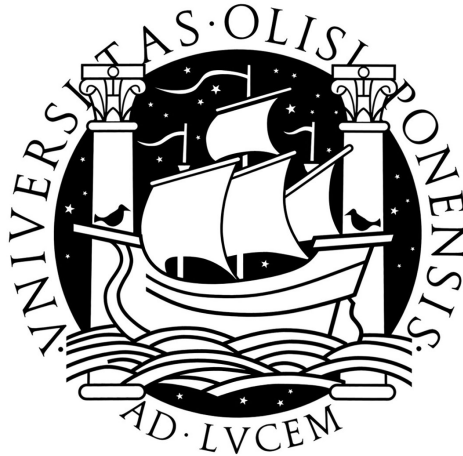


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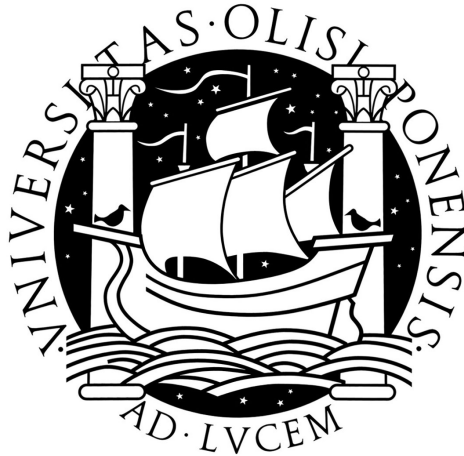
**Reading Literature Today: A Study of E. M.
Forster's and George Orwell's Fiction**

Paula Sofia Ramos de Sousa Sampaio

Doutoramento em Cultura Inglesa

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Tese orientada pelo Professor Doutor Álvaro Pina

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Abstract

This work engages with the novels of E. M. Forster and George Orwell from a cultural studies perspective, to explore the insights that the study of literature can offer to the study and theorisation of culture. It maintains that many of the challenges first formulated by Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Alan Sinfield and Pierre Macherey remain unfulfilled, and might help reshape cultural studies, or at least reveal its limits. I approach Forster's and Orwell's novels through a socially-grounded close reading, to release them from the liberal-humanist conspectus within which they were produced and have continued to be predominantly received. Turning to what Pierre Macherey has called the work's 'ideology', which percolated through these novels at the moment of production, I look for the stories they tell, but also (reading 'against the grain') for the stories they fail to tell. My analysis falls on three topics – Englishness, imperialism and liberalism – to reconstruct these authors' specific formation. I identify three different, but related, elements of 'Englishness': its reliance on a series of cultural and social 'Others'; its links to liberalism (in the form of 'a capacious liberalism'); its rootedness in capitalism. The construction of 'Otherness', which manifests itself in a long chain of binary oppositions (such as, public/private; masculine/feminine; rational/ emotional; elite/ mass), is not only at the centre of Forster's and Orwell's literary/political vision, but has been also replicated in the various identity-based post-modernist critiques of liberal-humanism. I displace this primacy, by complementing my reading with Alain Badiou's notion of 'event' and 'ethics of truth'. My concern is not with finding a label for these authors' politics, but with teasing out a set of elements and relations that helped to shape the 'criteria of plausibility' (Sinfield, 1992) that continues to define today's rather broad and deep-rooted liberal-democratic consensus.

Keywords: Forster; Orwell; cultural studies; Englishness; 'Other'; 'Event'; liberalism

Resumo

Este trabalho desenvolve uma análise dos romances de E. M. Forster e George Orwell numa perspectiva de estudos culturais, e uma reflexão sobre o contributo da literatura nas áreas da análise e teoria da cultura. Considera que muitos dos desafios formulados por Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Alan Sinfield e Pierre Macherey permanecem por cumprir e podem ajudar a reformular os estudos culturais, ou, pelo menos, apontar os seus limites. Adoptando uma leitura socialmente construída, mas que privilegia as obras ('close reading'), procurou-se arrancar estes romances ao quadro crítico liberal-humanista em que foram produzidos e no qual a sua recepção continua a ser predominantemente feita. O enfoque cai agora no que Pierre Macherey designou por 'ideologia', que permeou a obra no momento de produção. Estes romances são, por conseguinte, lidos pelas histórias que contam, mas também (numa leitura dissidente, ou 'against the grain') pelas histórias que se recusam a contar ou que ficam por contar. Partindo de três tópicos de análise – 'Englishness', imperialismo e liberalismo – identificaram-se três componentes essenciais da 'Englishness': a necessidade de identificar uma série de 'Outros' culturais e sociais; a conexão com o liberalismo (um liberalismo expansivo – 'a capacious liberalism'); o enraizamento no capitalismo. A construção da 'Outridade', com expressão numa longa cadeia de oposições binárias (tais como, público/privado, masculino/feminino; racional/emocional; elite/massas), não está apenas no centro da visão política/literária destes autores, mas tem também caracterizado as várias alternativas críticas (pós-modernistas, focadas na identidade e na diferença) à corrente liberal-humanista. Esta primazia é contrariada com o recurso às noções de 'evento' e 'ética da verdade' de Alain Badiou. O objectivo final não é etiquetar a tendência política destes escritores, mas identificar uma série de elementos que ajudaram a dar forma aos 'critérios de plausibilidade' (Sinfield, 1992) que continuam a definir o amplo e arraigado consenso liberal-democrático que caracteriza os nossos dias.

Keywords: Forster; Orwell; estudos culturais; 'Englishness'; 'Outro'; 'Evento'; liberalismo

Resumo Alargadoⁱ

Este trabalho desenvolve uma análise dos romances de E. M. Forster e George Orwell numa perspectiva de estudos culturais, oferecendo, ao mesmo tempo, uma reflexão sobre o contributo da literatura nas áreas da análise e teoria da cultura. Considera-se que muitos dos desafios formulados por Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Alan Sinfield e Pierre Macherey permanecem por cumprir e podem ajudar a reformular os estudos culturais, ou, pelo menos, trazer a lume os seus limites e limitações. Adoptou-se uma leitura socialmente construída que, na esteira de Williams e Bourdieu, questiona os pressupostos (geralmente invisíveis ou não articulados) da crítica literária tradicional – tais como a noção de ‘génio’ e criatividade literárias, que separa a obra da realidade em que foi produzida, resultando no que Williams apelidou de ‘estética dividida’ (‘divided aesthetic’ – Williams, 1971); ou pelo contrário, a noção não menos simplista de que a obra reflecte directamente essa realidade, resultando em leituras de cariz (psico)biográfico ou que procuram estabelecer correspondências directas entre o texto e a história. A ‘de-sacralização’ e ‘objectivização’ da literatura, que Bourdieu conceptualizou no seu modelo de ‘campo literário’ (ex. Bourdieu, 1993), e a concepção da relação entre literatura e mundo em termos de complexa mediação, e não de mero reflexo, vieram romper com os limites estéticos-literários e sociológicos das análises mais tradicionais (mesmo de inspiração Marxista). Fundamental nesta intervenção foi a *Teoria da Produção Literária* (1966) de Pierre Macherey, que proclama como objecto da análise literária a ‘ideologia’ da obra, isto é, o produto transformado (e deformado) do encontro entre realidade e linguagem que passa para a obra no momento de produção e que põe em evidência as contradições dessa realidade. Macherey chama a atenção para as falhas e os hiatos nas histórias que a obra conta, que apontam para as histórias que ficaram por contar, que uma leitura crítica pode reconstruir e reabilitar (Sinfield, 1992).

ⁱ De acordo com o disposto no art.º 41º da Deliberação n.º 1506/2006, DR n.º 209, 2ª Série, de 30 de Outubro de 2006

É neste quadro que se situa a minha análise da ficção de Forster e Orwell, que privilegia a leitura atenta destas obras ('close reading'), para as ler pelas histórias que contam, mas também (numa leitura dissidente, ou 'against the grain') pelas histórias que se recusam a contar ou que ficam por contar. O objectivo é definir o tipo de formação social, literária e política a que estas obras pertencem (o liberalismo de Forster, a liberal-democracia, no caso de Orwell), mas também arrancar estes romances ao quadro crítico liberal-humanista em que foram produzidos e dentro do qual a sua recepção continua a ser predominantemente feita. A análise prossegue em relação a três tópicos fundamentais: 'Englishness', imperialismo e liberalismo. Partindo dos romances italianos de Forster, e tomando a figura do turista como representativa do sujeito liberal, e o turismo como um tropo do liberalismo e do capitalismo, distinguiram-se três componentes essenciais da 'Englishness': a necessidade de identificar uma série de 'Outros' culturais e sociais; a conexão com o liberalismo (um liberalismo expansivo – o que Robert Colls designou por 'capacious liberalism' – Colls, 1986); o enraizamento no capitalismo (segundo o argumento de Ellen Meiksins Wood, 1991). A construção da 'Outridade' impõe-se como o elemento central e estruturante desta formação, manifestando-se a vários níveis, numa longa cadeia de oposições binárias, tais como, público/privado, masculino/feminino; racional/ emocional; elite/massas. Para além do 'Outro' estrangeiro (neste caso, italiano), os romances de Forster incluem também o 'Outro' feminino (as mulheres), o 'Outro' socialmente e culturalmente diferente e inferior (a classe média baixa), e o 'Outro' 'exótico', racial e colonizado. Forster incorpora os casos relativos ao género e à classe na visão de 'Englishness' apresentada em *Howards End*, sob a forma das irmãs Schlegel e de Leonard Bast, respectivamente. O último caso é tratado em *A Passage to India*, em relação à figura de Aziz. Há um último 'Outro' – o homossexual – que está implícito em grande parte da obra de Forster e que é finalmente incorporado na visão de 'Englishness' construída em *Maurice*, um romance escrito em 1914, mas que permaneceu por publicar até à morte de Forster, em 1970. Todas estas relações e problemáticas estão presentes, por vezes de forma reveladora, nas adaptações cinematográficas das obras de Forster realizadas entre os anos oitenta e noventa, que eu analiso à luz do argumento em volta do 'heritage fim', com o qual estes filmes ficaram associados.

É este mesmo quadro conceptual que encontramos na obra de Orwell, mas há diferenças significativas no tratamento quer do ‘Outro’ colonizado e racial, em *Burmese Days*, quer do ‘Outro’ social, o último dos quais passa agora a ocupar um lugar particularmente importante. Os vagabundos, os trabalhadores rurais e sazonais (‘hop-pickers’) e os desempregados de *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, bem como os pobres de *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* vêm-se elevados ao dúbio estatuto de ‘valor’, enquanto representantes da humanidade, na figura dos ‘proles’ de *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, que encontra na imagem da mulher prole (fértil, decente e trabalhadora) o expoente simbólico. As mulheres, como várias feministas têm argumentado (sobretudo Daphne Patai, 1984), detêm um papel fundamental na visão de Orwell, funcionando como ‘bodes expiatórios’ de uma série de realidades sociais (consumismo, modernidade, imperialismo) a que o sujeito masculino é hostil, mas em relação às quais não consegue assumir-se como opositor. Por fim, esta cadeia de relações conflui num novo ‘Outro’ – o ‘totalitarismo’, o ‘Outro’ político do liberalismo, que se encontrava ausente (ainda que em estado latente) da visão liberal de Forster, um desenvolvimento que associa à expansão do capitalismo na sociedade inglesa do pós-guerra e à agudização das hostilidade entre capitalismo e socialismo que ficou conhecida por ‘guerra fria’.

Esta estrutura de ‘outridade’ não está apenas no centro da visão política/literária destes autores, mas tem igualmente caracterizado as várias alternativas críticas à corrente liberal-humanista – desafios, lançados sob a égide pós-modernista, que se voltaram para a identidade e para a diferença para exigir ‘reconhecimento’, em nome de uma emancipação que se pretende demarcar do falso universalismo do sujeito liberal (e muitas vezes, do seu humanitarismo), mas que continua, em larga medida, presa a uma visão de cariz liberal. Esta tendência é contrariada neste trabalho através da filosofia de Alain Badiou, em particular, à sua noção de ‘evento’ (e, por arrastamento, de ‘ética da verdade’). Em vez das questões de identidade (e ‘outridade’) a primazia é atribuída ao ‘evento’ – à forma como estes romances representam o ‘evento’ (ou a sua ausência), entendido como algo que ‘acontece’ numa determinada situação (sendo-lhe imanente), que despoleta um processo de verdade (de ‘fidelidade ao evento’), e que resulta na construção de um sujeito e na mudança da situação inicial. Badiou considera quatro áreas em que os eventos podem ter lugar – amor, arte, ciência e política – que vão ao encontro da minha análise. As diferenças entre a

visão destes autores, em grande parte dependente da noção de arte que cada um deles perfilha e pratica, tornam-se mais evidentes sob este ângulo de abordagem. Apesar de remeterem para a mesma visão política de base (o liberalismo), os romances de Forster admitem ‘eventos’, que articulam com a questão da apreensão da realidade e a questão da verdade – os exemplos são *A Room with a View* e *Maurice*. Nos romances de Orwell, por outro lado, desde *Burmese Days* (que apelidei de ‘romance de confirmação’) a *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, nada ‘acontece’. A ausência de ‘eventos’ e de aberturas, que caracteriza a totalidade da obra de Orwell adquire expressão máxima no universo ficcional de *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, apresentando afinidades com o próprio conceito de ‘totalitarismo’ que tornou Orwell famoso. Em Oceania a estagnação é total: nada acontece (nem amor, nem arte, nem ciência, nem política) e toda a estrutura social e política está organizada – através de estratégias como a punição da intenção do acto de dissidência (e não apenas a punição do acto), e a sobrevalorização da cultura, da linguagem e do passado – para que nada possa acontecer.

O objectivo desta análise, contrariando a tendência da crítica de Orwell, não é etiquetar a tendência política destes escritores (apesar de poder haver resultados nesse sentido), mas sim identificar uma série de elementos que ajudaram a moldar e a consolidar os ‘critérios de plausibilidade’ (Sinfield, 1992) que continuam a definir o vasto e arraigado consenso liberal-democrático que caracteriza os nossos dias.

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Many of my arguments were first explored in conference papers, delivered at University of Évora ('IV Congresso Internacional da Associação Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada – Estudos Literários/ Estudos Culturais', 2001; 'Third International Language, Communication and Culture Conference', 2005); in Tampere ('Crossroads in Cultural Studies, Fourth International Conference', 2002); at University of Lisbon ('Ninth International Culture and Power Conference: Cultural Studies in the World Today', 2003); at University of Porto ('Fifth International Conference of the Utopian Studies Society', 2004); in Beja ('Second International Language, Communication and Culture Conference', 2004); and Malta ('Triennial EACLALS Conference', 2005). I am grateful to the colleagues who participated in the sessions and conferences I helped to organise between 2003 and 2006, and in other international events before and after, all of which provided the occasion for the fruitful exchange of ideas. I would like to thank, in particular, Stephen

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I wish to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, Maria da Luz and António, and to my parents, Camila and Rui. None of them ever attended higher education (and not always of their own choice). Their unwritten theses are part of the long list of non-referenced works that have truly inspired me.

List of Abbreviations

For the full reference, turn to Bibliography, in Works Cited.

I. Works by E. M. Forster

WAFT	<i>Where Angels Fear to Tread</i> (1905)
LJ	<i>The Longest Journey</i> (1907)
RWV	<i>A Room with a View</i> (1908)
HE	<i>Howards End</i> (1910)
PI	<i>A Passage to India</i> (1924)
AN	<i>Aspects of the Novel</i> (1927)
CSS	<i>Collected Short Stories</i> (1947)
M	<i>Maurice</i> (1971)
AC	<i>Arctic Summer</i> (1980)

II. Works by George Orwell

BD	<i>Burmese Days</i> (1934/1935)
RWP	<i>The Road to Wigan Pier</i> (1937)
CD	<i>A Clergyman's Daughter</i> (1935)
KAF	<i>Keep the Aspidistra Flying</i> (1936)
CUFA	<i>Coming Up for Air</i> (1939)
AF	<i>Animal Farm</i> (1945)
NEF	<i>Ninety Eighty-Four</i> (1949)

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Introduction

Literature and Cultural Studies: opening spaces

Over the past fifty years, cultural studies has firmly established itself as the privileged site for the study and theorisation of culture, in its many forms and expressions. The historical links between cultural studies and English (especially in Britain), against which cultural studies partly found its identity, have often resulted in the disavowal of literature. And yet, literature continues to occupy a place in our society too important to be ignored. Many of the questions it poses – regarding, for instance, the relationship between realism and fantasy, the mechanisms and significance of fictionality (of ‘telling stories’), the connection between form and meaning (between, for example, genre or style and ideology), the issues of authority and point of view – lead us directly to the heart of cultural theory, and may stimulate its much-needed renewal.

This project started out as a cultural studies take on the work of E. M. Forster and George Orwell. Their connections began slowly to emerge: though belonging to different generations and having developed different literary projects, it became clear to me that these authors shared a range of themes and modes of perception (what Raymond Williams described as ‘structure of feeling’) that linked them to a particular historical period, the first half of the twentieth century, a period that was crucial in laying the foundations (for better and worse) of the world we live in today. This link was more obvious in Orwell’s case, who got directly involved in many of the social and political issues of the epoch – the economic depression of the 1930s, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, the support of, and then disillusionment with, the first Labour Government – all of which flew, in often a polemical, idiosyncratic way, into his documentary work, his essays and journalism, but also his fiction. Linked to the fading influence of liberalism (he described himself as belonging to the ‘fag end of Victorian Liberalism – cit. Lago, 1995: 2; 9), Forster’s involvement was more discreet, but no less committed – he wrote a Report on the government of Egypt (1920), defended secular humanism in his broadcasts on BBC Radio

throughout the thirties and forties, and was one of the founders and the first president of the National Council for Civil Liberties (today's famous pressure group, 'Liberty').

The popularity of these authors has survived into our days, and raises a series of questions. Why are these authors still read today? Why is their work quoted from and drawn upon, 'read' not only as literature (as evidenced by the ongoing publication of their novels), but also as filmed and performed adaptations? Moreover, can we speak of a 'cultural legacy' that is passed down and expanded upon, and, if so, what cultural and political meanings are being invoked and built into it? For over fifty years, these authors have been subject to renewed critical attention. Their established reputation – Forster as a liberal humanist, Orwell as the champion of western liberal democracy – is proof of their continuing relevance. Orwell's name, in particular, has been invoked by people of different political persuasions to describe, make sense of or even live a panoply of cultural and political events – the fall of the Berlin wall and the East European block; the first reality TV show, 'Big Brother'; the rise and expansion of the surveillance society; 9/11 and the war on terrorism; the invasion of Iraq.

It is with regard to their literary achievement that the differences between these authors (both considered minor authors in the light of the Modernist canon – cf. Rodden, 2002: 397; Lee, 1969: 156) have been more evident. Forster's work, developed in a literary milieu with links to Cambridge and Bloomsbury, has been ranked above Orwell's, whose success has been largely attributed to the political reception of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This distinction between Forster's predominantly literary achievement and Orwell's predominantly political one, which has come to characterise criticism, hinges on the opposition between politics and literature ('politics and letters', in Raymond Williams's famous expression), which conceives of literature as a space exterior to politics, from which judgement on the (literary) 'value' of literary works is passed. Underlying this distinction, however, the impulse is the same: to claim both authors, via different routes, to the political culture of liberal humanism.

It was to contradict this kind of criticism (as well as its covert politics) and overcome this 'divided aesthetic', to take up Williams's words again, that I have turned to Forster's and

Orwell's fictional work (which I have restricted to their novels), to look for their politics¹ or, as Pierre Macherey put it in 1966, for its 'ideology', which percolated through it at the moment of production. It is in this spirit that my focus on literary analysis ought to be understood. By moving *through* rather than 'round' their books, as Forster so visually put it (AN, 21), by often reading 'against the grain', I set out to look for Forster's and Orwell's politics in the 'gaps' of their fictional worlds, in the stories that they were trying to tell, and that they actually told (or failed to tell). For this reason, too, I have opted to ignore or push to the margins of my analysis Orwell's self-explanatory comments, so profusely offered in his essayistic and journalistic work. Two other motives have guided this decision: first, the fact that the task of reading Orwell's fiction in the light of his comments has been extensively and intensively done (often with a competence that I could never expect to attain); second, the fact that these comments are deeply contradictory and, in fact, as it has been frequently noted, can be used to support a wide range of claims.

My approach, then, contradicts the biographical trend in Orwell studies, while (if only at a superficial level) colluding with the shift in liberal-humanist criticism, following the revelations of Forster's homosexuality after his death, from biography to literary analysis. But this is an apparent collusion. I reject any attempts to return to a purely aesthetic position, by way of a formalist type of close reading, the bastion of liberal-humanism, which, since the late sixties, has been the object of a protracted attack mounted on various fronts – from within a Marxist conspectus (in its structuralist, 'cultural materialist' and anti-colonial variants), or from so-called 'social movements' (feminism, gay and lesbian liberation, anti-racist and black movements). Despite their successes, these movements lost momentum, among other reasons, in my view, because the appeal of the liberal-democratic consensus proved stronger than the more difficult task of creating an emancipatory cultural politics with a universal purchase. Towards the end of the eighties or even earlier, now under the sway of academic 'postmodernism', these movements would eventually give way to the many expressions of what has become better known as 'identity politics', a politics

¹ Though for different reasons, this is in tune with other critics who have approached Orwell's fiction from more traditional standpoints, like Robert Lee and Stephen Ingle, who have also sustained that it is in Orwell's fiction rather than non-fiction that we are more likely to gain access to Orwell's politics (Lee, 1969: xii; Ingle, 2006: 23).

congenial with the incorporating promises of a 'capacious' liberalism, now in the form of multiculturalism.

The work on literature developed through the sixties and seventies (within the purview of cultural studies, especially cultural materialism, and largely under the influence of Pierre Macherey) continues to offer a type of analysis and a kit of critical tools that cannot be ignored or underestimated, given the fact that so many of its challenges remain unfulfilled. Macherey's latest writings on literature (written in a more philosophical vein) continue to profess the need to focus on the literary work, which continues to be a site where meanings (most importantly, unanticipated ones) are produced. Alain Badiou has taken this idea even further, by stating that literature is the place where things happen, an insight that I have come to realise not from reading Badiou, but from reading Forster's novels, and *A Room with a View* in particular.

My engagement with the work of these writers has, therefore, reinforced and expanded my own views on literature, politics, and their much-debated relationship. The novels I read and analyse, in other words, have been crucial in shaping my theoretical questions and in dictating their direction. It is not just that I use theory to analyse literature from a cultural studies point of view (a point of view that is far from self-evident), but that the literary works themselves offer the terrain for their own analysis and, at the same time, challenge the terms in which this analysis is to be carried out. This kind of priority granted to literature thus enacts the shift from culture to art, though not in the usual, traditional sense that would pit one against the other, confining literature to the mysterious, almost metaphysical sphere of 'creation'. On this point, Bourdieu's lessons on the literary field remain crucial. The objective is not to remove literature from its social embedding, but to recognise in the social the element of unpredictability ('improvisation' is one of the components of Macherey's theory of literary production), of dynamism and openness that the social also contains.

At first sight, this seems to be at odds with the centrality that culture has occupied in the project of cultural studies. This centrality needs to be put in context and understood as a response to the expanding sphere of action and growing relevance of culture in the specific socio-historical context of Britain in this period, as a late (and tendentially post-industrial) capitalist society. The same can be said of Forster's and Orwell's concern with culture,

which acquires in a novel like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* almost a totalising reach. I hope my work reflects the premise (that I have learned especially from Raymond Williams) that culture (and understandings of it) does not exist outside a concrete historical tissue of elements and relations – what Williams called a ‘formation’. Thus the set of relations that I analyse in Forster’s and Orwell’s novels – which I have divided, for analytical purposes, into three areas of topics, namely Englishness, imperialism and liberalism – are approached and reconstituted as part of one such formation. What must be avoided is the kind of sweeping generalisations and ahistorical extrapolations (such as to assume that everyone’s experience in the so-called developing world is the same – textual, post-industrial, postcolonial, post-essentialist, etc.) that too frequently haunt cultural and literary analysis, with far-reaching political consequences. What has emerged from my analysis is that the assumptions that underpin Forster’s and Orwell’s fictional worlds – which rest on a chain of binary oppositions such as public/ private; masculine/feminine; rational/ emotional; elite/ mass; producer/ consumer (one could add, politics/ literature) – cannot, indeed must not, be taken as universal, but as specific cultural constructs of a specific formation. I have identified two variations of this formation: the world of liberal capitalism (in Forster’s case) and of liberal-democratic capitalism (in Orwell’s). The differences between them are more of degree than kind, more to do with their specific emphases than actual ruptures. What interests me is how they interweave the experiences and artistic sensibilities of each author to create literary visions or stories that help to shape our ‘criteria of plausibility’ (to use Alan Sinfield’s term), whose boundaries, in many respects, continue to define our world, in 2007.

I start, in chapter one, with an overview of Forster and Orwell criticism, to concentrate on the construction and consolidation well into the seventies of Forster’s reputation as a liberal humanist, and its subsequent dismantling, following the revelation of this writer’s homosexuality and the publication of *Maurice*. In addition to gay studies, another challenge was taking shape under the aegis of postcolonial studies, which cast doubt on Forster’s almost legendary ‘friendship’ with the Indian sub-continent.² What interests me is the way these challenges continued to share much common ground with liberal-humanism. This can

² This kind of image is patent in K. Natwar-Singh’s *E. M. Forster: A Tribute* (1964), published to celebrate Forster’s eighty-fifth birthday, with contributions from Indian writers and friends such as Mulk Raj Anand, Narayana Menon, Raja Rao and Santha Rama Rau.

be seen in Robert K. Martin and George Piggford's 'queer' approach to Forster that rejects "an idealized portrait of Forster the liberal" (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 22), but goes on to endorse (via a reference to the threat of 'totalitarianism') 'a continuing liberalism' (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 3). It can be seen, too, albeit in a different form, in the reassessment of *A Passage to India* by postcolonial critics. Orwell touches on a similar set of questions, even if formulated in a slightly different manner. Even though it is no less strong than Forster's (in many respects, it is stronger), the allegiance of Orwell's work to liberal humanism has been mitigated by the political controversy in which his work was *intentionally* produced and in which it has been involved ever since. Orwell has been primarily read for his politics – and, what is more, for what Lionel Trilling famously called his 'politics of truth'. Biographical and psycho-biographical criticism has, therefore, dominated, even after the 'interruptions' by feminist and (to a less extent) postcolonial critics. Because his style is so interlocked with a given politics, it is not surprising that the most disruptive critical approaches should have been those which address his 'fictionality' (even of his non-fiction), what Raymond Williams called his 'mode'. This critical endeavour has only been possible through the development of more effective literary-critical tools, which sought to counter the tendency to reverentially take Orwell at his word (even if, less reverentially, to use it against him).

