers,* the manuscript of which has been recovered by Dai Smith and is now stored with the other papers sited in Swansea. Answering Williams' contention, the aspiration of *A Warrior's Tale* is to counter that anti-biographical sentiment, 'by ranging backwards and forwards over the area of his life even as its line moves inexorably on', and, Smith adds, 'It is for others to comment on the effectiveness of the reduction I have made' (p. 9). As a criterion this is helpful, for it indicates to the reader the tenor and intention of the biography. This is a big book. Yet the amount of material discovered means that it ends at the transition from the 1950s to the 1960s, covering only the first forty years of Raymond Williams's life. These, however, are the crucial years for understanding the later figure.

The new Williams that emerges here has the complexity and self-reflection we might expect. What is surprising is the strength, even at times hardness, of the character. The reader is shown the making of Raymond Williams, as a process of self-determination in response to external circumstance. A strength came from his childhood – the immediate family upbringing, the security of the village and, beyond that, of the people. We get a sense of this surety in *Border Country* and in a very different way from the remarkable unfinished work, *People of the Black Mountains.* This very particular place, the Black Mountains, has been seen as the source of the certainty often identified with Raymond Williams. Yet the story told here will surprise us. In the interviews for *Politics and Letters* Williams pointed to the confident young man who went up to Cambridge in 1939. That figure can certainly be detected here, but for Dai Smith the war years were crucial for understanding the whole life. The account of the war is perhaps the most difficult to follow, a point I return to later. What is essential to recognise is that Williams was a front-line soldier and that, as an anti-tank officer, he was engaged in brutal and bloody conflict. People around him died in terrible ways. It is of course impossible to enter into another's mind and some of the psychological torment can never be known. What Dai Smith emphasises is that the rebuilding of Raymond Williams after this was a long process, taking ten years at least. In that time

Williams set off in many different directions, as adult education tutor to the world, to himself and Joy, the writer of novels, plays, film scripts, criticism, short stories, and the countless notes which Smith has examined. Early on these notes were fragmented, pieces of paper with headings, diagrams, lists of work done and longer lists of work to do. Later they become more systematised in the form of notebooks and these are among the most important of the finds uncovered by Dai Smith's years of research.

The biography ends at the point where Raymond Williams established himself professionally, with the publication of *Culture and Society*. Yet behind this is the writing of *Border Country*, the work toward which Dai Smith is moving in his later chapters and which will settle Raymond Williams in himself. It is as though, like that novel's protagonist Matthew Price, Dai Smith too has measured the distance. His means are chronological and critical, the first represented primarily in the first six chapters, the remainder concentrating on the writing in the decade after the War, most especially the notebooks and novels. The first two chapters tell the story of Jim, who in a real sense precedes Raymond, the Abergavenny Grammar School pupil. As Dai Smith's Introduction points out, revealing the life means first and foremost identifying the place, and the history, which made that person. The railway is there from the first. Abergavenny, the nearest town to Pandy, was a railway town. At the time of the First World War one thousand people were directly employed in an industry with sheds so vast that up to a hundred tanker engines could be housed at one time. Were the family links of these people traced a third of the population of Abergavenny might be connected to, and therefore partly dependent on, the railway. This level of industrial concentration is remarkable and probably on a par with the cotton towns of Lancashire a hundred years earlier. Yet Abergavenny was also a market town where people from surrounding villages and farmers traded, both buying and selling. Despite its working class presence this railway centre had a Conservative-dominated Borough Council, raising questions about the electoral divisions of people and geography that made this possible. Through the telling of Jim's childhood we learn more of Pandy itself. The 'Village on the Border' – to take the title of an earlier version of *Border Country* – was populated by people who spanned the division of Wales and England. Their talk was not that of the Welsh-speaking parts to the west, but a mixture made by centuries of cross-border migrations. A feature of Pandy's physical presence was its water supply, which, dependent on a local arrangement of pipes and gullies, was not connected to that symbol of a modern capitalist state, a national water grid. The supply of something as everyday and ordinary as water set the parameters of consciousness and at the same time strengthened the local sense of community. When, eventually, Pandy was linked to the general water network, Harry Williams made a particular note in his diary. The process of being linked is apparent too in Jim's schooling. His first school was a place where for the majority of children the whole of their

formal learning would take place: one large room divided into two by a curtain, separating the children by age, with progress marked by transfer from one side to the other. The school's place in the wider scheme of rural life was marked by the need for children to be absent when the real learning of necessary skills at harvest and other times demanded. Yet it was a proud place and each year a small number would matriculate to learn further. It is this movement away to the grammar school in Abergavenny that is Jim's passage away from the village. The later distancing to go to Cambridge was the next step in the path already begun.

Elsewhere in these first two chapters we learn, however, that well before Cambridge Jim was a well-travelled boy. Because of the concessions his father earned as an employee of the Great Western Railway, the family had visited London. London also visited Pandy when a cousin came to stay and a whole other side of Raymond Williams's family was brought into focus. A more important visitor however was Margaret Fallas, who Gwen Williams decided would be her future daughter-in-law. In later chapters we learn of Gwen's lasting bitterness toward the woman Raymond was actually to marry, Joy Dalling; and how the two men, father and son, had to attempt a bridge between households already distanced by geography.