This concern with the social and political meaning of cultural forms (including literary ones) was at the root of the project of cultural studies as it first appeared in post-war Britain. I take stock of this tradition in chapter two, in an attempt to make sense of what has become an expanding, dynamic and variegated academic field. My focus falls on the distinction between two tendencies in cultural studies – what Adam Katz has called a critical cultural studies, in opposition to an appreciative or postmodernist cultural studies. I concentrate on the formation of British cultural studies, to include, drawing heavily on the work of Tom Steele, its origins in adult education. It is important to see this formation as a convergence of many influences and distinct projects, some of them antagonistic, rather than as one single project. Francis Mulhern's assessment of cultural studies, in *Culture/Metaculture*, which analyses the particular imprint left on it by its 'founding fathers' (Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and E. P. Thompson), while offering a wider theoretical view, has been particularly helpful on this point. I then turn to

the strained relationship between cultural studies and literature, which is discernible from its early days – when cultural studies emerged as a space of contestation within the dominant literary-critical tradition (especially, in Britain, Cambridge English) – and which continues in our days, when literature still arouses suspicion among many of cultural studies’ more enthusiastic supporters. In what is perhaps an infrequent (if not idiosyncratic) move I bring together the work of Raymond Williams, Alan Sinfield, Pierre Macherey, Pierre Bourdieu and Alan Badiou – the last three not practitioners of cultural studies, though Bourdieu and Macherey have influenced it in many important ways – to describe different projects that have succeeded in breaking away from, on the one hand, the aesthetic monopoly of literary criticism, and, on the other, purely sociological (context-based) approaches. The different accents that each of these authors brings to my discussion – literary, sociological and philosophical – produce many points of tension (which are internal to Bourdieu’s work, where they become particularly visible). I find these tensions salutary and a reminder that the challenges taken up by these authors – briefly, to view literary works, when read ‘against the grain’, as susceptible to yield new meanings and offer important insights on the world and ‘the real’ – remain with us.

Of this group, Alain Badiou is, no doubt, the odd one out, despite the fact that there is some affinity between many aspects of his theory of ‘inaesthetics’ and Macherey’s early and later writings on literature. Many of Badiou’s philosophical premises go against cultural studies (for instance, as far as identity is concerned), often to the point of hostility. Far from trying to make his theory amenable to cultural studies, which would be a violent, counter-productive and ultimately unsustainable act, I use it as a disturbing element, in the conviction that it can bring cultural studies a breath of fresh air (and hope) as it has done to my work.

My encounter with Badiou was an ‘encounter’ proper (as this philosopher has conceived it): it emerged from my reading of Forster’s work and proved extremely productive. Chapter three is largely a product of this encounter. In it, I look at the way Forster’s and Orwell’s novels participated in the construction of ‘Englishness’. Drawing especially on the influential work of Philip Dodd, Brian Doyle and Alun Hawkins (1986), I concentrate on three different, but related, strands of ‘Englishness’: its reliance on a series of cultural and social ‘Others’; its links to liberalism (especially in the form of ‘a capacious liberalism’);

its rootedness in capitalism (for which I draw on Ellen Meiksins Wood's argument). My reading of Forster's and Orwell's novels is built around the trope of the tourist or traveller: based on the stimulating analysis of James Buzard, I approach Forster's Italian novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*, as narratives which, from a position that is both internal and external (what Buzard refers to as 'internal distance') establish a complex, often ambiguous, relationship with tourism. What interests me, especially in the first novel, is how 'Englishness' is built in opposition to the Italian 'Other', viewed simultaneously as an object of incompleteness and excess. Although tourism is a privileged site for the projection of erotic fantasies, I eschew an analysis exclusively centred on sexuality, to foreground Forster's complicated treatment of tourism as a quest for the 'real', which I read in the light of Badiou's concept of 'event' (that is, as the yearning for something to happen) rather than authenticity (that is, as a matter of identity or 'being', in Badiou's terms), a distinction which I find crucial in *A Room with a View*. I then turn to Forster's and Orwell's social 'Others' – the low-middle-classes and the poor – to read *Howards End*, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming up for Air* for their constructions of Englishness from within, as travels (real and symbolic) into a pastoral England, and excursions (real and imaginary) down the social 'abyss' or across the 'terra incognita' of the poor and unemployed. I also consider how gender and homosexuality enter (or fail to enter) these constructions, and how the Left is conceived in these works as a political 'Other', and one that, furthermore, condenses in itself all others – as its associations with 'foreignness', femininity and (in Orwell's case) disreputable sexuality or 'indecent' (often equated with homosexuality) indicate. I finally take on the eighties and early nineties film adaptations of Forster's novels and the debate on 'heritage film' which ensued, especially on a first phase, very much around these films. Shifting the focus of analysis from the perceived central discrepancy which underpins the original argument – which posits that there is a tension in these films between the liberal narratives and the conservative-prone filmic modes – to the continuities between the films and the novels, I discuss some of the weaknesses of this argument, but also some of its less explored insights. Finally, I look at some of these films in more detail, to highlight, not only their shortcomings (mostly on account of their fidelity to the source, in the name of literary authority), but also the supplementary meanings that they also manage to produce.

I continue to draw meanings from the tourist trope, in chapter four, to analyse Forster's and Orwell's engagements with Empire and imperialism. What emerges, in relation to *A Passage to India*, is that, even though the two ladies that precipitate the action, Adela Quested and Mrs Moore, may be described as tourists, they cannot be reduced to that, in the same way that the colonial encounter – their 'passage to India' – cannot be reduced to a mere touristic experience. Forster's novel has been much-commended for its 'literary' qualities, normally on the basis of its elusiveness and indeterminacy. Its focal point, namely 'what happened in the caves', has inspired a wealth of readings – from liberal-humanist to feminist, psychoanalytical and postcolonial ones. While it is natural that these critical approaches should clash on some points (which does not prevent them from overlapping on many others), what makes the novel specially appealing is its treatment of the 'Other', in a way that locks the woman question and the colonial question in a double-bind – a double-bind, moreover, which tends to be reproduced in criticism. The main tendency in criticism has been to read the novel from an identity perspective – that is, as a book about the encounter with the 'Other', whereby the 'Other' stands for Indians, the East, the colonised, the feminine, or even, though less often, the homosexual, in relation to, respectively, the English, the West, the coloniser, the masculine and the heterosexual. Drawing, once more, on Badiou, I nevertheless distinguish this type of encounter from another, namely the encounter *as event*. I use this notion not only to analyse the central event (which the novel suggests may well be a non-event) but also to tackle other events in the novel that have remained absent or that have occupied a marginal, negligible place in most discussions. I bring these critical instruments to bear on Orwell's novel. Though lacking Forster's characteristic subtlety and depth, *Burmese Days* nevertheless produces an interesting set of unanticipated, supplementary meanings that a reading 'against the grain' can effectively activate. If *A Passage to India* is, in many respects, as critics have noted, Forster's reluctant, ambiguous, but also final statement of commitment to liberalism (a position represented in the novel by Fielding), *Burmese Days* brings to the surface many of liberalism's limitations, most notably the racism that underpins its cultural politics, functioning as an external limit that may be softened or circumvented, which may lie dormant, but that is always there. I use David Lean's film adaptation of *A Passage to India* to look at the ways in which the ideological strands that we find in Forster's and Orwell's

colonial fiction, written in the twenties and thirties, respectively, are again taken up and rearticulated in the eighties, to produce a film that establishes interesting links with the literary source, but also a wealth of new meanings, which cannot be dissociated from its socio-historical context of production and, albeit in a refracted way, its inbuilt politics.

The question of the event again dominates my last chapter. I turn to it in relation, firstly, to Forster's difficulties in writing and ultimate creative sterility, secondly, to his homosexuality and the writing of *Maurice*; and thirdly, to Orwell's (post)political vision of 'totalitarianism'. I start by analysing *Arctic Summer*, Forster's unfinished novel, to connect its failure, following the author's own explanation, to the inability to find an event. I also connect it to the novel's lack of truthfulness, which was relapsing into the vision of *Howards End*, rather than moving beyond its limits and limitations. The two aspects were resolved in *Maurice*. What had failed to happen in *Arctic Summer* (homosexual love) is finally allowed to happen, in a way that produces a vision of Englishness that has little to do with the one presented in *Howards End*. *Maurice* has been much criticised for its happy ending, but its treatment of truth, on which the distinction between real and unreal is predicated, as well as its deployment of realism and fantasy, have been less frequently and adequately attended to. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, on the other hand, could be described as the novel *par excellence* where nothing happens. One of its major features, its 'internal coherence', which critics have attributed to its political argument, 'totalitarianism', can be more productively regarded as an effect of this generalised condition of stagnancy, which reflects Orwell's own attitude towards fiction. Totalitarianism is, in many respects, the mirror image of liberalism. It is the intensification, on the level of ideology, of its beliefs (such as the primacy of private life and the individual) and the materialisation – to caricatural extremes – of its fears. In my analysis, I concentrate on the novel's focus on the past (which I treat as an obsession), and to which a certain idea of 'humanity' (one derived from a number of fixed 'values') becomes a site of permanent dispute between the protagonist and Big Brother's Party. I examine this dispute in the light of the novel's troubled oscillations between real and unreal and of the place that truth occupies (and the meanings it assumes) in the novel (parallels with *Maurice* are drawn). Finally, I turn to the novel's absent centre, capitalism, to discuss its vestigial and more than vestigial significance to the novel's political vision.

Throughout my work I reject the idea that presents Orwell as ‘a special case’, which even critics as perceptive and often critical as Raymond Williams and Alok Rai have insisted upon (cf. Rai, 1988: 4; Williams, 1961: 276). My treatment of Orwell alongside Forster – an author that shares so much with him, while displaying so many remarkable differences – has facilitated my initial determination to treat him as *not* a special case. As Brian Doyle and Peter Widdowson have put it, if there is anything we owe to literature, it ought to be a ‘healthy disrespect’ (Widdowson, 1999: x). Bearing this in mind, we can then approach literature not (or not only) for its lessons, but (also) for its possibilities – for constituting, as Pierre Macherey has put it, a ‘second reality’. Badiou has stressed this creative aspect. For him, literature, and art in general, is “simultaneously indeterminate and complete”, “occupying the gaps of available encyclopaedias” (Badiou, 2007: 17). In saying what cannot be said in any other ways, it opens up new spaces in thinking and living in the world. This, as I hope my work will demonstrate, cannot but be a valuable addition to the study of literature, understood, as I understand it, as part of a veritable cultural politics, in the tradition of the best that cultural studies has to offer.

Review of Forster and Orwell Studies

1.1. Forster Studies

E. M. Forster's reputation rests largely on the fictional work he published between 1905 and 1924, a period in which *Howards End* (1910) stood out from among his former novels to attain literary (and commercial) success, which *A Passage to India* (1924) later confirmed. The first wave of Forster criticism, therefore, grew slowly from the reviews of his novels to more general appreciations, often by the hand of friends and literary colleagues (Gardner, 1973: 6). Writing to an American audience, in December 1927, I. A. Richards noted Forster's 'cult status' in 1920s England (Richards, 1966: 16), and by 1928 he enjoyed an 'established reputation' (Gardner, 1973: 26).

Forster's connections with Bloomsbury and some of the exclusive cultural and literary milieus of turn-of-the-century London (such as Lady Ottoline Morrell's circle, to which authors like D.H Lawrence and others gravitated – cf. Furbank, 1978: 5) were crucial in this development. One of the first long essays on him was written by Virginia Woolf (November 1927). The first critical book, however, did not appear until the end of the next decade (Macaulay, 1938), which prompted a review by another prominent critic, F.R. Leavis, in *Scrutiny* (1938). American criticism took more time to respond.¹ I. A. Richards' essay appeared in the wake of the publication of *A Passage to India*, but it was Lionel Trilling's book, the first serious lengthy study of Forster (published in 1943, 1944, in England), which finally initiated what has been called a 'Forster revival' (Gardner, 1973: xviii), which placed American criticism at the head of Forster studies for almost two decades.²

Despite the general agreement that Forster was an accomplished novelist, early criticism had reticence in attributing to him the status of a 'master'. Among the problems or

¹ In the twenties Forster was little known in America (Bradbury, 1966: 1). His fiction only started to be published there after 1911 (with *Howards End*, reissued in 1921), and in a different sequence from that of their original publication (Gardner, 1973: xviii). In America, the order of appearance of his books was as follows: *A Room with a View* (1911); *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1920); *The Longest Journey* (1922), *The Celestial Omnibus* (1923); *A Passage to India* (1924). This means, as Gardner points out, that American critics often lacked "the sense of perspective available to English critics" (Gardner: 1973: 18).

² In the *Critical Heritage*, Philip Gardner noted that, of the fourteen book-length studies published between 1957 and 1970, eight were American and four were English (Gardner, 1973: 34).

'weaknesses' most often noted was Forster's 'elusiveness' (cf. Gardner, 1973: 12). For Virginia Woolf, there was "something baffling and evasive in the very nature of his gifts" (Woolf, 1973a: 319); after stressing his 'oddness', I. A. Richards called him "on the whole the most puzzling figure in contemporary English letters" (Richards, 1966: 15); F. R. Leavis referred to "the oddly limited and uncertain quality of his distinction", even if he conceded that it was a "real and very fine distinction" (Leavis, 1966: 34). Problems of verisimilitude were also noted: for I. A. Richards, Forster sometimes disregarded 'vivisimilitude' (Richards, 1966: 16); while others decried the over-use of coincidence (Gardner, 1973: 13). Another recurrent problem was the discrepancy in his novels between realism and fantasy

Commenting on *The Longest Journey*, Virginia Woolf confessed her sense of 'bafflement' and 'puzzlement' before the novel's 'contrast between poetry and realism' (Woolf, 1973a: 321). Like Jane Austen, Forster possesses a firm grasp of 'the social comedy' (Woolf, 1973a: 321); unlike her, however, he is also endowed with "the impulses of a poet" (Woolf, 1973a: 322). The novel has many gifts, but together they make up "a difficult family" – what Woolf calls, echoing Richards' 'oddness', "his queer and in some ways contradictory assortment of gifts" (Woolf, 1973a: 325), in which: "satire and sympathy; fantasy and fact; poetry and prim moral sense" converge. The overall effect is the awkward impression of "contradictory currents that run counter to each other" (Woolf, 1973a: 322). For Woolf, the novel lacks "the authority of a masterpiece", because it lacks "the power of combination – the single vision" (Woolf, 1973a: 322). Forster's 'combination of realism and mysticism' in his novels fails on account of his recourse to symbolism – reality (often in a 'crude' way) is made into a symbol, Woolf concludes, and we end up 'doubting both things – the real and the symbolical: Mrs. Moore, the nice old lady, and Mrs. Moore, the sibyl!' (Woolf, 1973a: 324).

There are two other faults, which emerge in respect to *Howards End*: lack of 'force' and lack of seriousness. The novel is praised for its character rendition, plot and 'atmosphere' (Woolf, 1973a: 326). Woolf notes the "lack of 'cohesion' and 'fusion' of its different elements, but focuses on their effects to conclude: first, "the book as a whole lacks force" (Woolf, 1973a: 325); second, it is not serious enough (a criticism already levelled against *The Longest Journey* – Woolf, 1973a: 321). Lack of 'seriousness' is again taken up and developed in Woolf's review of *Aspects of the Novel* – Forster's failure 'to deliver' is largely due to his attitude (of elusiveness and

hesitation) towards fiction. Unlike the great Russian authors, Woolf contends, Forster does not ‘take fiction (or, for that matter, literature) seriously’ (Woolf, 1973b: 335), in that confirming a vaster trend in English letters which sees critics and writers lacking severity and boldness, and prevents the novel from being ‘a work of art’ (Woolf, 1973b: 335). Forster’s ultimate failure is, therefore, the failure to make his novels into works of art.

The clash between ‘realism’ and ‘mysticism’ was noted by other critics. In America, in line with more metaphysical academic and literary traditions, the second element would, more often than not, be favoured. I. A. Richards’ essay opens with the contrast between Forster’s prose – “the clearest and simplest possible” and the ‘obscurity’ regarding “his ultimate intention, his philosophical goal” (Richards, 1966: 15). Richards highlights Forster’s critique of conventions (patent in his critical rendition of all figures of authority – Richards, 1966: 18), to conclude that his work was more likely to appeal to young readers. He discerns in Forster’s work a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the modern world – its ‘automatism’, ‘official action’, ‘insincerity’, ‘organization’, and ‘the non-spontaneous’ (Richards, 1966: 18). However, this is understood as Forster’s dissatisfaction with “human existence as he sees it”, and related to his “fiercely critical sense of values” (Richards, 1966: 17). The element of social satire is perceived in moral terms: for this critic, the characters of the early novels “are less to be regarded as social studies than as embodiments of moral forces” and *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is declared to be “far nearer in spirit to a mystery play than to a comedy of manners” (Richards, 1966: 16). In *Howards End*, however, the social element becomes more pervasive, and disturbingly so. Richards identifies a ‘double purpose’ in the novel, i.e. a conflict of aims, which he deems responsible for its weaknesses: on the one hand, “the development of the half mystical, and inevitably vague, survival theme” (which *Howards End*, the house, stands for) and, on the other hand, “the presentation of a sociological thesis, a quite definite piece of observation of great interest and importance concerning the relations of certain prominent classes in Modern England” (Richards, 1966: 19). The faulty passages are the result of the “mixing of the two aims of the book” (Richards, 1966: 19).

Some of these points emerge again (albeit in a different way and for different purposes) in F. R. Leavis’s review of Rose Macaulay’s book. Leavis’s overall sympathy (he would change his mind to the extent of disowning this essay – Gardner, 1973: 38, n23) is clouded by two major aspects: first, Forster lacks vitality; second (related to the first),

he lacks a sense of purpose or 'intention' – the 'poise' of his art "has something equivocal about it" (Leavis, 1966: 44). Leavis's starting point is also the comedy/ poetry distinction (which he nevertheless qualifies as superficial): he recognises that Forster is "a born novelist" in regard to the former, but "almost unbelievable crude and weak" in regard to the latter (Leavis, 1966: 34). He, nevertheless, urges us to resist 'lumping together' the four pre-war novels to pit them against the short stories: in fact, much of what we find in the stories, he argues, is to be found in the novels; in other words: Italy "represents the same bent of interest as Pan" (Leavis, 1966: 35). It is this 'bent of interest' which catches this critic's attention. He links it with Forster's "radical dissatisfaction with civilization" (Leavis, 1966: 35), which suggests parallels with D.H. Lawrence. Forster is measured against Lawrence and Henry James and found wanting: measured against James (the ultimate measure of 'art'), his work appears to be "only too unmistakably minor" (Leavis, 1966: 36); measured against Lawrence (Leavis's supreme measure), it lacks vitality.³ This last aspect is pervasive in the essay and appears to be decisive. Thus, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, considered as the most successful of the pre-war novels, Forster is attributed a "spinsterly poise" (an allusion to Jane Austen) (Leavis, 1966: 35). This is brought up again in connection with *A Room with a View*, which, though valued as charming and original, is charged with "a curious spinsterish inadequacy in the immediate presentation of love" (Leavis, 1966: 35). The Lucy-Cecil-George trio is "not realized" (Leavis, 1966: 36). Similarly, in *Howards End*, "the business of Margaret and Henry Wilcox is essentially as unrealized as the business of Helen and the insurance clerk, Leonard Bast" (Leavis, 1966: 41). Whereas Henry James's "knowledge of passion is profound" (Leavis, 1966: 36), Forster's is more than deficient: in *The Longest Journey*, the scenes involving the protagonist and his half-brother, outlining what Leavis calls "a Lady-Chatterley-and-the-keeper situation" (Leavis, 1966: 38), appear 'unreal' (Leavis, 1966: 40). Forster is "disconcertingly inexperienced" (Leavis, 1966: 39) and 'the victim' of 'disabling immaturities' (Leavis, 1966: 40). His 'inexperience' (so far seemingly of a sexual nature) is extended to class in the discussion of *Howards End*: unlike Richards, who praised "the presentation of Leonard Bast, in its economy and completeness and its adequacy to the context" (Richards, 1966: 20), Leavis is not convinced by this character (or by that of Jacky), whom he describes as "a mere external grasping at something that lies outside the

³ Lawrence himself had expressed "a feeling that Forster dealt only in half-measures" (Gardner, 1973: 17). Frieda praised *Howards End*, but urged Forster to 'go further' (Furbank, 1978: 8).

author's first-hand experience" (Leavis, 1966: 41). He also regrets the novel's 'sentimental' close and the fact that it is "too general and vague" (Leavis, 1966: 42). *A Passage to India* is deemed more successful: because of its theme and setting (India), the 'tone and mood' which Leavis had found wanting in the previous novels is now regarded as acceptable (Leavis, 1966: 43). There still is, however, "something unsatisfactory in the novelist's art, a curious lack of grasp" (Leavis, 1966: 43), which makes this critic regret (echoing Virginia Woolf) that Forster should be "so little certain just how serious he is" (Leavis, 1966: 45). Despite these objections, Leavis ends up by recognising in Forster a 'representative' of 'liberal culture', on which score he deserves "a lasting place in English Literature" (Leavis, 1966: 46). The sum total of weaknesses, i.e. Forster's "general lack of vitality" (Leavis, 1966: 46), are blamed on his liaison with Bloomsbury – even if Leavis cannot but grant that Bloomsbury is "the indispensable transmitter of something that humanity cannot afford to lose" (Leavis, 1966: 47).

Forster's liberalism has indeed, from early on, been one of the cornerstones of his criticism. Reviewing *A Passage to India*, which he regards as 'an event', J. B. Priestley hailed Forster's 'exquisite sanity' and 'civilising quality' (Priestley, 1973: 228), an idea re-emphasised by calling him "the most civilised writer we have" and *A Passage to India* "a genuine civilised narrative" (Priestley, 1973: 228). But it was no doubt Lionel Trilling's study that consolidated this image, on which the 'Forster revival' was largely built. Between 1945, which marked the beginning of serious critical attention (Bradbury, 1966: 1), and Forster's death in 1970, critics drew heavily on his liberal values. As Philip Gardner concluded, Forster's reputation owes a lot to his standing as "a living symbol of liberal values" (Gardner, 1973: xvii), which contributed to "the widespread worship" of him in his later years (Gardner, 1973: xvii). However, this was also accompanied by a permanent feeling of uncertainty over his stature as a writer, which could be heard as late as 1966 (Gardner, 1973: 35). Malcom Bradbury called it "the argument about Forster's greatness" (Bradbury, 1966: 5). By the time of Forster's death, Gardner points out, "books about him not only existed in sufficient volume as to imply his likely permanence in literary history, they also gave the impression of defining the various gifts which entitled him to that permanence" Gardner, 1973: 35).

The public disclosure of Forster's homosexuality, together with the posthumous publication of *Maurice* (1971) and *The Life to Come* (1972), was to change this perception: Gardner speaks of "a tremor strong enough at least to shake out some of [the] bricks" of "the laboriously erected edifice of Forster criticism" (Gardner, 1973:

35). There were misgivings concerning the effect the new work, with its explicit treatment of homosexuality, would have on Forster's reputation, which Cyril Connolly sardonically summed up as "the Sacred Maiden Aunt of English Letters, keeper of the Bloomsbury Conscience" (Connolly, 1973: 459). *Maurice* received, in general, a bad press. Most reviewers recognised it would have some kind of impact on 'the general view of Forster's work' (Gardner, 1973: 35). Colin Wilson saw in it 'the key' to the other novels and to Forster's silence after 1924 (Wilson, 1973: 453). Forster's homosexuality (which Wilson straightforwardly associated with his relationship with his mother) is invoked to justify the interruption of *Arctic Summer*. The novel failed because it tried to tell the story of the homosexual love between an intellectual and a soldier: Forster "wanted to get them into bed together, but he wasn't allowed to" (Wilson, 1973: 455). Similarly, the 'problem' of *A Passage to India* lies in the fact that Aziz and Fielding's relationship "ought to be homosexual; but this was out of the question" (Wilson, 1973: 455). George Steiner expressed a similar view: *Maurice* "forces one to rethink his achievement as a whole" (Steiner, 1973: 480). Like Wilson, he makes a causal link between Forster's homosexuality and his literary sterility (Steiner, 1973: 480-481). *A Passage to India* is now read in the light of *Maurice*, with Fielding and Aziz being called "'surrogates' for Maurice and Alec" (Steiner, 1973: 481). Though more cautiously, declaring that it was 'too early' to draw conclusions concerning either the place of the novel in the Forster canon or its impact on it (Gardner, 1973: 36), Gardner was equally inclined to treat Forster's homosexuality as 'the missing clue'. He turns to it to find an explanation for Forster's hostility towards school teachers, doctors and clergyman; his opposition to censorship and the defence of Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel; his 'cherishing' of personal freedom; and his failure to "render passion between man and woman" (Gardner, 1973: 36-37).

In the end, Forster's homosexuality shadows Forster's overall achievement, as it undermines his liberal humanism. Steiner's reasoning is worth quoting at length:

At the same time, it would be silly to deny that the very centrality of *Maurice* in Forster's private life and work (*A Passage to India* was his last novel and last book of any real stature) may narrow or specialize the sum of his achievement. In the light of an intensely spiritualized yet nervous and partly embittered homosexuality, a number of Forster's most famous dicta – it is better to betray one's country than a friend, 'only connect' – take on a more restricted, shriller ambience. His 'two cheers for democracy' and lifelong defense of the rights of private conduct lose nothing of their humane fineness, but we cannot help being aware henceforth of the personal hurt from which they derive. (Steiner, 1973: 481-482)

Because he is now (as a homosexual) *less* representative of the liberal tradition, Forster therefore becomes “less representative of modern English literature”, to the point of being reduced to “a minor master who produced one major novel” (Steiner, 1973: 482). Henceforth his work increasingly needs to be defended in terms of ‘literary value’ (Gardner, 1973: 39, n34), which are placed above (and in spite of) some of the ‘embarrassing’ facts of his life.

The publication of Forster’s biography (1977-1978) accentuated this kind of difficulty, as can be attested in the two compilations of essays published around the time of Forster’s centenary, G. K. Das and John Beer’s *E. M. Forster: A Human Exploration* (1979) and Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin’s *E. M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations* (1982),⁴ which represent the peak in Forster studies of liberal-humanist criticism, and, to some extent, foreshadow the end of its supremacy. Issued by Macmillan, the two books are very similar, featuring many common contributors, such as Wilfred Stone, Judith Scherer Herz and Frederick P. W. McDowell, P. N. Furbank, S. P. Rosenbaum, John Beer, John Colmer, V. A. Shahane and G. K. Das, recognised Forsterian authorities on both sides of the Atlantic. In spite of the differences between the English and American critical scenes, they adhere to a similar understanding of literary criticism: the essays gathered by Das and Beer range from literary history and context (understood as “the cultural conditions of his time”) to studies of influence (Beer, 1979: 6). Biographical approaches represent another strand, but are grounded in a liberal-humanist perspective, which ultimately values the ‘universal’ over the ‘particular’ (cf. Beer, 1979: 3) and places the emphasis on mythological and philosophical aspects (Beer, 1979: 6). In the Canadian volume, the essays cover areas from biography, to genre, literary influence and context. Herz refers the latter to Forster’s “contemporary critical and philosophic contexts”, i.e. to what she also calls “intellectual contexts” (Herz, 1982: 8). Accordingly, an essay reads *Maurice* “in terms of its early twentieth-century social and intellectual milieu” (Herz, 1982: 9); whereas *A Passage to India* “is placed in a succession of frames – the mythological, the philosophical, the biographical” (Herz, 1982: 9). They all state (and reinstate) Forster’s achievement as a novelist: Herz presents the volume as a token of “the ultimate stability

⁴ The latter book assembles essays from the centenary conference which took place at Concordia University, Montreal, in May 1979.

of Forster's reputation" (Herz, 1982: 2), and McDowell authoritatively declares that "his eminence as a novelist remains unassailed" (McDowell: 1982, 311).⁵

And yet, a sense of uneasiness also runs through these books. The appearance of Furbank's biography is regarded with mixed feelings. McDowell describes it as "the single most important and comprehensive book on Forster in recent years", and calls it "definitive and magnificent" (McDowell: 1982, 312), but he goes on to add, "in a sense, *somewhat difficult to define*, it also diminishes him" (McDowell: 1982, 312, my emphasis). In the end, he praises Forster the novelist *despite* the biographical revelations and the posthumous short stories, by invoking his liberal qualities:

For me Forster matters a great deal as the man who was capable, in the dark days of 1940, of utterances like the following: 'Our chief job is to enjoy ourselves and not to lose heart, and to spread culture not because we love our fellow men, but because certain things seem to us unique and priceless, and as it were, push us out into the world on their service.' The sense of *something uniquely human that is too precious to be lost* – the conveying of this in his fiction and non-fiction is the secret, I think, of his continual appeal to the intellectual and to the general reader alike. It is the steel of Forster's temperament, not the charm, that finally counts. (McDowell, 1982: 328-329, my emphasis)

In her introduction, echoing McDowell's 'sense of something uniquely human that is too precious to be lost', Herz also highlights in the majority of the essays included in the book "the attempt to locate *that which will endure* as fashions change, both fashions of fiction and fashions of belief" (Herz, 1982: 7-8, my emphasis). Acknowledging the need to overcome 'the tendency to separate the man and his writing' (Herz, 1982: 2), she stresses Forster's qualities as a novelist and the unity of his work (Herz, 1982: 2). It is the novels which secure Forster's 'unity' – "the novelist and the humanist are a single person" (Herz, 1982: 7) – and reaffirm his liberal reputation: "we are willing to believe what Forster says as an essayist because we have learned to trust him so implicitly in his fiction" (Herz, 1982: 3). Herz is reacting against what she considers to be a descent in "a biographically based belittling of his accomplishments", which threatens to 'blur' 'his achievement as a novelist' (Herz, 1982: 3). The escape route from such damaging incursions is found in Forster's novels, which justify "a continued and excited reading" (Herz, 1982: 1). In them, this critic finds a quality of 'intelligence', linked to Forster's 'comic voice', which is described as "no *parti pris*" (Herz, 1982: 4), i.e. one which

⁵ For an overview of this tradition, see McDowell's reviews in these volumes (McDowell, 1979; 1982).

refuses to take sides, but nevertheless offers moral judgment: “that finely tuned laughter which is so probing a tool of moral analysis (Herz, 1982: 7).

As I mentioned above, a degree of anxiety also runs through these two books, which are, in every other sense, frank tributes to Forster. Herz alludes to the present as “a period in which Forster’s somewhat unstable reputation will be fixed” (Herz, 1982: 7) and McDowell grants that he “will undoubtedly occupy a place somewhat less august in the annals of contemporary literature than he did in the years 1945 to 1970” (McDowell: 1982, 311). In the first of these volumes, John Beer voices similar anxieties. He decries the fact that ‘the new array of knowledge’ had misled many critics to “treat much of his fiction as displaced accounts of homosexual relationships” (Beer, 1979: 3). Beer prefers to stress the universality of Forster to the point of contending that he “was drawn to those aspects of love which were common to all human relationships, heterosexual or homosexual” (Beer, 1979: 3). Forster’s homosexuality, he concedes, “gave him an ‘outsider’s’ view of things” (Beer, 1979: 3), endowing him with ‘an unusual vantage-point’ (Beer, 1979: 3). Herein lays his ‘elusiveness’ – “a characteristic not only of his personal life but of his presence in the novels” (Beer, 1979: 3), which Beer relates to Forster’s ‘ironies’ (Beer, 1979: 2) and the difficulty in ‘aligning him with any preceding tradition’ (Beer, 1979: 3). But, more importantly, he grounds this ‘elusiveness’ in a political stance, i.e. in the avoidance of extremes, which enabled Forster to resist the attraction of ‘totalitarian causes’, remain ‘politically alert and independent’ (Beer, 1979: 6) and come through a difficult historical period “with an unusually clear reputation” (Beer, 1979: 5):

He touched at times the astringent clericalism of Eliot, the fluid translucency of Virginia Woolf, the sardonic vitalism of D. H. Lawrence, but refused to take them to so extreme a form (and was criticized by each writer in turn for failing to do so). And it is in his drawing back from such extreme positions, in art as in politics, that the nature of his own achievement again becomes clearer. (Beer, 1979: 10)

In other words, Forster’s liberalism (here carefully opposed to ‘totalitarianism’ whether of ‘left or right’ – Beer, 1979: 5) is that which critics fall upon when other (literary) guarantees no longer suffice. This insufficiency was starting to be perceived with urgency, especially in England. Contrary to George Steiner’s pronouncements, Forster’s work was beginning to attract *more*, not less, attention, albeit in a context of growing challenge to traditional literary criticism. ‘Elusiveness’, one of the major problems of

Forster's work, was now being pushed to the fore, to be looked at in a more positive light. The relationship between Forster's novels and the 'outside world' was also proving difficult to ignore. The publication of *Maurice* coincided with the rise of the gay liberation movement, in the wake of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which, in England, decriminalised homosexuality between consenting adults (as before 1885). Beer's contention, quoted above, that Forster was interested in "those aspects of love which were common to all human relationships, heterosexual or homosexual" failed to convince the gay readers who now turned to it precisely for its homosexual theme.

As Robert K. Martin and George Piggford have demonstrated, Forster's posthumous publications met with an "overwhelmingly homophobic response" (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 18), which was already present, in a veiled form, in early criticism.⁶ Bradbury's "ambiguities within Forster" (Bradbury, 1966: 13), from which he had derived a "sense of disquiet about his work" (Bradbury, 1966: 13-14), is suggestive of his homosexuality, as is the 'disquiet' that Furbank's biography provoked in many critics.⁷ Even Jeffrey Meyers' *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930* (1977), which announces itself as 'neutral', failed to avoid condemnation as one of the most hostile and homophobic of studies to have dealt with this topic (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 19). In the introduction, Meyers addresses "the problem of the critic who must find appropriate words to describe and analyse homosexual art" (Meyers, 1977: 2). As a solution, he claims to have emptied words like "invert, pederast and perverse" (which he uses throughout the book) of its negative connotations and 'moral judgment', and adheres to a neutral standpoint: "I have no desire to praise or condemn homosexuality" (Meyers, 1977: 2). This critic's sympathy, furthermore, falls on the work of art (Meyers, 1977: 2). His major contention is that homosexual writers have been able to attain great artistic accomplishment because of their 'clandestine' condition, which has forced them to resort to "a language of reticence and evasion, obliqueness and indirection, to convey

⁶ F. R. Leavis is a case in point (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 15-16). Indeed, Leavis's insistence on Forster's 'immaturity' and 'lack of experience', which he connects to the failure to depict ('realize') scenes of a sexual nature (Leavis, 1966: 36), suggests this reading. Forster's secret was known in restricted circles, Bloomsbury, no doubt. Virginia Woolf's critiques at many points carry sexual connotations: "the strength of his blow is dissipated" (Woolf, 1973a: 325); "we want to make Mr. Forster stand and deliver", and 'grasp' fiction' (previously described as 'a Lady in difficulties') 'firmly' and 'define her severely' (Woolf, 1973a: 333).

⁷ McDowell's difficulty in defining why the biography 'diminishes' Forster is preceded by his passing comment that "his socializing among London lower-class men at times seems faintly disreputable" (McDowell, 1982: 312; furthermore, his closing sentence, quoted above, in which he values 'the steel' in Forster's temperament, over his 'charm', may also be read in this light – i.e. he values those aspects in line with his 'manly' liberalism over those more readily associated with his 'effete' homosexuality (McDowell, 1982: 329).

their theme” (Meyers, 1977: 1). There is, therefore, a straightforward identification (and perhaps reification) of these “cautious and covert qualities” with “a specifically homosexual tone, sensibility, vision or mode of apprehension” (Meyers, 1977: 1). It follows that the liberation of the homosexual artist cannot but be won at the expense of his art, an assumption which later works by homosexual writers (bordering on pornography) seem to confirm: “the emancipation of the homosexual has led, paradoxically, to the decline of his art” (Meyers, 1977: 3). More paradoxically still, work by a homosexual artist on heterosexual love is more likely to be ‘art’ than work that explicitly addresses homosexuality. This is clearly Forster’s case, whose early novels – because they include “the disguised homosexual theme” – are deemed superior to his posthumous work, in which he overtly tries to “glorify homosexual love” (Meyers, 1977: 16).⁸ Meyers thus builds his analysis of Forster’s novels on the “recurrent pattern of latent homosexual relationships” (Meyers, 1977: 90), on which the artistic success of the early novels ultimately hinges. Not surprisingly, he is severe on *Maurice* and (even more so) on the short stories. The novel not only succumbs to sentimentality and escapism, but its belated appearance has shorn it of “all its moral and social significance” (Meyers, 1977: 99). Meyers criticises Forster’s inclination for interracial and inter-class relationships for their underlying sadism and ‘condescending and patronising’ attitudes to social ‘inferiors’ (Meyers, 1977: 108). Forster’s own involvement with working-class youths is condemned: “like Maurice, he was unable to establish sexual relations with men of his own class” (Meyers, 1977: 107). Finally, because they were “pornographic in intent” – they were written, Forster pointed out, “not to express myself but to excite myself” (cit. Meyers, 1977: 110) – the short stories are readily dismissed as “better as therapy than as art” (Meyers, 1977: 113). They fail to become literature because they are “rather trivial and even indecent when compared to *The Immoralist*, *Death in Venice* and *Cities of the Plain*, where the homosexual theme transcends the purely personal and is transfigured into a literary masterpiece” (Meyers, 1977: 113).

It was against this deference of the homosexual-as-‘particular’ to the literary-as-universal that many gay critics reacted. In America, *Maurice* was greeted by the gay liberation movement of the seventies, “which sought a language of freedom that it

⁸ Meyers distinguishes this use of ‘homosexuality in disguise’ from the use of heterosexual love as a disguise of homosexuality, which he considers to be absent from Forster’s novels (Meyers, 1977: 108).

believed it could find in Forster's work" (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 18).⁹ The critical response in England was, however, less enthusiastic. In a pamphlet of the Gay Liberation Front, Andrew Hodges and David Hutter give Forster as an example of 'self-oppression' and 'dishonesty'. Forster is blamed for not having the courage to 'come out' and publish *Maurice* during his lifetime. He preferred to cling to his "privileged status as the Grand Old (heterosexual) Man of English Letters" (Hodges and Hutter, 1974: 20) than contribute positively to the gay cause. During the public debate over the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report, Forster chose to remain silent, and, these authors claim, "it is possible that so prestigious a figure would have had influence in bringing forward homosexual law reform" (Hodges and Hutter, 1974: 20). Forster is therefore called a 'traitor' (Hodges and Hutter, 1974: 21) and awarded the title of "Closet Queen of the Century" (Hodges and Hutter, 1974: 20).¹⁰

As the seventies proceeded, Forster's 'liberal honesty' was being called into question on yet another front – that of his much-noted, and allegedly influential, anti-imperialism. Since its publication, *A Passage to India* had been received as an attack on the British presence in India. Peter Burra's famous essay (1934), which since 1942 has become the 'Introduction' to the Everyman Edition of the novel, called it "a book which no student of the Indian question can disregard" (Burra: 1989: 321). But the dominant strand of literary criticism had largely disregarded this aspect: John Beer, for example, claimed that the novel was "much more" than "a searching look at the phenomenon of the British in India" and stressed its universal quality (Beer, 1979: 4). Forster's 'quest' – his 'human exploration' – is considered by this critic in 'metaphysical' and religious terms – "while it could not realize itself in allegiance to a particular religion, it could honour each religion in turn" (Beer, 1979: 9). These and related aspects were beginning to appear uncomfortable to some readers, the more so as the notion of universality often betrayed a specific 'content' (in Beer's case, that of Christianity, or a version of it, which Beer concedes had gone 'deeper than Forster himself perhaps realised' – Beer, 1979: 9). In his 1982 review, McDowell noted, "the adulatory tone and the tendency, once noteworthy among his Indian disciples, to regard him as a saint have virtually

⁹ An example is Claude Summers' *E. M. Forster* (1983), which these authors describe as "representative of much gay-affirmative criticism of the 1970s" (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 18). See Summers' entry on E. M. Forster at the 'glbtq' website: http://www.glbtq.com/literature/forster_em.html (last accessed 25 November 2007).

¹⁰ Martin and Piggford have criticised this position not only for being 'class-biased' but also for underestimating the criminal and social stigma of homosexuality at Forster's time (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 21).

disappeared” (McDowell: 1982, 312). Commenting on the appearance of G. K. Das’ book, *E.M. Forster’s India* (1977), he went on to regret its overemphasis on history and social context, in detriment of the novel’s ‘religious dimensions’ (McDowell, 1982: 316).

Indeed, *E.M. Forster’s India* was one of the first lengthy studies to take an interest in the documentary aspects of *A Passage to India*. Das claimed that the novel had sprung out of “Forster’s realism, and a totally serious concern for history and fact” (Das 1977: xvii), his goal being to establish how important and ongoing an interest India had been in Forster’s life. Drawing on a range of personal correspondence, reviews and diaries – to the point of making the novel appear, in Harish Trivedi’s sardonic comment, “a subtle and elaborate *roman à clef*” (Trivedi 1995: 156) – Das contends that Forster’s picture of both British and Princely India reflects with some accuracy the political situation of the time. From the reforms of 1919, which he was ‘sceptical’ about (Das 1977: 22), to Gandhi’s Non-cooperation movement, which he sympathised with (Das 1977: 46), Forster’s engagement with India was deeper and more perceptive, this critic argues, than normally assumed. Thus, events such as the Amritsar massacre and the Khilafat movement are cited as having shaped *A Passage to India* (Das 1977: 47; 55), even if in very indirect, oblique ways.¹¹ Forster’s critique of the major imperialist doctrines (such as imperial trusteeship, utilitarianism, ‘Platonic’ elitism and Evangelicalism) is also highlighted (Das 1977: 24-25), together with his belief in a ‘democratic Empire’, which this critic regards as a great improvement on the Liberal brand of imperialism (Das 1977: 41-42) and compares to Gandhi’s own ideal of India (Das 1977: 45).

And yet, in spite of making the social and political setting of the novel the centre of his analysis, this critic’s overall position is, in the end, not substantially different from the ones we find in more overtly aesthetic-orientated interpretations. Das accepts that Forster’s greatest concern was the individual and the social, rather than the political (Das 1977: 43) or, as he puts it, to “[look] at India and Indians, as such, independently

¹¹ Das associates Forster’s awareness of the Khilafat movement to Aziz’s pan-Islamic feeling (Das 1977: 60), and the arrest of Aziz with the arrests that took place during the period of Non-cooperation movement; as he points out, “In 1921-2 political arrests and imprisonments were the order of the day” (Das 1977: 64).

of the political context”, hence his conclusion that “the novel’s outlook is on the future”, not on the imperial past (Das 1977: 75).¹²

E.M. Forster’s India was still firmly embedded in the mimetic or ‘realist’ tradition, which was beginning to come under attack from a different perspective. An important turning point was the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Said’s thesis that the imperialist ventures of the Europeans had been accompanied and reinforced by interventions at the level of representation (a thesis which drew on Foucault’s power and knowledge equation) encouraged a new wave of emerging critics¹³ to look at Forster’s novel as an instance of this kind of representation. This argument is expanded and, to a certain extent, refined in another book, *Culture and Imperialism* (1992), in which Said draws the attention to the co-existence in history of “a general worldwide pattern of imperial culture, and a historical experience of resistance against empire” (Said, 1994: xii). His analysis of ‘imperial culture’ foregrounds the novel and “its position in the history and world of empire” (Said, 1994: xiii), as he proposes to read a selection of English novels in connection with “the imperial process of which they were manifestly and unconcealedly a part” (Said, 1994: xv). He adds: “rather than condemning or ignoring their participation in what was an unquestioned reality in their societies, I suggest that what we learn about this hitherto ignored aspect actually and truly *enhances* our reading and understanding of them” (Said, 1994: xv). The book takes its cue from a qualified critique of Raymond Williams (whose *Culture and Society* may have influenced Said’s choice of title), whom Said takes to task for excluding empire – “I sense a limitation in his feeling that English literature is mainly about England” (Said, 1994: 14; cf. 47). For Said, this clearly is not the case.

This shift of focus has important consequences for the analysis of *A Passage to India*. For Said, the ‘crux’ of the novel is “the sustained encounter between the English colonials (...) and Indians” (Said, 1994: 243), on which score Forster does not fare particularly well: the novel “founders on the undodgeable facts of Indian nationalism”

¹² Das is, amazingly, oblivious of the fact that imperialism, here described as past, was, in fact, present, both regarding the time of the story and the time of Forster’s writing. Trivedi has appropriately criticised this passage for expressing an ‘essentialist’, and hence orientalist, view (Trivedi 1995: 156).

¹³ This is also a historical process. Here is how Said describes them:

A new generation of scholars and critics – the children of decolonization in some instances, the beneficiaries (like sexual, religious, and racial minorities) of advances in human freedom at home – have seen in such great texts of Western literature a standing interest in what was considered a lesser world, populated with lesser people of colour, portrayed as open to the intervention of so many Robinson Crusoes. (Said, 1994: xviii)

(Said, 1994: 245); it “deals with personal, not official or national, histories” (Said, 1994: 246); Forster is “evasive and more patronizing” than Kipling (Said, 1994: 246); and he ultimately “sees Indians with imperial eyes” (Said, 1994: 247). This, however, is not explained *directly*, in the way of many previous writings, as, for instance a matter of attitude or ‘reaction’ to the ‘imperial idea’ (cf. Islam, 1979). In a more sophisticated manner, Said refers the novel to a specific ‘structure of attitude and reference’:

Of course Forster was a novelist, not a political officer or theorist or prophet. Yet he found a way to use the mechanism of the novel to elaborate on the already existing structure of attitude and reference without changing it. This structure permitted one to feel affection for and even intimacy with some Indians and India generally, but made one see Indian politics as the charge of the British, and culturally refused a privilege to Indian nationalism (which, by the way, it gave willingly to Greeks and Italians). (Said, 1994: 248)

Said’s ‘structure of attitude and reference’ (which he draws on Williams’s ‘structure of feeling’) is the key to his approach. It seeks to avoid the concept of (imperialist) ideology, by placing the emphasis on culture – understood as a ‘battleground’ (Said, 1994: xiv) where the identity of a society or people (as well as the terms whereby this is done) is permanently being fought out, in an ongoing building process. It therefore encompasses many different and opposing social positions (for instance, of coloniser and colonised). Furthermore, this ‘structure of attitude and reference’ specifically refers to ‘location’ and ‘geography’ (the Orient, India, Africa, East and West),¹⁴ being heavily dependent on “what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world” (Said, 1994: xviii). Briefly, these discourses have played a powerful part both in the formation and consolidation of empire and in resistance to it.

Said’s argument (and presence, both as a teacher and as a public intellectual) left an indelible mark on literary criticism – especially in America – giving rise to a new area of studies which became known in the eighties and nineties as postcolonial studies.¹⁵

¹⁴ In my view, Said’s ‘structures of attitude and reference’ is also a narrowing of Williams’s concept. Here is how he has defined it:

I am talking about the way in which structures of location and geographical reference appear in the cultural languages of literature, history, or ethnography, sometimes allusively and sometimes carefully plotted, across several individual works that are not otherwise connected to one another or to an official ideology of ‘empire’. (Said, 1994: 61)

¹⁵ This has become a growing area, with many strands and different emphases. Said’s influence is still widely traceable, namely in the work of some of his former students, such as Anne McClintock, Gauri

The role that Forster's text played in the constitution of this new field cannot be overestimated. Forster's rendering of India stimulated and corroborated a number of readings which were trying to move beyond the mimetic script that had underpinned and informed the novel's early criticism.¹⁶

This was clearly the case of Benita Parry, who, in the late sixties, in Britain, set about reading the novel from a culture materialist perspective. Parry wanted to stress the social and political elements of *A Passage to India*, while resisting the temptation to reduce the novel to "a social document about the British in India, and the Indians in British India" (Parry 1968: 161).¹⁷ The impact of Said's work is patent in her essay "The Politics of Representation in *A Passage to India*" (1985), a revised version of an earlier one, "*A Passage to India*: Epitaph or Manifesto?" (1979). The two essays are worth considering together. In the first, Parry recognises in the novel a surface structure, i.e. a symbolism which aims to "make a coherent statement about human realities through art" (Parry, 1979: 129), but also a deeper structure, which "holds open-ended, paradoxical and multivalent meanings, discharging ideas and images which cannot be contained within the confines of the formal pattern" (Parry, 1979: 129). The effect is ambiguous – on the one hand, the novel strives "after models of universal and ahistorical order" and "a metaphysical wholeness" (Parry, 1979: 129); on the other, it points to "a future still to emerge, a tomorrow radically different from what exists" and, in that, it "reaffirms history" (Parry, 1979: 130). Parry explains the resulting ambivalence in the light of Forster's politics – the novel "deliberately reveals the crisis of liberal-humanist ideology" (Parry, 1979: 130), but does so by remaining the work of a liberal-humanist, hence its "retreats" and "oscillations" (Parry, 1979: 131). There is, by consequence, "a vacuum at the core of the political fiction" (Parry, 1979: 131), which is attributed to liberalism: "just as liberalism was unable to produce a fundamental critique of western colonialism, so is a consciousness of imperialism's

Viswanathan and Tim Brennan, but extends much beyond. See, for example, Benita Parry's critical overview of the field, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Parry, 2004).

¹⁶ Forster's novel has played an important role in the expanding field of postcolonial studies, as the huge number of books which include or mention it suggests. In her book on rape in British literature about India (an account fully immersed in postcolonial theory), Nancy Paxton, acknowledges the inspiring role of Forster's 'fascinating' novel (Paxton: 1999: ix). The widespread interest in Forster's novel in postcolonial studies suggests an affinity with this kind of approach, which I could not find in relation to Orwell's imperial novel.

¹⁷ See Benita Parry in *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination, 1880-1930* (1972). This critic would reinforce her materialist approach in later years, partly in reaction to certain de-historicising trends that, in the meantime, had become more pronounced. She also provides a historical reading of the caves, which are interpreted in relation to Jainism, in striking opposition to critics like Pathak, Sengupta and Purkayashtha, who regard them as 'without history' (Parry 1998: 15-16).

historical dimension absent from *A Passage to India*” (Parry, 1979: 131), as can be seen in the fact that “the concept of exploitation is notably absent” (Parry, 1979: 132). *A Passage to India* therefore constitutes “Forster’s epitaph to liberal-humanism” (Parry, 1979: 140), who hereafter turned to other literary forms to state his liberal values, regardless of the fact that they belonged to an ideology which was “drained of vitality” and which was “without relevance to the changing historical situation” (Parry, 1979: 141). Although the essay closes with praise for Forster’s “independence and courage”, we are left with the image of a man without a faith, who had found himself at a dead end, to the point of reaching creative sterility (Parry, 1979: 141).

It is interesting to note how the second essay can accommodate most of Parry’s early analysis and yet at the same time – through changes in phrasing, the inclusion of a new introductory section and a revised conclusion – produce a very different effect and move in an entirely new direction. The epigraph from Said’s *Orientalism* (in which Foucault’s presence is marked) sets the tone for these changes. In the early essay, Parry had been concerned with the connections between the novel’s dissent from the “conventions and aspirations of the late bourgeois world” and “the social and political structures they accompanied and sustained” (Parry, 1979: 131); now her attention has shifted to the connections between the novel and “the system of textual practices by which the metropolitan culture exercised its domination over the subordinate periphery” (Parry, 1985: 27-28). The mediation of Said’s theory is all too clear and confers a different meaning to the novel’s ambiguity and ambivalence. Rejecting the attempt of other emerging postcolonial critics (namely, Sara Suleri) to locate the novel inside colonial discourse and thus ignore “the text’s heterogeneous modes and its complex dialogic structure” (Parry, 1985: 28), Parry’s main contention is that ‘*A Passage to India* can be seen as at once inheriting and interrogating the discourses of the Raj’ (Parry, 1985: 28).¹⁸ Without failing to discuss the limits and oscillations of Forster’s vision (her own exposition moves through oscillation), Parry finally emphasises the novel’s “initiation of an oppositional discourse” (Parry, 1985: 28), which she associates with the text’s ‘evasions’, especially as far as the representation of India is concerned. It should be noted that in the first version of this essay, Parry already sympathised with

¹⁸ The reference to Sara Suleri has to be taken in its context – these are the early days following the publication of *Orientalism*, and Parry’s brief mention is to a conference paper given by Suleri. Her first major work, *The Rhetoric of English India*, would only be published in 1988 (Suleri, 1992). I find the similarities between Suleri and Parry (in relation to colonial discourse) more interesting than their (often inflated) differences.

Forster's representation of India, which she understood in terms of a withdrawal from definition or "the rationalistic" (Parry, 1979: 136). The point is now redefined by Said's Orientalist thesis: because it both refuses to know/define the other and introduces a range of "foreign codes" (Parry, 1985: 29), thus producing "a set of radical alternatives to the meanings valorised by an imperialist civilisation" (Parry, 1985: 29), the novel succeeds in going "against the grain of a discourse where 'knowing' India was a way of ruling India" (Parry, 1985: 29). Forster's book is thus read as "the limit text of the Raj discourse", so much so that criticism "should now address itself to the counter-discourse generated by the text" (Parry, 1985: 30). Parry has not jettisoned her more materialist critique of the novel – she continues to stress that it is "constrained by its conditions of production" and to point out, accordingly, that it lacks "a consciousness of imperialism as capitalism's expansionist, conquering moment" (Parry, 1985: 29). However, her focus has now shifted to epistemological (and even ontological) matters, diluting her previous more incisive analysis of the limits of liberalism, on which her sympathy with Forster had first hinged. Her engagement with colonial discourse, in other words, has made her more receptive to the novel's "libertarian perspective" (Parry, 1985: 43) and to Forster's political 'integrity' (whom she now calls, in the manner typical of the eighties, "an untheoretical socialist" – Parry, 1985: 43).