In the interviews for *Politics and Letters* Raymond Williams suggested that university in Wales would for him have been preferable. In fact transit across the border came by means of invitation partly engineered by Abergavenny Grammar School, which was also instrumental in getting the young Williams the necessary bursary. This was obviously essential: working-class children usually only got to Cambridge as servants to those anointed by class and background to study there. The formal dimensions of Williams's own attendance gain no more space in chapter three than their worth in the story and the significant aspects of his first year at college were twofold. The first was the inability of ancient colleges and superior dons to impact on this young working-class man. Not that Williams did not take advantage of the opportunity to learn from his time there. But he was not intimidated by the enormous cultural power the institution embodied. Williams saw that power epitomised in a tea shop where those who thought themselves to have a superior pedigree gathered to share their assurance in appropriate tones. From 'Culture is Ordinary', an essay written in 1958, we get a clear picture of Williams's anger and determination in such circumstances, contrasting the quality of his own background with the superficiality encountered here.

The other aspect of his first year at college was in part a product of the times and a moment in a longer revolution. This was the socialism which infused contemporary student politics and to which one in four of Cambridge students gave a measure of allegiance. It does not feature in the biography, but the lead to this socialist initiative came from the natural sciences rather than the famous arts-based figures. (On this see Gary Werskey, *The Visible College*, Free Association Books, 1988.) There is no doubt however about the most

effective intellectual grouping to emerge from this ferment. After the war the Communist Party Historians Group changed the whole shape of the discipline, and Dai Smith in later chapters pays due attention to Raymond Williams's relation with the group. In this first year of Williams's education the Socialist Club served as the place where he could find some kindred spirits, and it was through the Club's cultural apparatus that his first writings found publication. The student socialism was part of its time and the ominous presence of those greater movements of history hangs over this period. The choice between whether to fight or align with the extensive pacifist movement was not resolved for Williams, even at the moment he 'joined up'. The tension is brought out by Dai Smith's recovery of Williams's participation in a huge peace convention in Geneva, and his involvement in London with the Peace Pledge Union. Nevertheless, the chapter ends with Williams in the Signals Regiment before being transferred to 21 Anti-Tank, the prelude to the pivotal stage in the biography that is to follow.

There is one last and decisive turning point in chapter three: Joy Dalling enters the story. The Dallings were from the south west of England, around Barnstaple. They had made some way in business but physical frailty had kept the family from economic security. The turning point in Joy's education had come through the Workers' Education Association (WEA) which inspired her to enter the London School of Economics (LSE). Fear of London bombing had meant the college moving to Cambridge, with the consequence that for the first time women were a sizable part of the student population.

Chapter four, the War, is in some ways the most difficult. Operating at three levels, it addresses the wider picture of north-west Europe after D-Day, Williams's own war experiences, and the writing completed during those years. Readers may feel in need of an aid here, for plotting the movements of the 21st Anti-Tank Regiment is not always easy and the bigger picture is not always clear. This is no doubt a general problem in writing about wartime experience: the bigger picture is by definition that of the Generals, and probably retrospective. An attempt to write war from an alternative perspective, what Williams once spoke of, in the popular phrase, as that of 'the poor bloody infantry', can provide immense detail but, again by definition, not provide the 'map' which clarity needs. Smith's inclusion of extracts from Raymond's writing, some of it on the War, to illuminate this experience, means that sometimes fact and fiction become a little blurred.

An anti-tank regiment is a front line fighting force. Its job is to work with tank regiments and infantry, destroying enemy tanks and other potential threats. Anti-tank solders kill and in the process may themselves be killed. This is the brutal fact of Raymond Williams's life at this point. Typical of Cambridge recruits, Williams was made an officer, a Captain, with tanks under his command and a responsibility for intelligence and planning. Smith deals with all this, including an engagement where tanks under his command and enemy tanks were destroyed, in a manner that does not fudge the brutality yet

holds back from over-close detail. Rather we have a sense of the confusion that pervaded the experience of battle. D-Day and those days that followed are captured in the blur of limited movement and close engagement. Towards the chapter's end what comes through is a figure adamant that what was being destroyed was wrong and for which there could be no sympathy. The Raymond Williams in 1945 that Dai Smith presents is not particularly likable, but he is honest about the reality of the previous decade and more.

In chapter five, that Raymond Williams becomes a transitory figure, demobbed, a student again, a husband and father, and shortly the adult education tutor that would be his public face for the next thirteen years. Clearly the contradictions and temporariness of the circumstances were difficult for Raymond and Joy. Married in the midst of war and with Merryn, their first child, born in 1942, the need for security of home and a regular income weighed heavily. The two needs found a degree of resolution through a post with the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy, which required a working partnership with the WEA in the south-east of England, the family living first in Seaford and then Hastings. From this point on the biography begins to alter. If chapters one to six follow a broadly chronological line, chapters seven to eleven revolve around the writing, and, most importantly, around the evolution of Williams's fiction. Preceding the start of this writing is a development which is significant both politically and personally. *Politics and Letters* was a periodical seeking to explore relations of art and society and establish a forum where writers with different expertises could meet. Though in one sense failing (the project was aborted after only eighteen months), it represents an influential experience, at a point when the start of the Cold War, with all the divisions that would ensue, meant that the personal was increasingly also political. *Politics and Letters* was hampered by the common literary background of its editors, Wolf Mankowitz, Clifford Collins and Williams, because, as Williams later commented, what the project really required was political scientists and economists to give it breadth. The 'failure' of the journal was profoundly significant for Williams, and as much as anything determined the isolation in which he is commonly supposed to have worked over the next decade.