Postcolonial theory had (and is still having) an overwhelming impact on Forster studies. Under its influence, G. K. Das's image of Forster's India as bearing the "positive value of an impartial personal account" (Das 1977: 19) can hardly stand. The idea that literature played a constructive rather than merely reflective role in the history of imperialism has led many critics to argue for Forster's complicity in imperialism. As Benita Parry put it in the late nineties, *A Passage to India* moved a long way from being admired as "a poised and sympathetic account of the sub-continent's history, culture and landscape" to being indicted for participating in the 'Orientalising' discourse that informed and was complicit in the building of the Raj (Parry 1998: 13-14).¹⁹ Harish Trivedi, with his verdict that Forster turned out "a piece of sheer and unabashed orientalisering" (Trivedi, 1995: 154), fully illustrates this point. It is important to note how varied postcolonial readings of *A Passage to India* have been: there has been an

¹⁹ Parry's full quote reads: "It is noticeable that whereas Indian critics of an older generation had praised *A Passage to India* as a poised and sympathetic account of the sub-continent's history, culture and landscape, their descendants have since repudiated this fulsome appreciation as 'emanating from a colonized consciousness', while themselves accusing the novel of reinscribing 'Orientalist tropes'" (Parry 1998: 13-14).

incidence on feminist, gender and psychoanalytical studies (e. g. Sharpe, 1993; Burton, 1994; Hubel, 1996), which tend to branch into a more textual-oriented strand (identified, for instance, with Sara Suleri) and a more materialist, politically-engaged one (which Parry herself has come to represent) (Parry, 1998, 2004).²⁰ My concern here, however, has not been so much to tease out the differences within postcolonial studies, but to stress the influence of Said's work on existing anti-imperialist critiques (such as Parry's 1979 essay).²¹

In 1995, introducing the 'New Casebooks' collection of essays on Forster, a series dedicated to explore the interchanges between modern critical theory and literary criticism, Jeremy Tambling reflected on how little impact *theory* – by which he means “narrative theory, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, feminism or gender criticism [and] Althusserian Marxism or Foucauldian approaches to discourse” (Tambling, 1995: 1) – had had on Forster criticism. This may be due to the fact that other modernist authors, such as Virginia Woolf, overshadowed Forster, but Tambling also attributes it to Forster's major limitations: the “ideology of Englishness” (Tambling, 1995: 3) and “his interest in ‘friendship’” (Tambling, 1995: 10). These limitations are perceptible in three main areas of criticism, according to which this volume has been organised: (1) England, ‘Englishness’ and Modernism; (2) Gender and homosexuality; (3) Orientalism, Empire and the Other. Tambling concludes: “It may even be that criticism has to catch up with Forster. But the triangular relationship of Forster to modernism, homosexuality and empire is problematic” (Tambling, 1995: 10).

²⁰ Even though *Orientalism* inaugurated postcolonial studies and despite its debt to Foucault, some critics exclude Said from the more discursive strand of postcolonial studies, usually ascribed to Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This difference is recognised by Timothy Brennan, to whom Said “was more consciously drawing on an earlier philological and social democratic tradition of historians and activists”, counter Spivak and Bhabha, whose theories rely on “deconstruction, discourse-analysis, and Lacanian psychoanalysis” (Brennan: 2004, 132). Cf. Neil Lazarus' similar position, in the same volume of essays (Lazarus: 2004, 10-13) and Benita Parry's (Parry, 2004: 69).

²¹ The relationship between literature and Empire had already caught the attention of critics, namely Allen Greenberger, who wrote on the 'British Image of India' (1969), Benita Parry, who was concerned with the presence of India in the 'British Imagination' (1972), and Shamsul Islam, who focused on the 'literary reaction of the imperial idea' (Islam, 1979). The last work (which draws on the first two) is straightforward in linking the 'imperial idea' or 'mystique' to the building of the Raj (Islam: 1979: 1), but follows a historical approach (which also includes, but not only, the history of ideas) (cf. Islam: 1979: 14). Islam also calls attention to the vast body of literature inspired in the Raj (Islam: 1979: 4-5). Although his analysis lacks Said's breath and sophistication – it is based on the belief “that history and literature interact and illuminate each other”, the latter often constituting “a better guide to the spirit of the times” (Islam: 1979: 14), Islam anticipates some of Said's thinking. In spite of their limitations, these studies remain valuable, and may help to shed light on the strengths (and weaknesses) of subsequent, postcolonial, studies.

Since these words were written, there has been a rise in more theory-orientated publications, such as Martin and Piggford's collection of essays, *Queer Forster* (1997). The book is representative of a second wave of gay criticism, which not only devotes more attention to sexuality, but also aligns itself with new theoretical approaches, such as deconstruction, poststructuralism and postmodernism. Meyers' approach to literature and homosexuality (which ended up pitting one against the other) had exposed the shortcomings of many of the existing studies on this subject. Meyers had drawn on a variety of clichés – the homosexual as an instance of 'arrested development' (which underpins the description of Maurice and Alec as 'puerile', and of Forster as 'fixed' in the Edwardian age); the homosexual as a misogynist; homosexual literature as typifying "the divorce between the modern artist and the rest of society", therefore being essentially élitist and addressed "to the precious few" (Meyers, 1977: 9-10); and, above all, the homosexual as a kind of "tubercular artist", an assumption which may stress his role as a 'social outcast' "to question and challenge the conventional ideas about morality and art" (Meyers, 1977: 10), but which also reinforces the identification of homosexuality with disease. To a certain extent, as Martin and Piggford have noted, this critic had taken up the line of argument which opposed F. R. Leavis to Bloomsbury, with the latter representing, for Leavis, homosexual decadence (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 15).

Martin and Piggford's book stands on a very different (American) literary-critical tradition and reaches out for new theories. It aims to go beyond "the transcendentalizing and romanticizing that all too often accompanied the first wave of gay studies [especially in America]" (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 19), and foreground "one of the 'queerest' elements of Forster's work" – i.e. "his insistence on the peculiarities of passion" (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 4). The authors therefore reject any easy classificatory division between the 'straight' Forster (of the early novels) and the 'gay' Forster (of the posthumous novel and short stories) (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 4),²² to take up Judith Scherer Herz's thesis that there is a "homosexual subtext" in Forster's early novels (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 19). Desire, understood as a disruptive category, is now the keyword. Their reading is premised on the rejection of the traditional view of Forster as "sexually naive, earnest and lacking in the playfulness that

²² Furbank's two-volume biography might have encouraged this separation between Forster-the-novelist and Forster-the-homosexual. The first volume, 'The Growth of the Novelist', stops at 1914 and chronicles Forster's development as a novelist. Forster's first sexual experience, which took place in 1916, is related in the second volume.

marks postmodern culture” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 5). The ‘gay Forster’ had been built on the assumption of his “supposed naive idealism”, but they now propose to replace it with a ‘queer Forster’ who is, on the contrary, ‘slippery’, “elusive, sharp-witted, and multifarious” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 6). In a postmodernist vein (which brings together Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida), Forster’s proverbial elusiveness, much reviled in early criticism, is now valued as a (re)source of subversion. It is, furthermore, combined with theories of fragmented subjectivity, discourse and performativity (largely derived from Judith Butler – Martin and Piggford, 1997: 9), which challenge the concept of “the unified subject” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 10) and, with it, “the illusion of a stable category – the author” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 10). Forster therefore emerges as a complex (postmodern) self-ironic figure of subversion. His desire for men across classes, races and ethnicities, together with his sadomasochistic tendencies, invite in “a new and less moralistic reading” of his work – one which acknowledges “Forster’s inevitable complicity in the erotics of power” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 14), but which ultimately stresses his role “as a queer artist, as one who seeks to disrupt the economy of the normal” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 4). This allows these authors to go as far as rejecting, in the liberal literary-critical tradition (e.g. of a Lionel Trilling), “a number of well-meaning generalizations that dangerously obscure the very precision of Forster’s observations and the sophisticated political analysis that underlies them” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 17). In Trilling, they identify (and reject) “a kind of liberal utopianism that will come to haunt Forster’s reputation and obscure ironies” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 17). They believe, instead, that Forster’s queerness – a concept that is now a bridge between ‘stigmatization’ and ‘other oppressions’ – “can become the occasion for a political awareness of the need to envision a utopia of *différance*” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 18). The focus thus falls on the need to preserve the ‘nuances’ in Forster’s treatment of sexuality (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 17) and read Forster with “an open mind and with a renewed sense of multiplicity and diversity of desire” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 26). Despite their critique of ‘liberal Forster’, their project thus ultimately aims at “a liberalism that joins together difference, even while preserving particularity” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 3), i.e. a liberalism which has been modified by a (postmodernist) politics of identity. There are problems with this kind of ‘elusiveness’ understood as a category of critical production and – by extension – of social liberation. Although Martin and Piggford place their reading alongside other critical trends like postcolonialism – trends

committed to reading “against the grain in order to bring into focus a text’s contradictions, exceptions, inconsistencies” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 22) – ‘elusiveness’ per se does not suffice, and their position (or ‘politics’) risks being, likewise, elusive. Irony, on which this reading heavily relies (now also understood as self-irony), occupied already an important place in liberal-humanist literary criticism.

Indeed, Forster’s irony has been for a while associated with his liberal stance. As Gardner has pointed out, critics were prone to view favourably “the detached and tolerant attitude which Forster brought to his material” (Gardner, 1973: 21). But irony has also been a key element in claiming Forster to modernism. This comes out clearly in Malcom Bradbury’s essay, which relates Forster’s modernism to his “disinterested approach, his ironic detachment” (Bradbury, 1966: 4; cf. 6). Other things are common between liberal-humanism (of a Leavisian or other kind) and modernism (including that of Bloomsbury); as Bradbury points out, Forster’s “sense of culture and cultivation, his attachment to personal relationships, his concern with the developed heart, connect him in different ways with their [Bloomsbury’s] interests, as does his sense of membership in an evangelising intelligentsia” (Bradbury, 1966: 5).

The keyword here is *culture*, a term which, to a greater or lesser degree, has been present throughout Forster criticism. In fact, Bradbury’s essay is a response to an earlier study by D. S. Savage (1950) which had taken issue with Forster’s ‘culture’.²³ Savage had contended that the culture that Forster represents is the culture of “a group and a class” (Savage, 1950: 44); that is to say, he represents “the cultured, sensitive and democratic liberalism” (Savage, 1950: 46). What followed was a trenchant critique of liberalism, which stressed its reliance on “stable and comfortable circumstances”, its dismissal of ‘spiritual values’ and ‘the absolute’ (Savage, 1950: 46), and its complicity in capitalism and a sham ‘democracy’ (Savage, 1950: 47). To this critic’s accusations, Bradbury replies: “That Forster is, in a positive way, a ‘representative’ of a culture, or of several cultures, that he is a novelist much fed by his place and circumstances, is evident enough” (Bradbury, 1966: 5). He adds, nevertheless, that this is no cause for censure, but rather the source of his many ‘excellencies’ (Bradbury, 1966: 6).

²³ Although Bradbury gives Savage as an example of a Marxist analysis (Bradbury, 1966: 13), this is not entirely accurate, as Savage’s preface can attest. It is true that he is concerned with the relationship between the novel and the modern world, rather than with “the purely literary qualities” (Savage, 1950: 18), and that he criticises capitalism (Savage, 1950: 47), but his focus falls on the values that have been lost to a materialistic, utilitarian society, a critique which Savage extends to Marxism (Savage, 1950: 21). Furthermore, this critic decries the loss of ‘cultural unity’, which he equates with the ‘disintegration of Christian culture’ (Savage, 1950: 15), and to which he traces the “acute stage of spiritual malaise” in which modern novelists find themselves (Savage, 1950: 15).

The disagreement between these two critics is also a disagreement over the meaning of culture (cf. Bradbury, 1966: 5-6), and has been at the core of that brand of culture criticism and intellectual practice that has been called British cultural studies. After the First World War, as Francis Mulhern has argued (1998), ‘culture’ had become an important topic of debate in Europe, taking a particular shape in Britain (Mulhern, 2000: xiii). The main argument, initially developed in Germany, pitted ‘culture’, understood as the learned and refined appreciation of life, only available to a few, to ‘Zivilisation’, understood as the more general, chaotic and unmediated experience of the modern world, which included the contradictory realities of “capitalism, democracy and enlightenment” (Mulhern, 2000: xv). Forster’s positions on this topic permeate his novels – especially *Howards End* (cf. Mulhern, 2000: 35) – and have become the object of criticism in an expanding area of Forster studies – what Jeremy Tambling has called “England, ‘Englishness’ and Modernism”. With the release of the filmic adaptations of his novels in the eighties and nineties, this area has gained renewed relevance.²⁴ Although standing on their own as autonomous works, the films have brought to the fore some of the problems and contradictions that were already patent in Forster’s texts. Furthermore, they have become themselves major players in the debate over ‘heritage’, which has been building up since the late 1980s and early nineties (e.g. Higson, 2006; Hill, 1999).

1.2. Orwell criticism

All the three topics that Jeremy Tambling identified in relation to Forster are present in Orwell criticism. Here, however, the imperviousness to theory is even more striking. Despite a number of feminist critiques, gender has not been a central issue, and the same can be said of ‘Orientalism, Empire and the Other’. ‘Englishness’, however, has come to occupy a more prominent place, as Orwell’s prophetic vision of totalitarianism, which for decades dominated criticism, has lost some of its original force and appeal. In 1998, the editors of the ‘New Casebooks’ volume on Orwell (the equivalent of Tambling’s book on Forster) noted the “dearth of theoretically informed published

²⁴ The popularity of Forster was enhanced by the adaptations of five of his novels to film. David Lean’s *A Passage to India*, the first of these, appeared in 1984. It was followed by *A Room with a View* (1986) and *Maurice* (1987), two Ismail Merchant productions directed by James Ivory. *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, directed by Charles Sturridge, was released in 1991, and *Howards End*, another Merchant and Ivory production, followed it, in 1992. The reception of these films was uneven – *A Passage to India*, *A Room with a View* and *Howards End* were the most successful and remain the best-known.

material, which takes its point of departure from within debates in the areas of poststructuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis or cultural materialism” (Holderness et al. 1998: 1). They stress, on the contrary, the strong biographical vein of most studies, concluding that Orwell’s “life and beliefs still influence most readings of his writing” (Holderness et al. 1998: 1). The point is well made, and the fact that this collection (including the editors’ introductory essay), in spite of itself, fails to correct this tendency only highlights the magnitude of the problem. To some extent, Orwell studies are even more entrenched in the kind of liberal-humanist script to which Forster has been attached, since they more often lack the hesitations and uneasiness which, to a greater or lesser degree, have coloured the critical assessment of Forster.

Most critics would agree in grounding Forster’s literary achievement in *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*. When it comes to Orwell, there is even wider consensus in attributing his reputation to *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). The centrality of these books – regularly adopted, from as early as 1950, as set texts in British and American schools²⁵ and still popular sixty years after their publication – has had an important impact on the general assessment of Orwell’s work. As Williams noted, it promoted a kind of approach – ‘reading Orwell backwards’ (Williams, 1974: 3) – which was particularly active in America, where Orwell’s earlier work was not as readily available.²⁶

This approach continues to dominate and is, to a certain extent, inevitable. As John Rodden has demonstrated, Orwell’s reputation has gone through a number of distinct stages (he identifies ten, including a ‘pre-history’ and five posthumous stages – Rodden: 2002: 41). Briefly, the stages that precede his death comprise the following: (1) the time when he left Burma (1927) and began to struggle to be a ‘serious’ writer, which led him to his ‘down-and-out’ experiences in London and Paris; (2) the period during which he published the book relating these experiences (1933) and most of his ‘thirties’ novels (i.e. *Burmese Days*, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*), books which brought him scant attention and praise; (3) his turn to direct political controversy with

²⁵ Alan Brown was probably the first critic to pay close attention to the ample use of these two works, and of Orwell in general, in British education. Writing in 1984, he underlines Orwell’s exceptionalism in this role, when compared to his contemporaries (Brown 1984: 41). Brown’s sample draws on a range of study aids and examination questions of A and O Levels from as early as 1950 (Brown 1984: 60, n. 7). John Rodden noted the same trend in America, even though *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is among the books most frequently banned from American high schools, for obscenity (Rodden, 2002: 18-19).

²⁶ Even after Orwell’s death, most of Orwell’s works remained unavailable in America. This was the case of *Homage to Catalonia*, which only appeared in 1952, with an introduction by Lionel Trilling (included in Williams’ 1974 collection of critical essays). *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* only appeared in 1956.

the Left, first in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), the commented reportage commissioned by Victor Gollancz of his experiences in the jobless, mining North, then in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), his account of the Spanish Civil War; (4) the period that took him from the publication of *Coming Up for Air* (1939) to the end of the war, in which he was essentially known as a journalist and a writer of essays (especially on ‘Englishness’ and popular culture), and which saw him engage in polemic against the pacifists, following his transformation into a ‘patriotic socialist’; (5) and, finally, the period leading up to his death, in which he published *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), two immediate bestsellers which brought him to international fame and definitively bound him to political controversy (Rodden: 2002: 41-45).

It is clear that *Animal Farm* was the turning point in Orwell’s career, transforming him from a minor (and mediocre) novelist and local polemicist into one of the best-known political writers in the world. The book emerged wrapped in controversy: as an attack on the Russian Revolution, its political meanings had an unusual import for the particularly volatile historical times, and Orwell had difficulty in finding a publisher. The context of war and the fable’s critique of the Soviet Union (Britain’s ally at the time) constituted the main reasons for its rejection by a number of publishing houses. There were diplomatic apprehensions concerning the book’s political viewpoint (generally regarded as Trotskyist), but also dissatisfaction with particular formal or/and narrative aspects.²⁷ As expected, the initial responses to *Animal Farm* were mainly politically-orientated. Writing for *Horizon* in September 1945, Cyril Connolly called Orwell “a revolutionary who is in love with 1910” (Connolly, 1975: 199). Connolly’s main point is that, because they necessarily spring from violence, all revolutions result in “the abuse of power” (Connolly, 1975: 200). Partly reflecting the still prevalent feeling of gratitude for the Soviet Union, Connolly defends Stalin’s Russia, by pointing out the substantial material and social advances that had been made, and concludes, “if in truth Stalin is loved then he and his regime cannot be quite what they appear to Mr Orwell” (Connolly, 1975: 200). The same month, Kingsley Martin, the editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*, voiced a very different opinion. Praising Orwell for choosing “real evils to attack” and the story for being “a fair corrective of much silly worship of the Soviet Union” (Martin, 1975: 197), he nevertheless compares Orwell to

²⁷ As foreseen by Orwell, Victor Gollancz turned down the manuscript of *Animal Farm*. Even though he claimed to be “highly critical of many aspects of internal and external Soviet policy”, he refused to publish “a general attack of this nature” (cit. Crick, 1992: 454). See Crick’s detailed account of Orwell’s difficulties in publishing *Animal Farm* in Britain and America (Crick, 1992: 454-487).

Benjamin, an association which will become a favourite with some critics: “The logic of Mr Orwell’s satire is surely the ultimate cynicism of Ben, the donkey. That (...) is where his idealism and disillusion has really landed him” (Martin, 1975: 198). This critic also decries Orwell’s lack of courage for failing to recognise the story’s ultimate lesson, namely that the problem is mankind, not Russia, regretting Orwell’s rehabilitation of Trotsky as a safeguard of the revolution. Finally, he rejects the book’s overlap of the pre- and post-revolutionary ruling classes, since he believes “the new ruling class is really very different from anything that Russia has known before” (Martin, 1975: 199). By this time (especially on account of his *Tribune* column), Orwell’s image as a socialist writer was still fresh in the memory of British critics and the public in general. To orthodox communists, however, he was colluding with capitalism. A letter published in 1947 in the *Daily Worker*, called *Animal Farm* “that anti-Soviet farrago” (cit. Crick, 1992: 488). Others were quick to accuse him of running “into the arms of the capitalist publishers” (cit. Williams, 1971: 69).

In America, *Animal Farm* was elected the September Book-of-the-Month Club choice, which brought it to a wider audience. Interpretations now tended to be more homogeneous and simplistic, ignoring Orwell’s socialist background and his public endorsement of what he called ‘democratic socialism’.²⁸ Crick points out that many American reviewers “used the book as a polemic against socialism in general” (Crick, 1992: 488; cf. Lea, 2001: 21). Indeed, the book’s reception in America was already taking the contours that would define it in the next few decades of the Cold War. Orwell’s critique of the revolution was, in general, taken for granted and made to extrapolate to other ideological issues (cf. Lea, 2001: 21). This is clearly the case of Northrop Frye’s review for the *Canadian Forum*, in December 1946, which takes Orwell to task for choosing to expose the obvious, i.e. Stalin’s tyranny, instead of engaging with the weaknesses of Marxism itself. For him, the story should have been

²⁸ The usual tendency has been to follow Orwell’s own understanding of this term. Stephen Ingle, for instance, defined Orwell’s brand of socialism as “strongly egalitarian, anti-revolutionary, anti-élitist, and anti-ideology” (Ingle 1993: x), aspects also teased out in Alex Zwerdling’s book *Orwell and the Left* (1974). Perhaps more helpfully, Alok Rai has defined the term in relation to ‘totalitarianism’, which provided “a kind of *external* limit for ‘democratic Socialism’”, hence identifying it with liberal social democracy (Rai, 1988: 157). Historical pressures, according to this critic, would lead to ‘a compromise with capitalism’ and the retreat of ‘left positions’ from liberal social democracy. The problem, for Rai, is that ‘totalitarianism’ “came to define also, if only by sterile negation, the inner space of liberal social democracy” (Rai, 1988: 158). The problem with Rai’s position, in my view, as I will later discuss, is that it remains caught up in the terms defined by ‘totalitarianism’, and, hence by liberalism itself. It is clear, in any case, that Orwell’s ‘democratic Socialism’ had the effect of shifting the left political ground to the centre.

about “the corruption of expediency by principle”, not “the corruption of principle by expediency” (Frye, 1999: 4). Frye dismisses the story’s end as “complete nonsense”, both on formal terms – “the final metamorphosis of pigs into humans is a fantastic disruption of the sober logic of the tale” (Frye, 1999: 4) – and on realistic ones, since Stalinism cannot be ‘aligned’ with the Czar’s regime. The reasons for this choice, he suggests, must have been purely technical, as he needed a ‘neat, epigrammatic’ end (Frye, 1999: 4). Finally, he places Orwell among those Western writers who “have done their level best to adopt the Russian interpretation of Marxism as their own world-outlook and have failed” (Frye, 1999: 5).²⁹

Apart from the reviews of his works and some scattered studies,³⁰ criticism only took off after Orwell’s death, a mere seven months following the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It was, therefore, as much shaped by the stream of laudatory obituaries, memoirs and reminiscences,³¹ which at once reflected and boosted his rising popularity, as by the reception of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which, in the wake of *Animal Farm*, had taken the form of a political controversy. The book was also selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club, and went on to become an American bestseller in 1951 (Rodden, 2002: 45). On account of the novel’s overwhelming despair, but also of the thickening Cold War climate, readers were now readier than ever to take it as a straightforward attack on Stalinism, communism, socialism, and even the Labour Party (Big Brother’s Party is infamously called ‘Ingsoc’, the Newspeak corrupted form of ‘English Socialism’), which had been in government since 1945. Despite Orwell’s protestations, even his publisher commented that it was worth “a cool million votes to the Conservative Party” and a preface by Winston Churchill (cit. Crick 1992: 567). In an influential essay, written in December 1954, Isaac Deutscher pointed to the widespread adoption of neologisms like ‘Newspeak’, ‘Big Brother’, ‘Thought Police’ and ‘Doublespeak’ in everyday speech, to comment on the novel’s outstanding popularity and political impact. For him, it was obvious that the novel was being used for the purposes of anti-

²⁹ Frye’s review has become a classic. It was reprinted by the author in 1978 and included in Harold Bloom’s selection of essays, *George Orwell’s Animal Farm* (1999).

³⁰ The first studies were written by Q.D. Leavis (1940) and Lionel Trilling (1949). Rodden describes George Woodcock’s 1946 essay for *Politics*, “George Orwell, 19th Century Liberal”, as “the first serious essay about Orwell” (Rodden, 2002: 154).

³¹ *World Review* published a memorial issue in 1950, with contributions from Malcom Muggeridge, Stephen Spender and Bertrand Russell. Other magazines featured articles of this type, such as, *The Twentieth Century* (Heppenstall, 1955; Fyvel, 1956), *Encounter* (Fyvel, 1959) and *The London Magazine* (Potts, 1957). Orwell’s family also participated, with the testimony of brother-in-law Humphrey Dakin (T. R. Fyvel, 1959) and the short essay by Orwell’s sister, Avril Dunn (1961).

Communist propaganda. He called it “a sort of an ideological super-weapon in the cold war” which reflected the “convulsive fear of communism” that had become pervasive in the post-war era (Deutscher, 1955: 35).

The fifties were crucial for the dissemination of Orwell’s work and the construction of the image which was later to circulate on an international scale. There was a marked propensity for hagiography, partly stimulated by the political polemic, which translated into the first books on Orwell’s work being written by friends and acquaintances.³² The focus was clearly political. As the American critic John Rodden has demonstrated, Orwell’s reputation is largely the product of post-war cultural politics (Rodden, 2002: 9). By the mid-fifties, the ‘main outlines’ of his reputation had ‘crystallised’ into two ‘faces’ – ‘the ‘haloed Saint’ and the ‘dark Prophet’ – two images correlated, not only with the ‘developing rift’ between the man and the work (respectively, the Orwell of the obituaries and the Orwell of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), but also with the gap “between intellectual and popular audiences” (Rodden, 2002: 28).³³ No less important, the first years were also crucial in defining the kind of approach and set of topics, i.e. the ‘modes of criticism’ (Lea, 2001), which would come to dominate his studies.

This is already evident in the first book-length study of Orwell’s work, by John Atkins (1954). Although entitled ‘A Literary Study’, Atkins’ approach is clearly biographical. As it emerges, the appreciation of Orwell’s literature cannot be separated from either his life or his politics. Atkins notes, approvingly, that most of Orwell’s insights were developed ‘through personal experience’ (e.g. Atkins, 1954: 69) and based on his “first-hand researches’ (Atkins, 1954: 123). The study follows a chronological line, from which all topics derive – imperialism, poverty and class, socialism, defence of liberty, Orwell’s prose style, the decay of the English language, war and patriotism. For this author, a colleague of Orwell’s at *Tribune*, there can be no doubt that Orwell was a

³² Lawrence Brander (1954) had worked with Orwell for the B.B.C. as a literary broadcaster to India (he would later become Director of Publications for the British Council); John Atkins (1954) had preceded Orwell as *Tribune* literary editor, before joining Mass Observation (Anderson, 2006: 2); and Christopher Hollis (1956), was a connection from Eton.

³³ Rodden calls this phenomenon of crystallisation “the freezing of reputation” (Rodden, 2002: 29, 50, 404). This how he put it in 1989:

Looking back from the 1980s, it is clear that the decade immediately following Orwell’s death constituted the crucial period in the making (and partial freezing) of his reputation. The oft-quoted critical commonplaces (and myths) about Orwell the man, the entry of Newspeak into the political lexicon, the introduction of his work into school curricula, the mass media adaptations of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the political abuses of Orwell’s name and work: all of these developments were well under way by the late 1950s. They are among the main causes and consequences of Orwell’s present-day reputation. (Rodden, 2002: 50).

socialist. He considers ‘decency’ to be the foundation of his work (Atkins, 1954: 1) and associates it with socialism (Atkins, 1954: 14), Christianity (Atkins, 1954: 17) and, most importantly, Orwell’s ‘love of England’ (Atkins, 1954: 1). Intertwined with the themes listed above, we also find the stock idea that Orwell was a special kind of ‘saint’ (he is a ‘modern saint’, a ‘social saint’ – Atkins, 1954: 114, 115) who always and automatically sided with the victims and the ‘underdog’ (Atkins, 1954: 119). Atkins’ literary assessment of Orwell is clearly linked with the appreciation of (and identification with) his politics; nevertheless, he also turns his attention to Orwell’s making into a writer, his engagement with literature and literary criticism, as well as his transformation ‘from Blair into Orwell’. It is here that some of the shortcomings of Orwell’s work are addressed. Atkins does not fail to point out errors and inconsistencies (e.g. Atkins, 1954: 76; 92; 95), if only to come to his defence. Following earlier critics, he praises *Animal Farm*, but refuses to see *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as either a prophecy or a work of literary excellence, proclaiming it, as Orwell had wanted it, a warning. The fact that it is close to Orwell’s times, and that therefore adheres to his perspectives more easily (notably as far as patriotism and Empire are concerned), makes this book an important contribution.

Most of these trends were confirmed in subsequent studies, namely in George Woodcock’s influential study, *The Crystal Spirit* (1966/1967, UK). The book opens with the author’s memory of Orwell (‘The Man Remembered’), which recounts their acquaintance towards the end of 1942. Woodcock then concentrates on three aspects: the themes of Orwell’s fiction; his politics and ‘world-view’; and his literary criticism and style, in this following the major lines explored by Atkins. But it is the political aspect which captures Woodcock’s attention and that ultimately guides his analysis: he notes the ubiquity of the ‘myth of Orwell’, rejecting the image that it projects of “the tortured, tragic writer, who died in his prime after a life of heroic hardships, and left as his testament the haunting and admonitory nightmare of a future dominated by communism” (Woodcock, 1984: 49). He then goes on to remark on the strange admixture of followers that this mythological Orwell has attracted – “on the Right, Conservatives and free-enterprisers of every colour” (Christopher Hollis, Barry Goldwater and the editors of *Time* are mentioned); on the far Left, the Anarchists (who regard *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an illustration of Bakunin’s case against the Marxist view of the State); and on the centre, the ‘middle-of-the-way Socialists’, who stress Orwell’s links with the British Labour Party (Woodcock, 1984: 49). From among the

intellectuals, Woodcock also cites two other brands of ‘dubious disciples’, namely: ‘the American ex-Trotskyists’ of *Partisan Review*, and the British ‘angry young men’ (Woodcock, 1984: 50). For this author, the reason for such critical latitude lies in the discrepancy between the apparent simplicity of Orwell’s writing and the actual “protean complexity” of his thought, which was not afraid of contradictions and which was by nature ‘unsystematic’ (Woodcock, 1984: 50). He therefore situates Orwell in the tradition of nineteenth-century ‘individualist radicals’, alongside with Hazlitt, Cobbett and Dickens, attributing to him a conservative vein, a degree of eccentricity, and an inclination for “personal and temperamental rather than partisan and theoretical” enthusiasms (Woodcock, 1984: 51). His ‘inconsistency’ is also associated with two aspects: first, the gap in his ideas between the abstract (e.g. the critique of imperialism) and the concrete (e.g. the praise of imperial administrators); second, his “desire to be fair to his opponents as persons even when he detested everything they stood for” (Woodcock, 1984: 51). Writing in the mid-sixties³⁴, this critic stresses Orwell’s concern for ‘the defence of civil liberties’ (Woodcock, 1984: 19) and highlights his relationship with Anarchism (to which this critic himself was attached): he singles out Orwell’s “anti-authoritarian strain” (Woodcock, 1984: 31) and, in spite of differences, compares him with Proudhon (Woodcock, 1984: 28, 30). Finally, he stresses Orwell’s Englishness, calling him, in the wake of other critics (such as Atkins), ‘the revolutionary patriot’. All in all, it is the question of Orwell’s politics that ultimately dominates the book. The Orwell that emerges from its pages (and in tune with the libertarian winds of the decade) is ‘the Crystal spirit’, that is, “a free spirit” (Woodcock, 1984: vii) who rejects any kind of political totalitarianism, therefore belonging to what Woodcock calls ‘left of centre’ (Woodcock, 1984: vii), ‘the left-wing libertarian socialism’ (Woodcock, 1984: 15) or ‘the libertarian Left’ (Woodcock, 1984: 22).

The publication of the *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* in the late sixties (1968) even though it contained omissions and some debatable editorial choices,³⁵ created the conditions for more systematic studies. The interest in ‘the man’ continued to dominate: criticism was still markedly psychobiographical and continued to rely on

³⁴ *Homage to Catalonia* had become favourite reading to many anarchists and left-wing activists of the sixties, not least Noam Chomsky (cf. Lucas, 2003: 123). In *Culture and Society*, Williams too called it “a moving book” (Williams, 1961: 281).

³⁵ Alok Rai, for instance, drew attention to the suppression of essays (Rai, 1988: 163) and the removal of important sentences (Rai, 1988: 159).

an expanding body of biographies and memoirs.³⁶ But another trend was equally evident: the interest in Orwell's politics assumed special importance for the British Left. Many left-wing critics had for long voiced their uneasiness with his 'peculiar' brand of socialism. Conor Cruise O'Brien thought Orwell politically untrustworthy: his figure had 'lent dignity to retreat' in the 1950s America; he had 'shaken the confidence of the English left, perhaps permanently', leaving it 'more defenceless'; far from being 'progressive', he had an 'old-fashioned Tory side' to him (O'Brien, 1965: 32-33). Alex Zwerdling's thorough analysis of 'Orwell and the Left' (1974), agreed that his impact on the Left had been to 'shake its confidence permanently' (Zwerdling 1974: 5), pointing to connections with the historical movements of left revisionism.

The troubled relationship between the British Left and Orwell has itself become a topic of criticism, most notably in relation to Raymond Williams, whose engagement with Orwell dates back to 1956 (the year of Suez and Hungary, as Williams noted – 1974: 3-4), in an essay which was to become the last chapter of *Culture and Society* (1958). In 1974, editing, from America, a collection of critical essays on Orwell, Williams himself addressed the issue: "A complicated relationship with Orwell and with the climate that incorporated him was a central feature of the development of the British New Left, especially its first generation from 1956 to 1963" (Williams, 1974: 6-7). His collection seeks to shed light on this relationship by bringing together three different generations – a first generation close to Orwell (Lionel Trilling, Isaac Deutscher, George Woodcock); then "the generation immediately following" (Williams, 1974: 5), which includes Richard Hoggart, E. P. Thompson and Williams himself; and, finally, the younger generation represented by Terry Eagleton, Jenni Calder and Stephen J. Greenblatt. In the introduction, Williams adds: "I believe that there are some significant differences among these three generations, differences that are particularly interesting in regard to Orwell" (Williams, 1974: 5). Commenting on Hoggart's debt to Orwell, Williams

³⁶ This prolific strand continued well beyond the fifties. In 1961, Richard Rees (editor of *Adelphi* between 1930 and 1936, to which Orwell contributed, and his literary executor) published *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory*; from Canada, in 1966, George Woodcock 'exorcised' (Woodcock, 1984: 7) his memory of Orwell in *The Crystal Spirit*; Miriam Gross's collection of personal reminiscences, *The World of George Orwell* (1971), assembled old and new accounts by friends, colleagues and acquaintances; childhood friend Jacintha Buddicom wrote *Eric and Us* (1974). Despite the growing interest in Orwell's life, the full biography of Orwell was delayed. Stansky and Abrahams' *The Unknown Orwell* (1972) and *Orwell: The Transformation* (1972), written without the support of Orwell's widow, was one attempt. But it was only as late as 1980 that the first authorised biography, *George Orwell: A Life* (1980), written by Bernard Crick, appeared. T. R. Fyvel published *George Orwell: A Personal Memoir* (1982) and Audrey Coppard and Bernard Crick published a compilation of radio material (mostly interviews) by people who had known Orwell, entitled *Orwell Remembered* (1984).

recognised his own: “I can recognize the same feeling of direct relationship to Orwell’s life as an example, in my own chapter in *Culture and Society, and I would not want to lose it*” (Williams, 1974: 6, my emphasis). Williams’s 1971 book grows, precisely, from this awareness of Orwell’s presence in and influence on contemporary English intellectual life. Written in the form of a short polemic, the book has often been regarded as a straightforward assault on Orwell – Fred Inglis called it a ‘personal attack’ (Inglis, 1995: 233); and Stephen Ingle more euphemistically considered that in it Williams had “managed to damn his subject with faint praise”, Ingle, 2006: 9). Indeed, Williams’s advice, in the book’s concluding paragraph, is for the reader to ‘read his work’ rather than ‘imitate it’, and to regard Orwell as “a history to respect, to remember, *to move on from*” (Williams, 1971: 94, my emphasis). However, dismissing the book as merely a ‘personal attack’ is not completely fair either: it tends to take into account the political controversy, leaving out of the picture Williams’s more important (and original) literary-critical contribution.

By 1979, it was obvious that the gap between Williams and the younger generation of New Left Review (namely, Francis Mulhern, Perry Anderson and Anthony Barnett) had deepened. His book is now described as ‘apologetic’, i.e. “very controlled and sympathetic in tone towards Orwell, through all its criticisms” (Williams, 1979: 391). It may stand “as perhaps the only principled critique of Orwell from the Left”, but they still find that it ultimately “let Orwell off rather lightly” (Williams, 1979: 385). The verdict of New Left Review on Orwell is, indeed, much more severe: they claim that he had “few or no original ideas, a limited creative imagination, and an unreliable capacity to recount information” (Williams, 1979: 387). His achievement is cut down to “the invention of the character ‘Orwell’, which is deemed more ‘damaging’ than his politics, and which Williams is taken to task for having failed to adequately condemn (Williams, 1979: 387). For the interviewers, the ‘sum effect’ of Orwell’s work is ‘on the whole very reactionary’, and even though his ‘regressive social patriotism’ is clearly stated in Williams’s study, there is no clear accounting for Orwell’s ‘overnight transformation’ from an (anti-war) revolutionary socialist into a ‘solid patriot’ (Williams, 1979: 385). The reason for Orwell’s volte-face seems to amount to the idea that he had been exhausted and simply had to ‘readjust’, which is regarded by the NLR board as an attempt to ‘exculpate’ Orwell (Williams, 1979: 386).³⁷ In the end, the discussion

³⁷ In his book, Williams does invoke the pressures of history to understand Orwell’s shifting positions, namely after 1939, when Orwell criticised people for holding positions he had held between 1937-39, i.e.

assumes the form of a political indictment of Williams himself (and his generation), based on their historical and generational proximity. In his biography of Raymond Williams, Fred Inglis not only stresses this proximity, but understands Williams's hostility in terms of resentment born out of the awareness of how much he shared with Orwell.³⁸ There may be some truth in this. Williams does let on his impatience in the fifties at finding Orwell "along every road that you moved" (namely: popular culture, reporting on ordinary life, socialism) (Williams, 1979: 384).³⁹ At the end of the interview, and under considerable pressure,⁴⁰ Williams's comments seem to have

during what Williams calls Orwell's "period of revolutionary anti-war socialism" (Williams, 1971: 63). Williams puts these positions down to 'the desperate pressures of the time' (Williams, 1971: 65). He speaks of 'readjustment' (Williams, 1971: 64), 'political adjustments' (Williams, 1971: 68). Williams now agrees with the New Left Review board that 'tiredness' cannot be a justification for political quietism, but also stresses England's special situation, in which the belief that prevailed was, "British society could be transformed through the conduct of the war" (Williams, 1979: 386). What this belief led to was "a crucial slippage from that position to social patriotism, in the sense which connects with a later Labourism and chauvinism" (Williams, 1979: 386). Williams adds, "Many people in my generation underwent that slippage" (Williams, 1979: 386).

³⁸ Inglis thus summarises Orwell's presence in Williams's life: "a literary sibling and unavoidable fellow-pedestrian with whom he had never been on the best of terms" (Inglis, 1995: 231). He stresses their similarities:

Both men wished to speak as directly as possible of bloody-minded old Britain, the horrible actuality of its class injustice, its somnambulism, its dead refusal to face up to its own awfulness. Both wanted to find a prose and a form which would accommodate these facts. Both wanted to live intensely the politics of everyday life *as politics*, and to write about them in a like manner. Both felt right through them the bonds which tied them to their history. (Inglis, 1995: 231)

Inglis concludes: "Orwell did and felt these things; but Williams repudiates him" (Inglis, 1995: 231). The source of Williams's 'obscure rancour' was, then, his "keen sense of just how alike Orwell's work and his own really were, and how unsolved and irreconcilable the difficulties with which Orwell grappled and which Williams saw so clearly were" (Inglis, 1995: 233). Inglis may be right in stating that Orwell and Williams had to face similar problems and it is true that they often articulated these problems in a similar way. However, their trajectories, and responses also differed significantly. Williams and Orwell came from completely different backgrounds (in class, education and politics), possessed different intellectual dispositions, and, as Inglis recognises, Williams's 'Welshness' was central in preventing his lapse into patriotism (Inglis, 1995: 233).

³⁹ It is possible that too much has been made of this common ground – and of Williams's 'resentment' (cf. Hitchens, 1999: 9) or 'jealousy' (Hitchens, 1999: 19) – at the expense of important differences. These have deserved less attention from critics who have used Orwell to criticise the English (New) Left, Williams's cultural studies, or both (see Thomas, 1985; Walzer, 2002; Hitchens, 1999). The problem with these three articles is that they all move *with* Orwell, by taking him at his word (e.g. Thomas, 1985: 420). Orwell's point of view becomes their own – the point of view of the liberal left-winger who takes issue with a certain idea of the Left (in this case represented by Williams), which it proceeds to discredit and displace, often to take its place as 'true dissent'. As Williams once noted, it is a point of view which cannot be separated from the form in which it is rendered. Indeed, the cornerstone of all three critics is the identity between Orwell's 'plain writing' and the 'absence of humbug' (Thomas: 1985, 431), which Thomas takes Williams to task for not allowing, and which he now takes up in his charges against Williams. In the end, it is not just that Williams is "such a good touchstone for the Left's reception of Orwell" (Thomas: 1985, 433), as Thomas declares, but also that Orwell is a good touchstone for the reception of Williams, the British New Left and cultural studies.

⁴⁰ Paul Thomas referred to the NLR interviewers as "these inquisitors" (Thomas: 1985, 433). Hitchens mentions the 'pressure' that Williams had been put to by the NLR 'questioners' (Hitchens, 1999: 17). In

become 'sharper', as the NLR board suggest (Williams, 1979: 391), culminating in his final dismissal, 'I cannot read him now' (Williams, 1979: 392).

In 1974, Williams prognosticated, "The direct political legacy of his work, though still substantial, is inevitably diminishing" (Williams, 1974: 8). In hindsight, this statement no doubt mirrors the undergoing political shift to the Left (though we can also see it as wishful thinking); but the next decade would prove Williams's prediction wrong. The Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher came into power in 1979, with what was largely (though still unacknowledged as such) a neoliberal mandate, which pledged hostility to the post-war welfare state and unconditional support for private enterprise. By the time the calendar approached 1984, Orwell's 'prophecy' had been catapulted to international fame, now in the context of unprecedented powerful media, which spared no means to promote what Alok Rai would later call "the Great Fuss" (Rai, 1988: x). Orwell was heralded not only as the champion of anti-totalitarianism by many Western intellectuals and East European dissidents,⁴¹ but also as a staunch supporter of Western free market: in 1983 he was the cover of *Time* magazine, and Norman Podhoretz did not hesitate to claim him "for the neoconservative perspective on the East-West conflict", concluding that, had he been alive, Orwell would have recognised that "the values both of liberty and equality fare better under capitalism than under socialism" (Podhoretz, 1983: 37).

The mainstream appropriation of Orwell by the Right was accompanied by a wealth of attempts to reclaim him back to the Left. Orwell's biographer, political scientist Bernard Crick, took on his "appointment as Orwell's protector" (Lucas, 2003: 126) to claim him to the socialist, Labourite Left of *Tribune* (Crick, 1992). Stephen Ingle, a Professor of politics, followed much the same path, but to claim Orwell to a working-class Left (Ingle, 1984; 1993).⁴² Confirming Orwell's place in the British socialist tradition (e.g. Ingle 1993: 95), he recommended Orwellian socialism (or 'Orwellism'), understood in relation to its 'working-class values', as a remedy for a demoralised, battered Labour Party (Ingle, 1993: 128), or a 'politics of decency' (Ingle 1993: 133). And yet, more critical voices had also become available: towards 1984, a group of British left-wingers

the 'Afterword' to this article, Colin MacCabe confirms this aspect: "he told me that he had found the whole process very psychically taxing" (Hitchens, 1999: 21).

⁴¹ In his biography, Bernard Crick noted the widespread circulation of *samizdat* versions of *Animal Farm* in the Soviet bloc (Crick, 1992: 450).

⁴² In this book, Ingle stresses Orwell's commitment to objectivity and working class values, with which he himself identifies (Ingle 1993: 2). He also links these values to Orwell's Christian or Anglican (even if individualistic) sentiment (Ingle 1993: 22-23), considering that Orwell's importance lies in the fact that he was a 'propagandist' of these values (Ingle 1993: 122).

grabbed the opportunity to take stock of Orwell's political influence in a volume entitled *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, edited by Christopher Norris and published by Lawrence and Wishart. In different ways and from different perspectives, the book's contributors called into question Orwell's received image on the left, insisting that the world in which his work was now being read – and celebrated – had completely changed. Orwell had come to embody the voice of orthodoxy and the establishment, and any praise for his 'independence of thought' could only be read as a bitter anachronism. The result was a collection of essays which scrutinised the uses Orwell was being put to, by treating him, in a post-structuralist manner, as a myth. Although the editor talks of the 'kidnapping' of Orwell by the right (Norris, 1984: 7), many of these essays actually address the *intrinsic* weaknesses of Orwell's works, "their deeper complicity with those who would so use them" (Norris, 1984: 7). Norris therefore proclaims the "need to demythologise Orwell so as to see more clearly the nature of that 'common-sense' ideology which lends itself so willingly to propaganda purposes", a task which can only be successfully carried out by way of 'theory' (Norris, 1984: 8) and by reading his texts 'against the grain' (Norris, 1984: 10). The topics addressed by these essays range from the use of Orwell's major texts in schools (Brown, 1984) to the bias and historical inaccuracies in his writings on the Spanish Civil War (Alexander, 1984; Stradling, 1984). This volume also brings to the surface some of the tensions felt *within* a Left which was undergoing a process of (often hesitant and confused) renewal, moving away from its 'old' working class traditions and towards the new 'social movements'. The articles on Orwell's treatment of women by feminist Beatrix Campbell and Deirdre Beddoe clearly follow that line (and in that link up with Daphne Patai's book, *Orwell's Mystique*, which appeared in the same year), as does, in a different way, Stuart Hall's essay on Orwell and the state (Hall, 1984).⁴³

The collapse of the Eastern bloc and the end of the Cold War saw another wave of reassessments. John Newsinger's *Orwell's Politics* (1999) sought to up-date Orwell for a post-communist world, by contending that (again, 'if he were alive today'), Orwell would be revelling in the collapse of Communism, but would also be alarmed at the advance of free market, neoliberal politics (Newsinger, 1999: ix). Now that his hostility to Stalin has been 'vindicated', Newsinger contends, Orwell can finally get a fair hearing on the left, which for this critic means accepting the lessons of his revolutionary

⁴³ Newsinger called this volume "an unholy alliance of feminists, cultural theorists and old fashioned Stalinists, dedicated to reversing his [Orwell's] influence" (Newsinger, 1999: 156).

position in Spain and his anti-Stalinism (Newsinger, 1999: 155). In much the same euphoric mood, and using a similar language, Christopher Hitchens felt encouraged to proclaim *Orwell's Victory* (2002, a book less provocatively entitled in America *Why Orwell Matters*). He is peremptory in ascribing to Orwell a unique and, at the time of writing, prescient understanding of 'the three great subjects of the twentieth century,' namely, imperialism, fascism and Stalinism (Hitchens 2002: 4).⁴⁴ Hitchens also lists the following issues raised by Orwell, which have been proved influential: the 'English question', which Hitchens associates with today's 'regional nationalism' and 'European integration'; Orwell's linguistic concerns, which have resurfaced in the debate on 'political correctness' and 'bureaucratic speech'; the interest in popular culture; the 'fascination' with 'objective or verifiable truth', a central problem in post-modernist theory; and, finally, his concern with the environment (Hitchens 2002: 8). To Orwell's prescient legacies, Hitchens adds post-colonial studies. Lacunae and faults include the failure to acknowledge 'the importance of the United States as an emerging dominant culture' (Hitchens 2002: 9), and the not always self-mastered prejudice against 'the coloured masses', Jews, women, intellectuals, and homosexuals (Hitchens 2002: 7). Hitchens grounds his book in the wish to 'extricate' Orwell "from a pile of saccharine tablets and moist hankies", i.e. from "sickly veneration and sentimental overpraise" (Hitchens 2002: 3). And yet, the portrait he delivers is not itself divested of such excesses. Orwell emerges as a resilient, independent mind, admirable for facing "the competing orthodoxies and despotisms of his day with little more than a battered typewriter and a stubborn personality" (Hitchens 2002: 6). As some critics have pointed out, ultimately at stake are Hitchens' own credentials as "the lonely voice of dissent", at a time he himself was under attack (cf. Croft, 2002).⁴⁵ His admiration for Orwell's

⁴⁴ Compare with Newsinger's three elements that marked Orwell out in the late 1930s, and are thus worthy of notice, namely: "his anti-Imperialism, his revolutionary socialism and, of course, his anti-Stalinism" (Newsinger, 1999: 47).

⁴⁵ The full quote reads: "Anyway, who would dare to argue with Christopher Hitchens? Like Orwell, Hitchens repeats the banal claims of orthodoxy disguised as the lonely voice of dissent" (Croft, 2002). Eagleton also addressed the affinities (and differences) between Orwell and Hitchens (Eagleton, 2003: 6). Another example is Scott Lucas:

Like Orwell, Hitchens had framed himself as an honourable representative of the left who had become disillusioned with his comrades, especially after 11 September. Like Orwell, Hitchens had created an essential 'Englishness' which he was humbly promoting. And, just as Orwell tried to protect himself through his praise of Charles Dickens, so Hitchens would use Orwell to place himself as the leader of a 21st century 'decency'. (Lucas, 2003: 131-132)

Lucas would develop this topic in his following book, *The Betrayal of Dissent: Beyond Orwell, Hitchens and the New American Century* (2004).

exposure of ‘pseudo-intellectuals’, as well as the denunciation of ‘intellectual hypocrisy’ (Hitchens 2002: 5), inevitably recall Hitchens’ own intellectual disputes in the wake of 9/11 (cf. Hitchens 2002: 9)⁴⁶.

This process of appropriation or ‘body-snatching’ has been typical of Orwell’s posthumous reputation, as John Rodden has demonstrated. Rodden calls it “assimilation through canonization” (Rodden, 2002: 30), which amounts to “the heightened determination of would-be political beneficiaries to gain exclusive possession of the Orwell halo” (Rodden, 2002: 28). In other words, as Podhoretz recognised, it is because Orwell is highly regarded that he becomes “well worth stealing” (Podhoretz, 1983: 30). Unsurprisingly, the periods in which this process became more intense have culminated in the “perception that the Orwell ‘industry’ had overheated and that Orwell had reached a ‘saturation level’” (Rodden, 2002: 50). This was manifestly the case between the late 1950s and early 1960s, and after the climactic excesses of 1984.

By 2001 Daniel Lea was reasserting the “telling stagnation in Orwell studies” (Lea, 2001: 58), which tended “to focus on established aspects of Orwell’s politics and personality, whilst contemporary theoretical readings, along poststructuralist or postmodernist lines, are virtually non-existent” (Lea, 2001: 58-59). The critics’ reliance on extra-textual ‘events’ (the year 1984, the collapse of the Eastern bloc,⁴⁷ Orwell’s list,⁴⁸ 9/11, Orwell’s centenary, the war on Iraq), is only a measure of that continuing ‘stagnation’. Two major factors have contributed to this state: first, his status as a ‘myth’ (cf. Norris, 1984), which means not so much that he continues up for grabs, but rather that there is (and has always been, as Alok Rai seems to believe)⁴⁹ a stable set of

⁴⁶ He mentions the way Orwell continues to be well-received in America by “those American writers and critics who valued English prose and political honesty”, and who now draw on Orwell’s diatribes on pacifists to condemn the stance of ‘affected neutrality’ that ‘intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals’ are perceived to be adopting after the 9/11 attacks (Hitchens 2002: 9).

⁴⁷ Newsinger, for instance, stresses that the downfall of communism in the early nineties was welcomed with the words ‘Down with Big Brother’ (Newsinger, 1999: ix).

⁴⁸ In 1996 the publication of an article in *The Guardian* on Orwell’s notorious ‘List’ to the IRD led to another wave of reactions from the Left. In his biography, Crick had already referred to a “notebook of suspects” that Orwell kept because he was concerned about the non-democratic influences of communists in many public bodies and services (Crick, 1992: 556). The names now made public included some of Orwell’s friends. In 2003, the discussion was taken again up (cf. Ash, 2003a; 2003b).

⁴⁹ In 1988, Alok Rai argued, about Orwell’s *oeuvre*, that “underlying the diversity, the heterogeneity and the paradox, there is a kind of unity” (Rai, 1988: 10). By treating Orwell as a ‘social myth’ (Rai, 1988: 10) and a ‘text’ (Rai, 1988: 13), this critic hopes to demonstrate that “some *essential* structure of feeling and ideas, some *apt* pattern of experience and emotion is represented or enacted within Orwell’s luminous trajectory” (Rai, 1988: 150, italics in original). This is to do with Orwell’s ‘truth’. Rai dismisses “the *Time-Life* and *Encounter* view of Orwell”, the “myth of Orwell the Cold War Crusader, an early recruit to the armies of the Free World” as ‘ludicrous’, to link him instead with “the ideological world of liberal social democracy” (Rai, 1988: 151).

meanings underlying the variety of his body of work and criticism (i.e. the myth's core) which continues to be appealing for readers and critics alike. The question of Orwell's relevance for today's world, which underpins every new critical contribution, including unsympathetic ones,⁵⁰ ultimately adds to this status, i.e. to Orwell 'the monument' (Croft, 2002: 15). Second, this 'stagnation' is also to do with the fact that the major problem of Orwell criticism – i.e. how to *read* him – remains either simply unidentified or unaccounted for. Even as accomplished a study as John Rodden's, first published in 1989, which signals the maturity (and, as he himself implies, a point of saturation) reached by Orwell criticism, only succeeds because it is able to sidestep this more complicated issue. Rodden certainly hit a nerve in drawing attention to Orwell's place in 'contemporary intellectual history',⁵¹ as his voluminous book (with a new edition in 2002) shows; however, his study is by and large descriptive and he fails to introduce any significant innovations in the prevailing modes of criticism.⁵²

The fact that criticism has been intertwined with the political controversy has overshadowed Orwell's fiction. Moreover, although his work straddles the gap between literature and politics, most critics still move within these confines, and are willing to go only as far as their professional allegiances and theoretical horizons (literary criticism, political theory) will allow. The tendency has been for studies to branch into two strands (with the accent falling on literature or politics). In other words, to praise Orwell for his politics has often meant to underestimate (or deny) the artistic motivation and literary artifice behind his work (which Orwell's 'honesty', 'authenticity' and near 'sainthood'

⁵⁰ See Newsinger (1999: x), Stephen Ingle (2006: 2-3), or even Scott Lucas (2004).