This picture of intellectual isolation has been taken too far, and Dai Smith offers a healthy corrective. Among the associations identified, the first were other tutors, such as Tony McLean, whose influence Williams acknowledged on various occasions. Second was a rather strange relationship with the film maker Michael Orram, the later break with whom is shocking to read. Third, and most interesting, was the Communist Historians Group which gathered at Netherwood, a Party house near Hastings, and to which Williams spoke at a week long conference in 1954. (On this, see Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', in Maurice Cornforth, ed., *Rebels and their Causes* [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978].) The 1954 conference, to which Williams was invited as a guest speaker, encapsulated in miniature the

map of social and economic history over the next twenty five years. This contact provided Raymond Williams with an intellectual and political stimulus against which to form his own thinking. The direction his historical work was to take, however, was something he had already indicated in a Report of a Tutors' course in July 1950, for which appropriately he was Director of Studies. (See Raymond Williams, 'Literature in Relation to History', Rewley House Papers, Vol. iii, No. 1, 1949/50, reprinted in John McIlroy & Sally Westwood, *Border Country*, NIACE 1993.) The 'report' reads like a manifesto for the forms of social and cultural history that were to emerge after the founding of the Annales- influenced periodical *Past and Present* in 1952, and more especially the watershed of 1956, but which Williams was already trying to put into practice in his efforts to start classes on the theme of culture and society.

None of this should be taken to mean that isolation was not real. Rather it should direct us to appreciate its specificity. What was unknown to virtually all except perhaps Raymond's foremost critical supporter, Joy Williams, was the vast amount of writing that Williams imposed on himself. Dai Smith is perhaps closer here than anywhere to the core of that writing, and the process through which Raymond Williams invented himself. There are very important outputs along the way; the books on drama, *Drama in Performance* (1954) and *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1952), and *Reading and Criticism* (1950), some of which were written for a series *Man in Society* published by Frederick Muller and aimed at WEA students. There is the essay, 'The Idea of Culture' in 1953, and the aborted venture with Michael Orram which produced *Preface to Film* in 1954. A later outcome was the brilliant essay 'Culture is Ordinary' published in 1958. Behind all this though, are the drafts on drafts, some taken to manuscript, others dropped, of novels. Among the most prescient of titles were 'Border Village', 'Brynllwyd' and 'A Common Theme'.

Each draft played a part, figures and places and the relationship between them altered and advanced toward an end that seemed always somewhere ahead. We are in these latter chapters in the deepest territory of the book, watching at times two subjects, Dai Smith and Raymond Williams, as the first pushes through the pages of manuscript dissecting in a single moment both the content and its writer. This is not easy reading, nor should it be. We are made to work if we want to understand what are three coterminous processes: the evolution of Raymond Williams himself, the development of a form of writing, and what the biography itself is doing. The interaction of these is complex, the circumstance, notably of the death of his father in March 1958, gave Williams the means by which *Border Country* might be written. The mechanism was the dual stories of Harry and Gwen's settlement in Glynmawr and the pivotal story of the General Strike, in between that of Mathew's return to his now dying father. However it is the problem of the form of writing that requires most of the reader. The issue combines a number of threads, the tradition of realism, socialist and working class fiction, and most importantly

the novel and prose writing in Wales. Only a reader conscious of all of these at the same moment can fully appreciate the real achievement of *Border Country*. *Border Country*, though, is not the biography's end point, which is *Culture and Society*, but the presence of the novel about to be published hangs expectant in the final pages.

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The Raymond Williams Memorial Fund

The Raymond Williams Memorial Fund aims to honour and sustain Raymond Williams's project through adult education – primarily by supporting educationally disadvantaged adults in attending courses on themes related to his work. It has successfully organised annual residential weekends since 1988 in partnership with the WEA and Wedgwood Memorial College, and with the support of the Raymond Williams Society.

The Trust looks forward to its twentieth residential weekend next year. This will take place from 2-4 May 2008 and will be devoted to the themes of Williams's *What I Came to Say*, including discussion of his now classic essay, 'Culture is Ordinary'. The weekend will therefore perfectly match the broad aims of the Trust – to make not only Williams's work but a range of progressive ideas on modern society commonly available.

The Trust is presently reaching the end of an extraordinary saga. A bequest of more than £200,000 made to the Raymond Williams Memorial Fund has for the last four years been held back in a complex legal process. The Trust stands still to receive £150,000 to support its work and we naturally remain hopeful that this will be the outcome. Meanwhile we appreciate the interest and support of all involved.

For further information, please contact **derektatton@btinternet.com.**

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