⁵¹ The list of intellectuals that Rodden compiled – ranging from a first generation of Orwell's contemporaries (including names like Julian Symons, George Woodcock and Mary Fyvel) to a second, post-war generation comprised by Irving Howe, Norman Podhoretz, Mary McCarthy, Kingsley Amis, among others (Rodden 2002: ix) – has not stopped growing. Influences of Orwell are still traceable today in a large number of public intellectuals – the examples of Christopher Hitchens, Jonathan Freedland and Timothy Garton Ash (the last two regular contributors to *The Guardian*) being the most obvious. Orwell's name continues to loom large in political and social commentary. It is a lingering reference in the work of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, regarding the topics of utopia and the surveillance society. In *Politics of Fear: Beyond Left and Right* (2005), a polemical piece of social commentary, Frank Furedi, another British sociologist, opens his 'Foreword' with a quote from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Furedi 2005: 1). The reference to Orwell continues to be automatic in regard to many other subjects, and is prone to successive actualisations, which involve different political quarters.

⁵² Rodden's approach still owes a lot to psychological understandings of 'reputation', as he himself concedes (Rodden 2002: xii). Despite his awareness of institutional factors, reputation is treated in terms of image projection, or the 'dynamics of image-making' – hence the deployment of terms like 'gallery', 'portrait' (Rodden 2002: xi) and 'intellectual heroism' (Rodden 2002: xii). Rodden's book, however, illustrates the perceived need for a more objectified, less emotional (whether hagiographic or hostile) mode of analysis. His academic 'objectivity' is only half-successful: he ultimately sides with Orwell's stance, by concluding that he was a 'true' intellectual (Rodden, 1998: 177-8), thereby becoming part of the 'map' he is describing.

appears to contradict). The foregrounding the literary aspect, on the other hand, has been frequently done at the expense of his politics (which are cut down to a 'mere' ethical-moral vision). These two positions need not be dramatically different, and critics often oscillate between the two. Stephen Ingle has recently revisited his assessment of Orwell (which had hitherto been fundamentally political) to conclude that, rather than a working-class socialist, as he had hitherto defended, Orwell was essentially a moralist (Ingle, 2006: 170). This shift is made possible, on the one hand, by placing the focus on Orwell's literary endeavour and by accepting his inconsistency as proper of a moralist (e.g. Ingle, 2006: 180). Ingle is now less prone to dismiss Orwell's literary ambitions, as well as the centrality of writing in his life. The belief in Orwell's 'political motivation', which had led him to reject Bernard Crick's suggestion that Orwell was looking for material for his writing in his forays among the poor and down-and-out (Ingle: 1993, 16), disappears. Now the focus falls on literary motivation, to the point of including Burma and Spain (Ingle, 2006: 13; 29; 69).⁵³ And yet, Ingle's shift is more apparent than real: Orwell's values (now regarded as part of a moral system) are still readily championed, and recommended to the general public, rather than the Labour Party. As Ingle points out, his reassessment is less a 'break with the tradition of Orwell scholarship' than a 'readjustment to our focus' (Ingle, 2006: 170). If Orwell-the-writer had been, in 1993, 'saved' by Orwell-the-socialist (cf. 1993, 35), now, it is Orwell-the-moralist that justifies this writer's presence in the literary canon (Ingle, 2006: 181). The proclamation of Orwell-the-moralist is therefore also the exaltation of Orwell-the-writer, for Ingle, 'two sides of the same coin' (2006, 170), and it ultimately aims at 'saving Orwell from himself' (Ingle, 2006: 161).⁵⁴ More importantly, this 'break' is

⁵³ Raymond Williams was one of the first to assert that "Orwell's original intention in going to Spain" was, quoting Orwell, "to gather materials for newspaper articles" (Williams, 1971: 54) and that it was only the contact with revolutionary Barcelona that made him want to fight (Williams, 1971: 55), a position which has often been badly received by some of Orwell's acolytes.

This is why biographical details like the reasons for going to Burma or Spain have become such hot points of contention. Williams's assertions

⁵⁴ Up until now Ingle had defended Orwell against both allegations (e.g. Ingle, 1993: 118) by foregrounding his politics (socialism), which he believed to be of a special kind – i.e. non-utopian, non-progressive, non-(even anti-) intellectual (Ingle, 1993: 114). Orwell's democratic socialism is now referred to as 'decency myth', and regarded as a *moral* rather than political construct (2006, 180). In striking contrast with his former position (e.g. 1993, viii), this critic now highlights Orwell's literary commitment and chooses to focus on his fictional, imaginative work, which is distinguished (not without difficulty) from non-fiction by way of "intentionality" (Ingle, 2006: 24). Raymond Williams was wary of this kind of distinction, which he considered under-theorised and still bound up with the 'naïve' separation between form and experience, with what he called 'a divided aesthetic' (Williams, 1971: 30). Within the rim of the former would belong all that is perceived as 'aesthetic' (or even literary); all that falls outside of that would be regarded as 'sociological' (cf. Williams, 1971: 36-37). Williams, nevertheless, considers this 'surface', 'conventional' distinction as secondary: the problem is not to tell

symptomatic of the limits of this kind of criticism. Ingle may have shifted to the other pole of the argument which is at the centre of Orwell's writing (politics versus literature), but he remains deeply immersed in that framework, which allows him to retain most of his analysis and reach conclusions which are not so different from the ones he had previously advanced.

Orwell's relationship with the literary establishment has not been a simple one. Despite his popularity, his ascendancy to the canon of twentieth century literature remains incomplete. Daniel Lea predicted that it would eventually take place, by virtue of the significance of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. However, Orwell's journalistic style and the difficulty in classifying his work in terms of genre have slowed down the process considerably (Lea, 2001: 10-11). Rodden had already noted these difficulties: even though *Animal Farm* is "a high school staple", Orwell's writings are "rarely encountered in more advanced courses" (Rodden, 2002: 18). One reason for this is the fact that "a fable and a dystopia do not fit easily into standard fiction categories" (Rodden, 2002: 18). But reasons also include his heterogeneous reception, which spans "the split among 'highbrow', 'middlebrow', and 'lowbrow' audiences" (Rodden, 2002: 20), and "the problematic relationship between the man and the works" (Rodden, 2002: 20). Orwell 'the fiction writer' is normally associated with a readership which favours "non-experimental, more accessible writings" (Rodden, 2002: 20), and is therefore more likely to be found in more marginal courses on 'Thirties writing' (Rodden, 2002: 19).

Indeed, apart from *Animal Farm* and a selection of essays, Orwell's work has been severely criticised on aesthetic and literary grounds. When they first came out, his thirties novels failed to attract attention. As Rodden points out, he was first and foremost regarded as "an 'old-fashioned' Edwardian novelist and a regular contributor (until 1935 as 'Eric Blair') to the *Adelphi* and *New English Weekly*" (Rodden, 2002: 42). As early as 1940, Q. D. Leavis was calling his novels "those dreary books" and advising Orwell to give up being a novelist to become a literary critic; she strongly believes, "nature didn't intend him to be a novelist" (Leavis, 1940: 175). Irving Howe was reluctant to call *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a novel (Howe, 1961: 236), assenting, however, "the last thing Orwell cared about when he wrote *1984*, the last thing he should have cared about, was literature" (Howe, 1961: 237). John Wain similarly

apart which of the writings Orwell intended to offer as imaginative, and which he intended to offer as 'factual' (even when that intention is stated). Rather, as Williams points out, it is "the relation between 'fact' and 'fiction' which matters, an uncertain relation which is part of the whole crisis of 'being a writer'" (Williams, 1971: 41).

dismissed his novels – “he was a novelist who never wrote a satisfactory novel” (Wain 1974: 90), and his novels are read not for being ‘imaginative work’ (Wain 1974: 100) or for ‘any specifically literary quality’ (Wain 1974: 102), but for their ideas. Similarly, Sean O’Casey told Gollancz that Orwell had “about as much chance of reaching the stature of Joyce as a tit had of reaching that of an eagle” (Rodden, 2002: 42). John Casey offered devastating criticism: “as a novelist he was not even of the second rank”; as far as *Animal Farm* is concerned, he refuses comparisons with Swift, by declaring “much of the writing inept and stilted”, the allegory “is obvious and its development mechanical”; *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is “at least as thinly written”, “characterisation is minimal”, “Orwell had no psychological insight whatever”, and the affair between Winston and Julia is “trivial and perfunctory” (Casey, 1971: 349). More recently, introducing a collection of essays on *Animal Farm*, Harold Bloom considered Orwell an essayist and satirist rather than a ‘storyteller’, and dismissed his fable, because its ‘historical aspect’ has ‘faded’ since the collapse of the Soviet Union, as “children’s literature” (Bloom, 1999: 1, 2).

From a different academic and political stance, American critic (based in Birmingham) Scott Lucas has attributed Orwell’s popularity not to his literary achievement, but to his “central position in the political and cultural context of the Cold War” and, especially more recently, in “the promotion of him as an archetypal representative of ‘Englishness’” (Lucas, 2003: 117), often used as “a comforting icon of superiority over continental Europe” (Lucas, 2003: 131). For Lucas, Orwell obviously lacked literary merit: “Orwell’s reputation was sustained because, in the simplified, protracted Cold War environment of ‘Good’ versus ‘Evil’, literary ‘quality’ was a secondary consideration” (Lucas, 2003: 121). He considers that the renewed tendencies to follow the literary route are only a hopeless attempt to ‘rescue’ him from the threat of becoming “a Cold War anachronism” (Lucas, 2003: 129).

Robert A. Lee’s *Orwell’s Fiction* (1969) was a rare exception to this major trend. As the American critic noted (and decried), “Orwell’s force as a political commentator has been so pervasive that his art has suffered a unique fate: When his fiction is considered, in a curious reversal of normal critical procedure, it is often used only to gloss his nonfiction” (Lee, 1969: xi). Lee reverses this criticism, to propose that “the novels reveal the political insights – if that is what we are to look for in Orwell – in a more fully developed way than do his nonfictional writings” (Lee, 1969: xii). Rejecting biographical criticism, he adopts a method that is ‘unabashedly textual’ (Lee, 1969:

xvi). He also foregrounds a thematic approach which centres on what he believes to be Orwell's two major topics: "the problem of the individual conscience versus public demands" (with *Homage to Catalonia* as a turning point in the way he understood this opposition) (Lee, 1969: xiii); the "theme of corrupted language" and lack of communication (Lee, 1969: xiii).

The problem of how to *read* Orwell was only seriously brought up for the first time in Raymond Williams's 1971 book, which remains one of the best critical studies on Orwell. Williams brought to the scene a theoretical baggage that had been (and, to a large extent, still is) absent from most criticism. The book was written for the series 'Fontana Modern Masters', under the editorship of Frank Kermode, and, as we have seen, is the result of a complex engagement with what appeared to be a complex figure. Williams acknowledges Orwell's achievements, but also calls into question some of the ideas which had by then become established. He still engages with the political controversy, addressing what had been typical biographical issues.⁵⁵ But it is his approach to literature (a sociological approach which pays special attention to forms in their relationship with social history – the cornerstone of his 'cultural studies') which, however, makes this a unique contribution. In his 1974 introduction, Williams explained that at the root of his first engagement with this writer had been his dissatisfaction with existing criticism, which would either concentrate on Orwell's writings and dismiss the political controversy surrounding them or fail to see beyond it. He felt both approaches were amiss:

Orwell was neither traitor nor liberator, neither truth-teller nor slanderer. Rather, very deep in his work were contradictions and paradoxes – including truth and falsehood, humanity and inhumanity – that he had both articulated and been limited by, not only in his own remarkable development but also in regard to his generation as a whole. I thus felt that a different kind of analysis was necessary (...) (Williams, 1974: 4)⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Williams foregrounds, for instance, Orwell's involvement in the British Empire, but detects a 'complex response' to imperialism, linked with an "uncertain and ambiguous relationship to England" (Williams, 1971: 9). He also presents some of Orwell's options – such as going to Burma or his stint in Paris (Williams, 1971: 9) – as more conventional and typical of his age and class than normally conceded. On the other hand, Williams also praises *Homage to Catalonia* (Williams, 1971: 59): he highlights Orwell's period in Spain, to argue that it made him a 'revolutionary socialist' (Williams, 1971: 60).⁵⁵ Finally, he defends Orwell's work at the BBC – "where he very genuinely tried to keep the propaganda to India 'decent'" (Williams, 1971: 66).

⁵⁶ In *Culture and Society* (1958), Williams had already made Orwell's paradox central to his analysis (Williams, 1961: 277). In the 1979 interview to *New Left Review*, he insists that it was Orwell's 'complexity and contradictoriness' that he had been trying to address (Williams, 1979: 384).

As the title of his book indicates, Williams tried to do this through the exploration of what he called ‘Orwell’ the character – i.e. “the man inside and outside the experience”, first developed in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Williams, 1971: 50; 51). For him, ‘Orwell’ is a literary creation, a product of the convergence between a specific biography, a given ‘structure of feeling’, and a set of problems with which the individual/writer is confronted. Orwell’s development into a writer is therefore brought to the fore, though not in a way that diminishes his politics. The emphasis falls on the *relationship* between literature and society, not, as commonly is the case, their separation and mutual exclusion. As the editors of *New Left Review* noted, the book “unites ‘politics’ and ‘letters’ perhaps more closely” than anything Williams had written (Williams, 1979: 384). Indeed, Williams’s analyses of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* go far beyond what had already been said and written. Although he concedes that these books had become part of “the exploitation of literature by the politics of the cold war” (Williams, 1971: 71), he offers a more nuanced picture. Both works are ‘projections’ of the Orwell figure, but they also have a ‘consciousness’ of their own, which comprises positive and negative elements. The problem he identifies in them is not the books’ politics *per se*, but Orwell’s “incomplete humanity” (Williams, 1971: 79), i.e. the fact that he drew upon a narrow range of experience to create “situations and people that, in comparison with his own written observations, are one-dimensional and determined” (Williams, 1971: 81). In Williams’s words: “This is not primarily a matter of politics, but of a more extended experience of self and society” (Williams, 1971: 81); it is, in short, a *literary* problem, of how experience is handled to produce literary works and become literature. In 1974, Williams reaffirmed the need to keep together the study of Orwell’s practice as a writer and the political controversy attending his work (Williams, 1974: 2). He stressed that “most of the ways in which he has been studied are the ways that he energetically practiced”, suggesting, in addition, that these ways may not be entirely satisfactory (Williams, 1974: 3). In the end, following up on this idea, he turns to the need to study Orwell’s ‘mode of discourse’ (Williams, 1974: 9):

One of Orwell’s most powerful effects was a particular mode of attention to politics, and a mode of writing about it. It cannot be assumed that these modes are simply detachable and transferable; indeed, it may be that they are not part of the solution but part of the problem. It is especially in this area that useful further study of Orwell’s work can be expected. (Williams, 1974: 8-9)

In 1988, Alok Rai took up this challenge, with some successful results in his *Orwell and the Politics of Despair: A Critical Study of the Writings of George Orwell*. The influence of Williams is evident throughout the book, not least in its presentation as “a literary-critical account of George Orwell’s work and its relationship to his life” (Rai, 1988: ix) which refuses to neglect “the politics of his reputation” (Rai, 1988: x). Rai stresses how difficult it is “to constitute Orwell as an object of critical enquiry”, that is to say, to “focus critically on the writings themselves” (Rai, 1988: 3), a difficulty which he refers to as “the Orwell problem” (Rai, 1988: 1). Rai identifies three sources of this problem: (1) Orwell’s ‘honesty’ and the ‘transparency’ of his prose renders useless the recourse to traditional literary tools, which are not suitable to deal with the ‘obvious’ (Rai, 1988: 4);⁵⁷ (2) traditional forms of literature had inbuilt in them a certain distanciation from the world; however, because it is “contemporary political literature” (Rai, 1988: 4), Orwell’s work “appears to be coextensive with a historical world” (Rai, 1988: 4), so that there is no immediate domain outside it (as there used to be in more aesthetic-orientated literature) (Rai, 1988: 4-5); (3) his work reaches the reader/critic in an already interpretative mould, i.e. “with suggestions as to how that historical world and consequently itself – the literature – ought to be read” (Rai, 1988: 4). Indeed, it is far from the case, as Scott Lucas has suggested, that Orwell “has left far too much unsaid for others to lay claim to after his death” (Lucas, 2003: 136). Rather, his work comprises an excess of ‘saying’, i.e. a bulky body of non-fiction which is committed (in a straightforward, honest way) to guide readers and explain his fiction; in other words, to *externally* control the reading process. The adherence to this ‘voice’ (“his disarmingly available presence” – Rai, 1988: 4) ultimately disables the critic.⁵⁸

In order to read Orwell’s work, one needs therefore to create “a critical space” (Rai, 1988: 5), i.e. a space which is gained from the critic’s distance⁵⁹ from the ‘deceptive

⁵⁷ Rai recognises that literary-critical methods are not worthless, but they have to be ‘adjusted’ to Orwell’s work. He also concedes that this is the case of all literature, “a critical perspective has to be struggled for”, but believes that “Orwell presents some rather special problems” (Rai, 1988: 4). I think that this proclivity to approach Orwell as ‘a special case’ is itself part of the problem.

⁵⁸ Even in his short biography of Orwell (2003a), which is far from hagiographic, Scott Lucas uses Orwell’s own assertions to contradict and censure him (the last chapter relies heavily on his quotes). The limitations of this practice can be appreciated in the e-mail exchange between Scott Lucas and DJ Taylor published in *The Guardian* (Lucas and Taylor, 2003).

⁵⁹ Two other factors have been at the root of this chronic lack of critical distance in Orwell studies. First, the preponderance, especially at the beginning, of laudatory studies, often written by friends and acquaintances, invariably connected with his ‘clarity of prose’, ‘honesty’ and ‘decency’. Orwell could count on his friends to ‘rescue’ him (even from himself). Second, Orwell rapidly became the touchstone whereby the left would prove its democratic credentials, in other words, whereby it could define itself (whether under the banner of ‘ethical socialism’, democratic socialism, anarchism, libertarian socialism,

transparency’ of his writings, their ‘imbrication’ with the historical world and Orwell’s ‘self-interpretations’ (Rai, 1988: 7).⁶⁰ This kind of emphasis on “the autonomous and factitious nature of literature” is, however, merely ‘tactical’, ‘a heuristic strategy’ that seeks to avoid “the naïve literalism of less sophisticated critics” (Rai, 1988: 5) – of the kind found in Lionel Trilling’s essay on *Homage to Catalonia*, which reduces criticism to “the condition of paraphrase: to saying what, it must be assumed, the ‘truthful’ work has said already” (Rai, 1988: 6).⁶¹ Besides the usual ‘suspension of disbelief’ which literature requires (Rai, 1988: 8), this critic also proposes “a suspension of belief”, which he sees as the only alternative to hagiography (Rai, 1988: 8). The main problem is, therefore, one of “plausibility”. Rai’s solution is to refuse to give in to it, by foregrounding the question of ‘mediation’ (i.e. of ‘authorial consciousness’) instead of ‘reality’ (which tends to reduce reading to a matter of ‘correspondence’) (Rai, 1988: 9). In the end, it is an ‘act of violence’ that is called for:

With work that is as subtly ingratiating as Orwell’s, criticism must become an act of violence, delicate or brutal as the need arises, but determined anyway to

Trotskyism or one form or another of liberal social democracy) in opposition to the communist/Stalinist left. Any open criticism of Orwell would be automatically dismissed as doctrinaire and biased – in Lucas’ words, “as the rambling of Marxist cranks” (Lucas, 2003: 120) – and carried little or no credibility. Criticising Orwell could earn the critic the label of ‘totalitarian’ or ‘communist’.

⁶⁰ These aspects can defeat even the most critical of assessments, as can be seen in relation to Cruise O’Brien, whose political critique of Orwell ultimately clashes against (and is dissolved by) his much-admired prose. After suggesting the damage that Orwell has caused the Left, this critic gets caught up in the general admiration for “that spare, tough prose”, “that clear eye” (O’Brien, 1965: 35), which makes him contradictorily declare: “The main reason why many intellectuals accepted the truth of Orwell’s accusations is that so many of these accusations were true, and *the lucidity of Orwell’s prose made their truth inescapable*” (O’Brien, 1965: 32, my emphasis). If truth is inbuilt in ‘prose’, it follows that any kind of challenge will have to come from outside the text (i.e. biography, stated intentions and political statements – which, incidentally Orwell lavishly provided). This is confirmed by Cruise O’Brien’s remark that the only alternative is to ‘question’ Orwell’s “impartiality and therefore his right to judge” – O’Brien, 1965: 33) – a possibility which is likely to bounce back against the ‘clarity’/‘truth’ of his prose. What is at stake here is not the mere recourse to a rhetoric device (which would be easily dismantled), but the critic’s inability to find a position *within Orwell’s work* from which to read ‘against the grain’. Englishness is another obstacle to criticism. Despite all his objections, Cruise O’Brien concedes that Orwell’s ‘truths’ have also made the English left “intellectually more scrupulous” and his ‘character’ as ‘an English conservative eccentric’ is found ‘attractive’ and thought to have “done much to make English life more decent” (O’Brien, 1965: 32-33).

⁶¹ “George Orwell and the Politics of Truth”, Trilling’s essay, does represent, as Williams announces, one of the best examples of the case for Orwell as “the man who told the truth” (Williams, 1974: 6). Orwell’s ‘clarity of his prose’ has been widely regarded as an indispensable feature of Orwell’s work, inseparable from his critical faculties and, by extension, his politics. In his 1993 study, Stephen Ingle stated that the ‘quality’ of Orwell’s writing “provided him with a ready means of communicating successfully to a very wide readership” for specifically political purposes (Ingle: 1993, viii). Other critics have expressed their admiration for Orwell’s pamphleteer qualities, for Michael Walzer a sign of his willingness to be ‘connected to the people’ and his times (Walzer 2002: 130). From a less sympathetic standpoint, Robert Stradling has connected this feature with Orwell being “a self-confessed propagandist” (Stradling 1984: 111).

seize that which the work itself is reluctant to yield, instead of politely or gratefully accepting what the work is proffering anyway, and so declining into superfluity, mumbling about ‘truth’. (Rai, 1988: 9)

This ‘violence’ also entails an act of strategic engagement with the double ‘nature’ of Orwell’s work. As Rai concedes, “anyone who wishes to write on Orwell must be willing to be both ‘aesthetic’ and ‘political’”; however, it is important that the critic retains their distance, namely, by “responding ‘aesthetically’ where the work itself invites a ‘political response’, and ‘politically’ when the work is itself ‘aesthetic’” (Rai, 1988: 9). His approach to literature, therefore, is careful not to cut off the links between the works and the culture of which they are a part:

(...) it may well be the case that there is an incommensurability between Orwell’s purely literary achievement and his undeniable cultural importance. But instead of being embarrassed by this disproportion, we might recognise in it an opportunity for a more wide-ranging, a more penetrating investigation into the modes, the processes whereby a social and cultural order expresses and learns to recognise itself. (Rai, 1988: 12)

In words that evoke Christopher Norris’ treatment of Orwell as a ‘myth’ (and this critic’s approach to poststructuralism⁶²), Rai concludes: “Because, of course, finally it is ‘Orwell’ that is the text, and Orwell is only *one* of its authors” (Rai, 1988: 13).

The interest in Orwell, though cut to a much smaller size, has survived into our days and in much the same forms as before. Even after the twenty volumes of Peter Davison’s *Complete Works of George Orwell* (1986-1998), Orwell’s work continues to see new editions.⁶³ As John Rodden anticipated almost twenty years ago (Rodden, 2002: 50), critical attention has turned again to his life, producing a proliferation of

⁶² For Christopher Norris, the challenge posed to ‘theory’ is finding a way out of Orwell’s “commonsense empiricist idiom”, which roots him in consensus politics, without disposing of what he considers to be one of the bases of a ‘socialist critique’, namely, “a knowledge independent of language, ideology and politics” (Norris, 1984: 8-9).

⁶³ Based on Davison’s *Complete Works*, Penguin Classics has started to publish a new series in 2001, which comprises one volume with the complete novels (Orwell, 2001f), and four volumes organised thematically, covering what have now become the staple topics of Orwell’s criticism: *Orwell in Spain* (2001c), *Orwell’s England* (2001d), *Orwell and the Dispossessed* (2001e) and *Orwell and Politics* (2001b). Orwell’s writings on the Spanish Civil War appeared again in 2007, the 70th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War, under the title *Fighting in Spain*, now as part of the series ‘Great Journeys’ (Orwell, 2007). Finally, an edition of Orwell’s writings for *Tribune* has also been published (Anderson, 2006), featuring a foreword by former leader of the Labour Party, Michael Foot, who was editor of *Tribune* between 1948 and 1952.

biographies which, though less hagiographic, continue to buttress his well-established reputation.⁶⁴

Conclusion

In one of the least sympathetic reviews of Forster's work, Montgomery Belgion expressed his misgivings in terms of "what it is Mr Forster stands for" (Belgion, 1934: 58). For him, it all amounts to a question of values: Forster is proclaimed "a man in some mental confusion" (Belgion, 1934: 63) and many of his values are deemed "the wrong ones" (Belgion, 1934: 73). Belgion is writing for the *Scrutiny*, from a conservative standpoint; at stake is the value of literature and of the culture that Forster stands for – liberalism. It similarly can be said that Orwell criticism has ultimately been about what he 'stands for'. His 'values', however, are more often than not readily translated into politics. This difference, albeit a superficial one (by and large, it depends on the approach adopted), cannot be missed out when considering Forster and Orwell criticism together, and reflects the distinctness of their respective creative works: Orwell, as a political writer; Forster, as a novelist.

In a famous attempt to justify his writing (the product of trying to 'make politics into art'), Orwell (almost apologetically) declared that 'political writing' emerges in response to an age of warfare and political propaganda, when the individual's liberties are being threatened (cf. Orwell, 2000a: 3). Implied in this view, as Raymond Williams noted, is the idea that politics is always *external* to literature – in fact, that it is always an external *imposition* on literature.⁶⁵ The underlying assumption, as Williams points

⁶⁴ Michael Shelden's authorised biography (1991) was followed by Jeffrey Meyers' *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation* (2000); Gordon Bowker's *George Orwell* (2003); Scott Lucas' short biographical study, *Orwell* (2003); and D. J. Taylor's *Orwell: The Life* (2003). The latter won the Whitbread Biography Award, in recognition of Orwell's ongoing reputation in his centenary. Taylor's book marks the attempt to shift critical interest to the literary pole, again – just as Peter Davison's *George Orwell: A Literary Life* (1996), a coda to the *Complete Works* had attempted.

⁶⁵ This idea derives from what Williams called a 'divided aesthetics' (Williams, 1971: 30), which had been forming in Europe, especially between the 1880s and 1890s, to culminate in the distinction between 'writing for form' (the aesthetic option favoured during the 1920s) and 'writing for content' (the present tendency, in the 1930s). This has often resulted in an "aesthetic attitude towards *art*" (rather than an 'aesthetic attitude towards life'), a stance which assumes that art can be enclosed in itself, cut off from the world around it, and which, for this critic, has had real, long-lasting effects:

We can see, looking back, how convenient it was (how convenient it often still is) to put literature into a compartment in which, to be true to itself, it should have no direct concern with social reality. This suited the people who despised literature as impractical but who in any case wanted no independent scrutiny, of any kind, of the society they were actively directing and creating. (...) But then the apparent opposition – the people who said they valued literature – had in practice reduced it to a safe area and, moreover, were teaching attitudes that would limit its uses to touching and tasting. (Williams, 1971: 38)

out, is that there was a time in the past when this was not so (Williams, 1971: 35). Forster's fictional work, written well before the politicised thirties, would appear to illustrate this point, as an instance of 'pure' literature. It is clear, however, that the relationship between 'literature' and the 'world' was already a central concern in his work. So much so that critics perceived it as a problem: as Philip Gardner noted, "the co-existence of fantasy and realism (their ratio varying from book to book) has sometimes been a stumbling-block for critics of Forster" (Gardner, 1973: 15). Reviewers of *Howards End* lamented that Forster seemed to have turned to 'life' instead of 'fantasy' (Gardner, 1973: 16) and *A Passage to India* further divided critics between its "topical relevance" and its "more enduring human and literary qualities" (Gardner, 1973: 6).⁶⁶ On the whole, as Bradbury pointed out, "much English criticism has emphasized Forster's qualities as a *social* novelist, whereas American criticism has tended to emphasize his qualities as a *romance* novelist" (Bradbury, 1966: 10). Close reading, 'symbol-hunting' (Bradbury, 1966: 12), and a focus on metaphysical and religious issues have dominated the American reception of Forster, whereas the meaning and significance of his liberal culture has been a more salient interest in England.⁶⁷

And yet, no matter how congenial Forster appeared to be to these types of reading – which could overlook the politics of colonial India as much as those of a class-ridden England – there were limits to what they could achieve. As Jeremy Tambling put it, "more has been got into the novels than is often assumed" (Tambling: 1995: 2), which is to say, *too much* has often been excluded, as subsequent gay and queer, postcolonial and feminist critics have demonstrated. Ever since the eighties, Forster's texts have been ransacked for ends other than liberal-humanist-endorsed close reading, and if he continues to be read for his Englishness and the values of liberalism (which tend to

⁶⁶ Gardner himself refers to the political discussions that *A Passage to India* raised as "topical reactions" (Gardner, 1973: 23). This duality runs through Forster's criticism, taking different forms, such as the distinction between the novelist and the story teller (Gardner, 1973: 15; 26), or the tension, in his work, between realism and 'mysticism' (or 'poetry') (Woolf, 1973a: 321; 323), 'the mystical' and the sociological' (Richards, 1966: 19), "the area of social observation and comedy, and the area of symbolic romance" (Bradbury, 1966: 10).

⁶⁷ In America, the elements of 'romance' and 'fantasy' were largely favoured: Criticism therefore turned to issues such as "myth, archetype and symbol" (Gardner, 1973: 34). Bradbury also decries the trend, especially in American criticism, towards textual analysis: "the current mechanical fashion of symbol-hunting" (Bradbury, 1966: 12), noting how it often "pays little attention to the life the work refers to, the life invigorated and interpreted in it" (Bradbury, 1966: 12). Forster's much-noted 'elusiveness' seemed to lent itself to that kind of analysis – which, as Gardner pointed out, often treated the novels as if they "existed separately, each in a vacuum" (Gardner: 1973: 18).

overlap), his reputation today rests no less on recent, alternative critical trends. Reading Orwell in this way – against the grain – has been notably more difficult, and not just because of the mythologizing racket surrounding his figure. Forster’s elusiveness, so often decried by critics, has proved an inexhaustible source of new readings; Orwell’s ‘clarity’ of prose, so often praised, has proved a major hurdle. However, the issue cannot simply be settled by dismissing Orwell as a less accomplished author (however much evidence we may find to support this).

The study of literary works hinges, for its success, on having the right critical tools at hand. This has been best illustrated by Raymond Williams’s approach to Orwell, one of the first studies to recognise and address the need to develop such tools. Williams’s work on Orwell was part of a wider challenge to traditional modes of criticism (at first especially directed at literary criticism), a challenge which rapidly extended to other academic areas (such as sociology and communication) and went on to attain considerable success. In many respects, literature has been left behind in this process. Nevertheless, Williams’s project of cultural studies continues to offer important insights to the study of literature. It is to them, and the way they can contribute to a cultural studies approach to literature – one which owes as much to Williams as to authors like Pierre Macherey, Alan Sinfield and Pierre Bourdieu – that I wish to turn in my next chapter.

Chapter Two

Cultural Studies and Literature

The relationship between literature and cultural studies has been a difficult one. To a certain extent, cultural studies originated as a critical response to ‘English’ (understood as a pedagogic and social project), to which it sought to present a radical alternative. Fifty years on, we are now in a better position to assess the successes and failures of such an alternative. This I propose to do, first, by offering a critical overview of cultural studies, its history and conflicting projects; then, by exploring a number of contributions which (from within cultural studies or related positions) have concerned themselves with finding new ways of approaching literature that are both antagonistic to traditional criticism and committed to emancipatory social projects. In a first moment, I wish to consider the place occupied by literature in British cultural studies, concentrating on Raymond Williams’s and Alan Sinfield’s cultural materialism. I will then look at Pierre Macherey’s theory of literary production and Pierre Bourdieu’s work on the cultural and literary field. My intention is to map out some of the issues that have been shaping the sociological study of literature, but also to overcome what I perceive to be its limitations. For that purpose I will draw upon Pierre Macherey’s later work as well as Alain Badiou’s philosophical writings. My aim is twofold: to challenge the bias against literature that dominates in certain quarters of cultural studies; to release the radical potential of literary analysis that cultural studies has not always been able to release.

2.1. Cultural Studies: an intellectual practice

The history of cultural studies has been an issue of contention, stimulating a plurality of accounts. There are many traditions (often emerging simultaneously in different places),¹

¹ See, for example, Lawrence Grossberg et al. (1992), Nick Couldry (2000), Toby Miller (2001) and Andrew Milner (2002). Richard Maxwell has presented a (very debatable) diagram of global cultural studies,

but it has become common practice to trace its beginnings to the late-fifties and early-sixties in Britain around the figures of Richard Hoggart, E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall (Edgar and Sedgwick, 1999; Miller, 2001; Hartley, 2003). Another common gesture has been to foreground the work developed at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham from 1964 onwards under the direction of Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall.² Because cultural studies has reached a stage of relative institutionalisation³, which has entailed the endorsement of certain areas and topics at the expense of others and its widespread as an academic discipline,⁴ the tendency has been to champion a historical version that justifies (and naturalises) such a

reproduced in Miller's book. There are arguments for alternative and separate traditions. In the eighties, for instance, the American Janice Radway was reading popular literature (the romance) within an anthropological frame. She shared some concerns and methods, such as an ethnographic approach, with the Birmingham centre (Radway, 1991). Different traditions and developments separate British from American cultural studies. In the account of Mary Pileggi and Cindy Patton, "American sociology and philosophy turned a blind eye to one another and left a good portion of twentieth-century social thought to the dogs – that is, to mongrel trans-disciplines like cultural studies, or sub-departments of literature in which more 'theory' was read than 'literature'" (Pileggi and Patton, 2003: 315). They add: "Cultural studies – and there are national variants that emerged simultaneously and in dialogue – made tremendous sense as an intellectual space in which to calibrate non-disciplinary Continental thought to increasing discipline-bound universities in the US and the UK." (Pileggi and Patton, 2003: 315). In the US, cultural studies developed within communications departments and found a home in "the emergent minority studies programmes" (Pileggi and Patton, 2003: 316).

² A first-person narrator of this story has been Stuart Hall. See, for example, his paper delivered at the 1990 Illinois conference, in which he describes how feminism and race interrupted the history of British Cultural Studies (Hall, 1996a: 268). In response to this paper, Charlotte Brunsdon has referred to the moment of feminism at the CCCS in the 1970s as "interruptions interrupted" (Brunsdon, 1996: 279). See also Stuart Hall interviewed by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal in *Radical Philosophy* (1997).

³ In 1980, Stuart Hall situated the institutionalisation of Cultural Studies in "the 1960s and later" (Hall, 1980b: 58). Hartley has situated it much later, by singling out two of its main landmarks – the launching of its first journal in the mid 1980s and the organisation of the first international cultural studies conference in 1990. Both the institutionalisation and internationalisation of cultural studies have been problematic. See, for example, Hartley's brief account of some of the problems involved in the formation of an international Association for Cultural Studies, finally launched at the 2002 Crossroads conference in Tampere (Hartley, 2003: 9-10).

⁴ Stuart Hall has from early on insisted that cultural studies is not a discipline, preferring to refer to it as an "emergent field of study", and stressing its interdisciplinary nature (Hall et al., 1980: 7). Others have referred to it as 'anti-disciplinary' (Grossberg et al., 1992: 2), 'interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary' (Grossberg et al., 1992: 4). Katz has referred to *postmodern* cultural studies as a "(post)discipline" (Katz 1997: § 21), stressing the need for a critical cultural studies to position itself differently on this plane (Katz, 1997: § 60). On an equally critical vein, and having especially in mind the 'institutionalization' of cultural studies and a certain American hegemony, Mulhern has called it a "tendency-discipline" (Mulhern, 2000: 132), a 'project-discipline' (Mulhern, 2000: 156), or even simply a 'discipline' (Mulhern, 2000: 155 – writing about Grossberg, this critic even uses the phrase 'his discipline' – Mulhern, 2000: 134). Nick Couldry has rejected the notion that cultural studies is 'above disciplinarity' (Couldry, 2000: 8). Conceding that it is 'a distinctive discipline', he calls for the need to define its method (Couldry, 2000: 9). Fred Inglis, on the other hand, has preferred to refer to it as 'studies', rather than a discipline (Inglis, 1993: 227). Far from a terminological whim, this question touches on the kind of project that is being defended or 're-imagined', as Andrew Milner's discussion makes plain (Milner, 2002: 3-4).

development. Authors like John Hartley have conceived of the history of cultural studies as one of gradual expansion and growing success, its centre being the Anglophone world, or ‘the triple-A axis of the Anglo-American-Australian region’ (Hartley, 2003: 7). This perspective, however, runs the risk of underestimating (or even obliterating) alternative formations developed both in other geographical locations, under different socio-historical conditions, and within the same ones.⁵ While it is undeniable that cultural studies has experienced a marked expansion over the past twenty years, it is important to acknowledge that this has been done by way of continual contestation. It is not within the scope of the present work to produce an exhaustive critical account of this process. I am specifically concerned with the formation known as ‘British cultural studies’ (Turner, 1996; Morley and Robins, 2001), which has more direct bearings on my own work.

By the account of one of its major figures, Raymond Williams, cultural studies was born out of an emerging structure of feeling which became fully recognisable in post-war Europe. Referring specifically to its theoretical linings, Williams has referred to it as a ‘new kind of convergence’ (Williams, 1995: 12) which took place on two levels. First, it brought together aspects of what hitherto had been incompatible positions, namely the idea of culture as an “informing spirit” (typical of an idealist position) and the concept of “lived culture” (characteristic of a materialist position). According to Williams the focus was now to fall on a materialist-derived notion of “a whole social order”. The new position adopts the idealist emphasis on ‘a whole social order’, but articulates it with a materialist emphasis on production:

(...) it differs from it in its insistence that ‘cultural practice’ and ‘cultural production’ (...) are not simply derived from an otherwise constituted social order but are themselves major elements in its constitution. It then shares some elements with [the traditionally idealist position], in its emphasis on cultural practices as (though now among others) *constitutive*. But instead of the ‘informing spirit’ which was held to constitute all other activities, it sees culture as the *signifying system* through which necessarily (though among other means)

⁵ More or less independent strands of cultural studies have developed all over the world, in East and South East Asia, Scandinavia, the Iberian Peninsula, Latin America and South Africa. The influence of the Anglophone branch varies in each case and has to be inflected with local formations and historical contexts. As Lawrence Grossberg has pointed out, while there may be a generally recognised debt to British cultural studies, it is reductive to refer all existing varieties to it (1992: 17-18).

a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored.
(Williams, 1995: 12-13, emphasis in original)

On a second level, this new convergence brought together the understandings of culture as “a whole and distinctive way of life”, developed within comparative anthropology and sociology, and as “the active cultivation of the mind” (Williams, 1995: 11), its activities and, more broadly, “all the ‘signifying practices’ – from language through the arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion and advertising” (Williams, 1995: 13). Emerging from this set of (con)junctions and a new conceptual framing (what Williams calls “a sociology of a new kind” – Williams, 1995: 14), cultural studies is defined as a ‘branch of general sociology’, though this is understood more in the sense of “a distinctive mode of entry into general sociological questions than in the sense of a reserved or specialized area” (Williams, 1995: 14). In other words, cultural studies is ‘a kind of sociology’ concerned with ‘manifest cultural practices and productions’, which translates into “new kinds of social analysis of specifically cultural institutions and formations” and of the relations between these and “the material means of cultural production” and “actual cultural forms” (Williams, 1995: 14). In Williams’s perspective, cultural studies is thus committed *from the moment of inception* to what he called a cultural materialist approach, without which it would never have developed in the first place.

There is another context in which these conceptual changes and convergences need to be placed and in relation to which they need to be understood – the context of education expansion, to be more precise, adult and university extramural extension classes, which sought to include people from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds. Williams situates here the development of cultural studies, a project which constituted itself as a challenge to ‘minority institutions’ (Williams, 2007: 154). This argument has been explored and corroborated in Tom Steele’s *The Emergence of Cultural Studies* (1997). Rejecting the assumption that cultural studies originated at one stroke, ‘fully-armed’, in the English department of the University of Birmingham (Steele, 1997: 3, 9, 14) and drawing on archival material, this author argues that much of what was later to become identified with cultural studies – interdisciplinary work, the debate over the role of the ‘literary’ and the ‘social’, the study of ‘popular culture’ (Steele, 1997: 2) – had been anticipated in the work of adult education carried out in the period immediately before and after the war

(roughly, between the thirties and sixties). Adult education provided a “broader creative milieu of experiment and realignment” which was propitious to the formation of the particular ‘structure of feeling’ (cf. Steele, 1997: 105) that would give birth to the New Left and the Birmingham Centre (Steele, 1997: 1). Steele stresses that all the seminal texts of cultural studies – *The Making of the English Working Class*, *The Uses of Literacy*, *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* – were not “isolated events but were nested in a widespread culture of experiment in adult education” (Steele, 1997: 14), regretting that this ‘prehistory’ of cultural studies – “a lost genealogy” – has so often been omitted (Steele, 1997: 14). Steel traces this pedagogic project (which he sometimes calls ‘adult liberal studies’ – Steele, 1997: 2) further back, to the schools created by the 1870 Education Act, which eventually resulted in the extension of education provisions to the lower classes and women. A wealth of influences flowed into this milieu: from the Leavisites in the thirties and other liberal intellectuals to the working-class movement, from sociology (Steele stresses the work of R.H. Tawney and Karl Mannheim) to the Communist Party Historians Group and women’s studies (namely the work of Sheila Rowbotham) (Steele, 1997: 2-3), from new approaches to socialist politics and democracy to more sophisticated readings of Marxism brought to England by war refugees and émigré intellectuals (Steele, 1997: 4).⁶ In view of such a rich milieu, Steele notes the irony that “cultural studies were enabled by the very decline of independent working-class education as a distinct formation”, from which “they received their radical impulse” (Steele, 1997: 3). Steele thus attaches cultural studies to a specific political moment, “the regeneration of a democratic, socially just New Britain” (Steele, 1997: 9). He highlights the work of Raymond Williams as the one whose project, which endeavoured “to unite cultural radicalism, left wing politics and adult education”, was the most ‘far-sighted’ of the post-war period (Steele, 1997: 6):

⁶ The latter included figures like Karl Manheim, Norbert Elias and Karl Polanyi, and made “a considerable impact on British educational debate” (Steele, 1997: 92), which continued to be felt long after the war ended. As this author stresses: “positions articulated in this time – particularly on questions like the base and superstructure debate, the creation of class-consciousness, the need for a total science of society and the foregrounding of interdisciplinary study – echo through the founding texts of British cultural studies” (Steele, 1997: 92-3). Émigré intellectuals brought new ideas and approaches, introducing “a tradition of Marxist and Weberian inspired sociology into the largely positivistic British ethos” (Steele, 1997: 99). They also influenced British Marxism and the emerging New Left (Steele, 1997: 99).

He saw what he and others were doing was quite definitely not founding a new academic subject area but contributing to the process of social change itself. It was clear from those who originated these ideas that cultural studies began as a *political project of popular education amongst adults*. (Steele, 1997: 15, italics in original)

Steele recounts, not without some ambivalent feelings, the transformation of the (experimental, practical) work of adult education into cultural studies: “From the embers of the independent workers’ education movement arose the phoenix of cultural studies” (Steele, 1997: 9). After the war, adult education was being transferred from the WEA (Workers’ Educational Association) to the newly created university extra-mural departments (Steele, 1997: 10), where tutors like Raymond Williams (from 1945), Richard Hoggart (from 1946) and Edward Thompson (from 1948) taught (Steele, 1997: 20). Steele chronicles the disagreements inside the adult education movement vis-à-vis the advance of ‘popular’ or ‘general education’ over ‘workers’ education’ (Steele, 1997: 11, 12). The issue was ultimately political: it was dreaded that a workers’ education would entail the submission to party politics and the loss of objectivity (Steele, 1997: 13). Within the WEA, the ‘modernisers’, who were for the transformation of the association into “a more general provider of liberal studies for adults” (Steele, 1997: 13), eventually took the lead. There were also long-standing disputes over the teaching of the arts:

From the Labourist left, the arts were the soft subjects of workers’ education, stigmatised as ‘women’s subjects’, seen at best as a mere diversion from the class struggle or at worst as the vehicles of bourgeois ideology, clothed in the snake’s skin of ‘spiritual values’. (Steele, 1997: 11-12)

After the Second World War, the turn to the arts (at the expense of politics and economics) in the WEA was definitive (Steele, 1997: 19). Steele concludes: “this ‘feminisation’ of the WEA appears to have been critically important for the development of cultural studies and with the demise of the male-dominated working-class movement they steadily took over from the political-economic curriculum” (Steele, 1997: 19). The dilemma within the WEA between privileging either ‘class’ or ‘mass’, which pitted traditionalists of the provinces, rooted in the working class movement, against metropolitan modernisers (Steele, 1997: 73, 78), anticipated some of the questions which were behind the formation of cultural studies.

So did the disagreements over the teaching of literature, namely those opposing the ‘sociological approach’ to the more traditional ‘spiritual values’ approach (Steele, 1997: 80).

Two aspects are worthy of note in Williams and Steele’s argument: it holds that (1) cultural studies emerged as part of a pedagogic project geared to respond to the needs of working-class students (2) this project was practice-orientated, not only inside the classroom (for instance, students participated in the elaboration of their own syllabus), but also outside it, insofar as it was articulated with a vaster project of democratisation and effective social change (cf. Steele, 1997: 15). As Álvaro Pina has put it, cultural studies cannot be separated from a “reality-producing” working class culture. Co-existing side by side with other cultures (such as “the high culture of Modernism, the middle-class culture of feminine consumption and suffragette militancy” – Pina, 2001), this ‘socialist working-class culture’ contributed decisively to the production of “the most significant social changes in Britain up to the 1970s” (Pina, 2001). Drawing on the habermasian notion of modernity as an unfinished project, Pina stresses that the ongoing “history of modernity under the regimes of North-Atlantic modernisation is also the history of the long revolution” (Pina, 2001). The former was built on the ‘divorce between culture and society’:

(...) this separation, this divorce, constructed both culture as a sphere of power and society as the hegemonic project of the bourgeois middle class. Culture was constituted within North-Atlantic modernisation as an apparatus against both industry and democracy, against the long revolution. (Pina, 2001)

The latter, even if developed in some of the most marginal quarters of everyday life, pulled (with often unforeseen success) in the opposite direction – i.e. towards the ‘reconnection’ of culture and society, industry and democracy:

The reconnection of culture with the sphere of praxis and other, non-capitalist alternatives are [sic] very difficult under the regimes of North-Atlantic modernisation, that is, within a modernity articulated to capitalism, bureaucracies, nations and the divorce between culture and society. But the sphere of everyday praxis has produced formations and institutions of an alternative modernisation – a renewal of modernity in which the democratic and the cultural changes of what Raymond Williams called the long revolution point to the possibility of non-capitalist development. Working-class culture, adult

education and cultural studies belong to the renewal of the modern project.
(Pina, 2001)

A different story has been told by John Hartley, who grounded his *Short History of Cultural Studies* (2003) in two major characteristics: pluralism and indeterminacy. Hartley's account is representative of what seems to be at present the dominant strand of cultural studies. From the first pages, he presents cultural studies as a field riven with disagreements about what it is, whose interests it serves, what theories, methods and objects of study are 'proper to it', and where its limits lie. This, in Hartley's view, constitutes its virtue. Cultural studies might have been "criticised from all sides over a number of issues" (Hartley, 2003: 1), but that only proves that it is "a lively field of debate and dialogue", "a crossroads or bazaar for the exchange of ideas", where people from different backgrounds and political persuasions can meet, without the need to supply 'definite answers' (Hartley, 2003: 2).

The defining features of cultural studies are thus to be found, not in a fixed 'identity' or agenda, but in its relation to other academic disciplines (which it simultaneously challenges and deploys), and in its hazy (and problematic) sense of a 'mission'. The latter point is more carefully brought out. For Hartley, cultural studies has "sought to build a new consciousness": it emerged in a context of post-war affluence and political disillusionment, following the perceived failure of 'inherited truths to command assent' (Hartley, 2003: 2). Its primary question, then, was "how to teach a new generation of students to engage ethically with their own culture, without relying on the discredited master narratives of nationalism, racial supremacy, patriarchy or imperialism" (Hartley, 2003: 3). Reflecting the changes of democratised (Western) societies, cultural studies emerged, in Hartley's words, as a "philosophy of plenty, of inclusion, and of renewal", which departed from an understanding of culture as 'plentiful' (Hartley, 2003: 3). Hence too its engagement, especially as far as literature and art are concerned, with "the expansion of difference" (Hartley, 2003: 5). As cultural hierarchies are pulled down, differences are maintained, even celebrated. Issues of production and class struggle (which Hartley prefers to call 'adversarial relations between consumers and producers') are relegated to a foregone time of scarcity. In an economy of plenty like ours, he adds, consumers are no longer passive; they need to be taken heed of, if producers want their products to sell (Hartley, 2003: 5).

Thus one of the cornerstones of cultural studies – the active reader or viewer of media audience studies – is introduced and pushed to the fore, as Hartley proclaims ‘astute reading’ the ‘number one skill’ of cultural studies (Hartley, 2003: 6). It is in this context that Hartley prefers to speak of many ‘different cultural studies’ (Hartley, 2003: 8). All the fashionable buzzwords associated with cultural studies have, nevertheless, been spelled out: interdisciplinarity; self-reflexivity; indeterminacy; emphasis on margins, boundaries, difference and hybridity; contestation of authority, orthodoxy and universalism; valorisation of texts as open-ended and non-definitive (Hartley, 2003: 8-9). A final element is the identification of cultural studies with ‘intellectual politics’ (“making a difference with ideas, to ideas, by ideas” – Hartley, 2003: 10), whose practical application appears to be confined to university teaching. In the end, like the ideas about it – which Hartley compares to ‘quarks’ – cultural studies is pronounced “hard to identify but important to understand” (Hartley, 2003: 13).

It is not difficult to recognise in Hartley’s study a highly selective approach to the history of cultural studies – it excludes the role played by adult education, from its liberal beginnings in the nineteenth century to its development inside the working-class movement, from WEA to university extra-mural classes – as well as to its nature, goals and political meaning. His understanding of cultural studies could be taken as a case in point of what the American-based critic Adam Katz has called ‘postmodern’, ‘mainstream’ or ‘appreciative’ (as opposed to critical) cultural studies (1997). Katz considers this strand of cultural studies as the result of “the articulation of cultural studies within a post-marxist, post-modern problematic” (Katz 1997: § 21), a tendency he traces back to the turn to Gramsci undertaken by Stuart Hall and articulated in essays like ‘Cultural Studies: two paradigms’ (1980). According to Katz, Hall’s attempt to conciliate the strengths of the two paradigms failed to address the major problem of cultural studies – that of “theorizing determination” – and inevitably led to ‘theoretical eclecticism’ (Katz 1997: § 12). By safeguarding (from the culturalist paradigm) the categories of ‘experience’ and ‘culture’, at the expense of ‘ideology’ (from the structuralist paradigm), Hall was, in practice, ‘capitulating’ to the culturalist paradigm (Katz 1997: § 12). Hall’s interpretation of Gramsci was governed, on the one hand, by the critique of economic determinism, and, on the other, by the wish to preserve a variety of determinations. Such a critical frame had two major

consequences: first, it made cultural studies lose sight of determination; second, it eventually led to a 'discursive kind of reductionism', in which ideological struggles are seen as the site of their own construction (i.e. they are immanent in the sense that they are *not* determined by structures external to themselves) (Katz 1997: § 15). Hence the staple notion of the popular as progressive (Katz 1997: § 16); hence too the overrated interest in questions of identity and everyday life 'experience'. Katz's conclusion is paramount, "The turn to Gramsci in contemporary cultural studies, then, is a turn away from Marxism and any other theory which abstracts from the specific and sees the specific as an effect of more general structures" (Katz 1997: § 20).⁷

It thus comes as no surprise that in postmodern cultural studies indeterminacy (reflecting the indeterminacy of culture itself, which derives both from the lack of external points of determination and the slippery co-existence of many determinations) should be 'valorized *per se*' (Katz 1997: § 36). Values such as openness and undecidability are now widely celebrated, allowing for the kind of "speculative 'writerly' approach" that Katz identifies in Angela McRobbie's concluding essay to Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler's *Cultural Studies* (Katz 1997: § 22). Katz relates this feature to a vaster trend in cultural studies – "the uncritical valorization of pluralism (as opposed to contestation and critique)" (Katz 1997: § 29), which is concomitant with its preferred methodology, bricolage (the term is used by Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler to define the methodology of cultural studies – Grossberg et al., 1992: 2). Cultural studies, understood as a 'pluralist institution' that is not shy to embrace opposing views, thus favours an 'appreciative discourse' – one that is more interested in its institutional value than in its theoretical and political effectivity. Furthermore, critical discourses have no place in it (Katz 1997: § 30-31). Katz's conclusion can be no other than pronounce cultural studies a failure – it has failed as an instrument of transformation of the academy (its successes being very limited – 'partial' and 'contradictory', cf. § 4) (Katz 1997: § 40) and it has failed as a self-declared radical political project.

⁷ Andrew Milner has discussed the consequences of this turn away from Marxism – which he called "a 'condition of possibility' for the emergence of Cultural Studies" (Milner, 2002: 9). See also the debate between cultural studies and political economy (e.g. David Morley vs. James Curran – Curran, 1996a and 1996b; Morley, 1996a and 1996b).

The first aspect is patent in the fact that many of the traditional disciplines (and their functions) have remained fundamentally unaltered. Rather than producing ‘oppositional subjectivities’, Katz argues, cultural studies has contributed for the Humanities to adapt to a changing (and ever more conservative) environment (Katz 1997: § 3-5). Its ‘free-floating, unfixed character’ and rejection of disciplinary boundaries have earned cultural studies a place in the academy where it can operate in the margins of disciplinary knowledge, retain some institutional capital and prestige, evade accountability in respect to its institutional position, and restrict its social effects to contingent, untheorized ones – all in the illusion of its own radicalism (Katz 1997: § 39-40). Politically, cultural studies, according to Katz, has been engaged in a double mission, namely: (1) the sustained attack on liberal humanism (from which its sense of ‘radicality’ is derived – Katz 1997: § 42); (2) the development of new discourses of legitimation (Katz 1997: § 7). Katz thus understands postmodern cultural studies as “the full scale reconstruction of liberalism on terms appropriate to late capitalist social relations” (Katz 1997: § 8). In this process, both the classical liberal subject (modelled on ‘the right to liberty’) and the social democratic subject (modelled on ‘the right to need satisfaction’) give way to the ‘postmodern liberal subject’ (modelled on ‘the right to recognition’), to bring about ‘a renovated postmodern liberalism’ (Katz, 1997: § 57). Hartley’s analogy of “a thinking machine that has a life of its own” (Hartley, 2003: 12) to characterise the field brings to mind the image of a juggernaut, and seems thus to be in tune with the postmodern sensibility.

The populist streak of cultural studies – which McGuigan refers to as ‘New Left populism’ (McGuigan, 2005: 178) – has been another target for the critics of cultural studies. American Thomas Frank has denounced the links between cultural studies, American corporate culture and what he calls ‘market populism’. His critique is addressed at cultural studies’ ‘trademark arguments about audience agency’ (Frank, 2002: 17), which automatically reject (what Jim McGuigan has called a ‘populist reflex’) any suggestion that audiences of popular culture may be “tricked, manipulated, or (...) made to act against their best interests”, on account of elitism (cit. Frank, 2002: 7). Frank goes back to the clash between elitism and populism, fought along similar lines during the 1950s, to pin down an unacknowledged lineage arising from American sociology that taints the credentials of cultural studies as “a proudly committed leftist pedagogy” (Frank, 2002: 14). On the

contrary, Frank argues, such lineage only highlights the consensus that now (in contrast to then) ranges from left to right. With market populism, which Frank describes as ‘a discourse on the right’, cultural studies has shared the yearning for democratic legitimacy, the pronouncement of *the critics* of business practices – rather than of their representatives – as elitist, and the attack on state power (which suits many vested and corporate interests) (Frank, 2002: 19-20). Finally, Frank takes cultural studies to task for eschewing the analysis of business-related topics at a time when these have become so central. He attributes this to a reaction against two major straw men, namely, Marxist determinism and the ‘elitism’ of the Frankfurt School (Frank, 2002: 33). Some of the trends of cultural studies – equating consuming with democracy (Frank, 2002: 40), if not straightforward revolution (Frank, 2002: 21); accepting the ideology of the market, reducing social and political life to self-expression (Frank, 2002: 34) – in the end, make it resemble “a close relative of traditional American libertarianism” (Frank, 2002: 34). This critic concludes by discerning ‘a fatal double irony’ in the fact that academic radicalism has become indistinguishable from the discourse of free market advocates, who claim for themselves the status of ‘radicals’ and seek to reduce democracy to a matter of consuming (Frank, 2002: 51-2).

The trenchant critiques of Katz and Frank (both launched from America, where the problems denounced seem to be more evident) reflect the growing scepticism that has surrounded the dominant strands of cultural studies.⁸ That there are many ways to understand cultural studies (given that it is a convergence of many different traditions and intellectual legacies, as we have seen) seems to be at the root of the problem. ‘What it is and what it isn’t’, to take up Toby Miller’s formulation (Miller 2001), has been at the very heated centre of cultural studies, to the point of appearing, to some critical voices, “by far the most attractive subject” to its practitioners (Frank, 2002: 9). Whether it is one of cultural studies’ enduring qualities (Hartley, 2003: 8) or a cause of exasperation, as a 1995

⁸ Left-wing critiques have been formulated by Francis Mulhern, Terry Eagleton, Pierre Bourdieu and Slavoj Žižek, and tend to address the collusion of cultural studies with capitalism. Žižek has been particularly vocal on this point (e.g. Žižek: 1999: 218; cf. 358-359). He has also questioned cultural studies’ ‘lack of specific disciplinary skills’, which can result in “a kind of false universal critical capacity to pass judgment on everything, without proper knowledge” (Žižek, 2001: 224). Noting, as a crucial development, the shift from English to American Cultural Studies, “from an engagement with real working-class culture to academic radical chic”, he finally concedes that “the very fact of *resistance* against Cultural Studies proves that they remain a foreign body unable to fit fully into existing academia” (Žižek, 2001: 226).

essay by Lawrence Grossberg's seems to suggest,⁹ this ongoing engagement in self-reflexivity – resulting, in Mulhern's term, in a vast 'literature of self-representation' (Mulhern, 2000: 157) – cannot be dismissed lightly; it is part and parcel of its primary concern: the carving of an intellectual practice.¹⁰

Lawrence Grossberg has at many occasions rejected the idea of a single and homogeneous cultural studies, insisting on its 'discontinuous' and even 'erratic' trajectory, which covers "different projects and practices" to the point that diversity becomes "the very practice of cultural studies" (Grossberg, 1992: 17).¹¹ However, unlike Hartley, Grossberg does not take this trait uncritically. He goes on to deplore the fact that the success of cultural studies is turning it into "an intellectual fantasy" – "the more it is talked about it, the less clear it is what is being talked about" (Grossberg, 1992: 16). Instead of blaming the usual suspects – 'institutionalization' or "increasing disciplinization" – Grossberg prefers to speak of "a misreading of the open-endedness of cultural studies which either allows anything to be cultural studies or identifies it with a "'correct' paradigmatic version" (Grossberg, 1992: 16). For Grossberg, it is important to be able to acknowledge not only the diverse and contesting meanings of 'cultural studies', but also the meanings (or stakes) of such contestations. It is on these terms that Grossberg formulates his own position:

If there are real stakes in the practice of representation, including the ways we represent our own intellectual practices, then we have to take seriously the struggle over the name of cultural studies. I refuse to relinquish the gains and lessons of this specific intellectual formation, with its own history,

⁹ For an instance of this kind of 'definitional' despair', see Grossberg (1995), "Cultural Studies vs Political Economy: Is Anybody Else Bored with This Debate?" On a more despondent note, another of Grossberg's essay states: "I think it is time that we admitted that much of what we (progressive academics and intellectuals) are doing is not working" (Grossberg, 1998: 78-9).

¹⁰ Hall argued that the 'politics of intellectual work' was "placed at the centre of Cultural Studies from the beginning – a concern from which, fortunately, it has never been, and can never be, freed" (Hall, 1980b: 58). By placing cultural studies within 'metacultural discourse', which is, "among other things, a reflection on the meaning of intellectual vocation" (Mulhern, 2000: xix), Mulhern has tried to bring out the full consequences of this concern.

¹¹ It is difficult to miss out this aspect of plurality in the introduction of Grossberg et al. to *Cultural Studies* (1992). The wording is symptomatic: 'the dimensions of cultural studies', 'its varied effects', 'its varying definitions', its 'diverse objects of study', 'its possible futures'. Open-endedness is also positively announced (Grossberg et al., 1992: 1). Disagreement and even conflict are also indicated as part of its history (Grossberg et al., 1992: 10). Finally, its elusiveness is confirmed: "it is probably impossible to agree on any essential definition or unique narrative of cultural studies" (Grossberg et al., 1992: 3). The same idea echoes throughout Angela McRobbie's last book, which approvingly refers to cultural studies, "not as a tightly defined discipline but as a shifting terrain, a site of dispute and contestation" (McRobbie, 2005: 2).

contradictions, uneven developments, conflicts, differences and unities.
(Grossberg, 1992: 17-8)

What cultural studies is and ought to be cannot, therefore, be separated from what it has been, i.e. from its specific historical record – a knowledge or awareness that seems to be lacking in much work developed in the U.S. (Grossberg et al., 1992: 9). Grossberg himself situates his intellectual project in relation to British cultural studies, and to Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall in particular (Grossberg, 1992: 16; 404, n28). Its aim is to “explore the often sophisticated ways people use and respond to popular culture: to recognize the often pleasurable, sometimes empowering and occasionally resistant nature of their relation to popular culture” (Grossberg, 1992: 2). Hoggart and Hall’s influence is clear in Grossberg’s critique of cultural and political elitism (the launching pad for his own research on popular culture) and the ensuing attention to the open-endedness of culture as both a communicative process (entailing the foregrounding of audiences and their responses) and a site of power, within a model that stresses the articulation of contradictions to explain resistance. It can also be traced in his rejection of the tendency or ‘fad’ (especially in American cultural studies) towards the uncritical celebration of popular culture (Grossberg, 1992: 2), which tails in with this critic’s critique of capitalism.

If Grossberg owes a significant debt to Hoggart’s espousal of popular culture, his greatest affinities are with the work of Stuart Hall. A founding member of the New Left and the first editor of the *New Left Review*, Stuart Hall brought to cultural studies new perspectives and emphases, namely a growing attention to sociological approaches and theory (cf. Steele, 1997: 139). Hall was in tune with “the emerging culture of the left” (Mulhern, 2000: 100), to which he belonged and which he was helping to shape. His theoretical contributions had a formative influence, especially his famous essay, “Cultural Studies: two paradigms” (1980), which became a reference text in subsequent discussions. In it, Hall consecrates Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy*, Williams’s *Culture and Society* and Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class* as “the caesura out of which – among other things – ‘Cultural Studies’ emerged” (Hall, 1980b: 58). What the three books had in common was that they had been conceived within the historical traditions of ‘English Marxist historiography’ and ‘Economic and ‘Labour History’, but were now foregrounding a different set of questions, to do with “culture, consciousness and experience”, placing the focus on ‘agency’ and

breaking “with a certain kind of technological evolutionism, with a reductive economism and an organizational determinism” (Hall, 1980b: 58). Culture was the key concept of this new configuration, the defining feature being, according to Hall, the fact that it posited “no single, unproblematic definition of ‘culture’”, but constituted instead “an area of continuing tension and difficulty in the field” (Hall, 1980b: 59). Nevertheless, drawing especially on Williams and Thompson, Hall went on to identify the two concepts of ‘culture’ at the centre of this ‘(in)-determinacy’: firstly, culture meant “the sum of the available descriptions through which societies make sense of and reflect their common experiences” (Hall, 1980b: 59), i.e. culture stood for ideas, but the sum total of ideas (not just ‘the best ones’) produced and shared by a given community, in a ‘common culture’ (it is in this sense that culture is ‘ordinary’). Secondly, culture meant, in a more anthropological understanding, ‘social practices’ (Hall, 1980b: 59). The major aspect is that the two concepts are inter-related, with the emphasis falling on “the active and indissoluble relationships between elements or social practices normally separated out” (Hall, 1980b: 59). This is captured by Williams’s concept of ‘structure of feeling’, which allows to analyse given practices and patterns in relation to each other and to the ‘whole’ (Hall, 1980b: 60 – Hall draws attention to “its deliberate condensation of apparently incompatible elements” – Hall, 1980b: 63). With it, Williams hoped to transcend both traditional idealism and a ‘vulgar materialism, arriving at what Stuart Hall calls “a radical interactionism”, that is, “the interaction of all practices in and with one another, skirting the problem of determinacy” (Hall, 1980b: 60).

Hall’s 1980 essay became famous for opposing this theoretical ‘paradigm’, which he calls ‘culturalist’, to the ‘structuralist’ one. For Hall, ‘culturalism’ constitutes *the* dominant paradigm’ in cultural studies (Hall, 1980b: 63, italics in original).¹² Attributing to it a constitutive rather than merely reflective role, culture is here understood as “interwoven with all social practices” (Hall, 1980b: 63). Such a ‘totalising’ ambit brings together people’s agency in everyday life with their possibility to ‘make history’. As Hall puts it,

¹² Andrew Milner has regarded Hall’s essay as crucial in the retrospective transformation of ‘thinkers and critics who had imagined themselves to be Marxists’ into ‘culturalists’ or ‘structuralists’ (Milner, 2002: 2). He criticises the compounding of Williams and Thompson, ‘self-declared Marxists’, with Hoggart, which has contributed to what has been called “the myth of ‘Raymond Hoggart’” (Milner, 2002: 2). Milner prefers to speak of Raymond Williams as a ‘post-culturalist’, in relation to the Arnoldian ‘culturalist’ tradition (Milner, 2002: 169-170).

The *experiential pull* in this paradigm, and the emphasis on the creative and on historical agency, constitutes the two key elements in the *humanism* of the position outlined. Each, consequently accords ‘experience’ an authenticating position in any cultural analysis. It is, ultimately, where and how people experience their conditions of life, define them and respond to them, which, for Thompson defines why every mode of production is also a culture, and every struggle between classes is always also a struggle between cultural modalities; and which, for Williams, is what a ‘cultural analysis’, in the final instance, should deliver. (Hall, 1980b: 63, italics in original)

Furthermore, these positions differ from Hegel’s notion of totality in important ways: what is now in question is a totality “with a small ‘t’, concrete and historically determinate, uneven in its correspondences”, in sum, a totality understood “expressively” (Hall, 1980b: 64).

Culturalism was interrupted, in cultural studies, by structuralism, which, though formed by several different strands and tendencies, constitutes a paradigm of its own (Hall, 1980b: 64). Hall singles out the prominence of the concept of ‘ideology (rather than ‘culture’), especially in Marxist structuralism. The general impetus behind structuralism was the attempt to make the study of culture more ‘scientific and rigorous’ (Hall, 1980b: 64). The model was linguistic (in the footsteps of Saussure’s linguistics), with an “a-historical and synchronic stress” (Hall, 1980b: 64). Hall also discerns a tendency towards a “structuralist causality – a logic of *arrangement*, of internal relations, of articulation of parts within a structure” (Hall, 1980b: 65, italics in original), even though he also acknowledges that “Althusser did return to the problems of the relations *between* practices and the question of determinacy” (Hall, 1980b: 66, italics in original), namely through the concept of ‘overdetermination’. Both culturalism and structuralism reject the base-superstructure scheme of simplistic determination (culturalism prefers to speak of “the dialectic between social being and social consciousness” – Hall, 1980b: 63) and both show a marked disposition to give primacy to what had hitherto been regarded as ‘superstructural’ (Hall, 1980b: 65). Where they most acutely disagree, however, is over the concept of ‘experience’ (Hall, 1980b: 66):

Whereas, in ‘culturalism’, experience was the ground – the terrain of ‘the lived’ – where consciousness and conditions intersected, structuralism insisted that ‘experience’ could not, by definition, be the ground of anything, since one could only ‘live’ and experience one’s conditions *in and through* the categories, classifications and frameworks of the culture. These categories, however, did not arise from or in experience: rather, experience was their ‘effect’. The culturalists had defined the forms of consciousness and culture as collective. But they had stopped far short of the radical proposition that, in culture and in language, the subject was ‘spoken by’ the categories of culture in which he/she thought, rather than ‘speaking them’. These categories were, however, not merely collective rather than individual productions: they were *unconscious* structures. That is why, though Levi-Strauss spoke only of ‘Culture’, his concept provided the basis for an easy translation, by Althusser, into the conceptual framework of ideology (...). (Hall, 1980b: 66, italics in original)

Considering neither paradigm as entirely ‘adequate’, Hall goes on to analyse the strengths and limitations of each, which, in the impossibility of a synthesis, will point the way forward. One of the lessons to be learned from structuralism concerns its “stress on ‘determinate conditions’” (Hall, 1980b: 67). For Hall, the dialectic between conscious agency and historical conditions has to be maintained, at the risk – should the emphasis fall on the former (as it does in culturalist interpretations) – of leading to “a naïve humanism, with its necessary consequence: a voluntarist and populist practice” (Hall, 1980b: 67). Drawing on the Gramscian maxim, ‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’ (Hall, 1980b: 67), Hall clarifies this point:

The fact that ‘men’ can become conscious of their conditions, organize to struggle against them and in fact transform them – without which no active politics can even be conceived, let alone practised – must not be allowed to override the awareness of the fact that, in capitalist relations, men and women are placed and positioned in relations which constitute them as agents. (Hall, 1980b: 67)¹³

For Hall, such an insight is fundamental to make the necessary ‘break with the obvious’ urged by Marx. From structuralism, Hall also wishes to salvage the need for theory and abstract thought, with the proviso that it proceeds through ‘different levels of abstraction’ so as not to lose sight of ‘the concrete in thought’ (Hall, 1980b: 67-8), as well as its

¹³ Álvaro Pina turns this quote upside down to make the opposite point, in defence of Williams’s cultural studies project, to emphasise agency and the possibility of change (Pina, 2000).

conception of complex ‘totality’, which, unlike the ‘expressive totality’ of culturalism (whereby, according to Hall, totality is the expression of, and ultimately reduced to, the ‘simplicity’ of social practices), is conceived of as ‘unity-in-difference’ (Hall, 1980b: 68-9). The advantage of the structuralist paradigm is that it permits to “*conceptualize* the specificity of different practices (...), without losing its grip on the ensemble which they constitute” (Hall, 1980b: 69, italics in original) – a process in which Althusser’s concepts of ‘relative autonomy’ and ‘over-determination’, as well as the notion of ‘articulation’ (especially in Laclau and Mouffe’s terms) have a role to play (Hall, 1980b: 69). Finally, Hall welcomes structuralism for ‘decentering’ experience and “elaborating the neglected category of ‘ideology’” (Hall, 1980b: 69). And yet he concedes that, if culturalism has failed to develop ‘a proper conception’ of ideology, structuralist approaches have failed to conceive of ideologies which are not dominant and which (co)exist in a context of struggle. The solution seems to be emerging from the works of Gramsci (especially with the concept of ‘hegemony’) and Ernesto Laclau (Hall, 1980b: 69).

Hall is far more laconic on the strengths of culturalism, largely attributing to it a corrective influence over structuralist trends: its focus on “conscious struggle and organization” is positive. With the help of Gramsci (in particular, his analysis of ‘common culture’ and popular culture), “culturalism properly restores the dialectic between the unconsciousness of cultural categories and the moment of conscious organization” (Hall, 1980b: 69). The future of cultural studies is, in the end, envisaged in relation to three major developments: (1) the turn to ‘discourse’ and ‘the subject’; (2) the ‘return’ to “a more classical ‘political economy’ of culture” (Hall, 1980b: 70); (3) the privileging of ‘difference’ as ‘radical heterogeneity’ (Hall, 1980b: 71). Hall sees valid points, but also shortcomings, in all three trends: the decentred, contradictory subject is bound to have a trans-historical character (Hall, 1980b: 70); the economic analysis of cultural processes is important, but may occlude their specificity and jeopardize the theoretical gains that have been made (Hall, 1980b: 71); the attention to difference (particularly under Gramsci and Foucault’s influences) has promoted “the concrete analysis of particular ideological and discursive formations”, but it has also degenerated in an overrating of contingency and indeterminacy (Hall, 1980b: 71).

In conclusion, Hall's project is situated in the theoretical 'space' created by culturalism and structuralism, with a declared debt to Gramsci's work (Hall, 1980b: 72). Both paradigms matter, as "they address what must be the core problem of Cultural Studies", namely:

They constantly return us to the terrain marked out by those strongly coupled but not mutually exclusive concepts culture/ideology. They pose, together, the problems consequent on trying to think *both* the specificity of different practices and the forms of the articulated unity they constitute. They make a constant, if flawed, return to the base/superstructure metaphor. They are correct in insisting that this question – which resumes all the problems of a non-reductive determinacy – is the heart of the matter: and that, on the solution of this problem will turn the capacity of Cultural Studies to supercede the endless oscillations between idealism and reductionism. They confront – even if in radically opposed ways – the dialectic between conditions and consciousness. At another level, they pose the question of the relation between the logic of thinking and the 'logic' of historical process. They continue to hold out the promise of a properly materialist theory of culture. (Hall, 1980b: 72)

Stuart Hall's contribution to the development of cultural studies cannot be overstressed – his analytical skills together with his penchant for synthesis, which so often characterise his successive historical accounts of cultural studies, have left a powerful mark on the field. This much is recognised by Francis Mulhern in one of the most insightful comments on cultural studies, which acknowledges the enormous influence of Stuart Hall and, at the same time, shows him in a different light, by referring his project to what he terms 'metaculture'.

First published in 1998, *Culture/Metaculture* is not specifically about cultural studies, but about "'culture' as a topic in twentieth-century debate, in Europe and particularly in Britain" (Mulhern, 2000: xiii), a phenomenon which this critic designates as 'metaculture'. Mulhern's major contention is that cultural studies has been an expression of metaculture, the process and product of 'culture speaking of itself'. In an argument that stretches 'from 1918 to the near-present' (Mulhern, 2000: xv), this author claims that metaculture has historically realized itself in two major ways or discursive formations: (1) through Kulturkritik, i.e. the understanding of culture as developed in Germany from the later eighteenth century (and subsequently in England), which places a high value in 'Kultur' (i.e. in the sensitive and learned appreciation of 'total' life), as against 'Zivilisation' or

modern life (i.e. the emerging, fragmentary and contradictory realities of “capitalism, democracy and enlightenment” – Mulhern, 2000: xv); (2) through cultural studies, formed “in conscious opposition” to Kulturkritik, which, in the British case, corresponded to a normative and elitist notion of culture– epitomised in Matthew Arnold’s “the best which has been thought and said in the world” ([1869] cit. Mulhern, 2000: xvi) and F.R. Leavis’s (literary) ‘great tradition’. While making important discriminations between Kulturkritik and cultural studies, but also within cultural studies itself, Mulhern is especially interested in mapping out continuities (Mulhern, 2000: xv). Hereupon lays the novelty of his argument: other critics had already pointed to the Leavisian link in the development of cultural studies;¹⁴ Mulhern, however, takes one step further, by considering these continuities not in terms of persistent, even if residual, influences, but as evidence that both formations (Kulturkritik and cultural studies) share the same ‘conceptual *form*’ (Mulhern, 2000: xv). What is more, this form comprises a particular relationship between culture and politics.

According to Mulhern, the concept of culture put forward by Kulturkritik (including its English variant) claimed to address “the ‘generality’ of symbolic life and its historical ‘conditions of existence’”, was “developmental in character” and “universal in its moral scope and application”, its source and target being “what was distinctively human in humanity, the ‘best self’ that might qualify and even overrule the ‘ordinary selves’ of everyday class and other social interests” (Mulhern, 2000: xvi). “Culture, in this construction”, Mulhern concludes, “is not merely a repository of value: it is *the principle of the good society*” (Mulhern, 2000: xvi, my emphasis), the only trustworthy touchstone for human activity.

Cultural studies was formed in direct opposition to most of the tenets of Kulturkritik, actually reversing many of its tendencies and directions. And yet, it also took up its ‘metacultural’ form. In Mulhern’s phrasing, cultural studies “emerged in a complex process that was both a continuation and a displacement of English Kulturkritik” (Mulhern, 2000: xviii). A “strict egalitarian ethic of attention”, the embracing of all “practices of signification” (which is to say, of *all* practices), and the inextricable association between

¹⁴ See Stuart Hall on Hoggart (Hall 1980a: 18). E. P. Thompson took issue with Williams’s reliance, in *Culture and Society*, on ‘a compromised tradition’ (Thompson, 1961a: 27); Tom Steele noticed a “continuity with the language of Leavisism” in Thompson himself (Steele, 1997: 170).

power and meaning – constitute the major parameters of cultural studies, as opposed to older forms of cultural criticism (or Kulturkritik). To this should be added a two-part ‘mission’ – namely, (1) “to revoke the historic privilege of ‘culture with a capital C’ (the sovereign value of Kulturkritik); (2) to “vindicate the active meanings and values of the subordinate majority (the so-called ‘masses’) as core elements of a possible alternative order” (Mulhern, 2000: xviii). Despite the numerous and evident successes on both scores, this mission rests incomplete. Mulhern’s discussion of popular culture and ‘populism’ (Mulhern, 2000: 132-151) stresses the failure of cultural studies to provide a critical platform from which an alternative to capitalism (with which the popular streak of cultural studies so often merges) can effectively be built. Mulhern’s ultimate critique, however, is directed at the persistence of the ‘cultural principle’, the ‘form’ whose ‘coordinates’ are “*culture, authority and politics*” (Mulhern, 2000: xix, italics in original). The ‘cultural principle’ favours non-coercive forms of power – in Mulhern’s words, “authority relations are those in which assent is secured on non-coercive grounds” (Mulhern, 2000: xix); authority is “itself predominantly cultural in substance” and “normally appears as if granted by those who defer to it” (Mulhern, 2000: xix). All this leads Mulhern to proclaim, “‘power’, in the indiscriminate sense that has been standard in Cultural Studies, is a blunt instrument of scant theoretical value here” (Mulhern, 2000: xix). Left out of this definition of ‘power’ are other forms of command and control such as “the ownership and control of property’ and ‘physical coercion’, to which this critic prefers to reserve the term (Mulhern, 2000: xix). Culture understood in this way therefore pronounces the end of politics (or its irrelevance) – either in a declared way, as in the case of Kulturkritik, or in contradiction to its often stated (often misrecognised) purposes, as in the case of cultural studies:

The socially contrasted ideal subjects of Kulturkritik and Cultural Studies are alike in this: both urge ‘culture’ as the necessary, unregarded truth of society, whose curse is the inadequacy of the prevailing form of general authority, *the political*. It is politics as such that is fundamentally in question here: in declared principle, in the case of Kulturkritik, or as a self-defeating final implication, in the case of Cultural Studies. The latter’s ‘political’ assault on high-cultural privilege has turned out to be, at the same time, a renewed attempt at a ‘cultural’ dissolution of politics – a popular-leftist mutation of metacultural discourse. (Mulhern, 2000: xix-xx)

Besides Kulturkritik, Mulhern's topic touches upon another tradition in which theory and politics meet, namely: Marxism. One of Mulhern's interests is the "opaque ambivalence" (Mulhern, 2000: xx) of cultural studies towards this tradition. Marxism is, in this critic's words, "the tradition of theory and politics to which [cultural studies] owes its existence" (Mulhern, 2000: xx), but he speaks of "an emphatically 'complex' relation" to it (Mulhern, 2000: 108), which was especially active between the late sixties and seventies, under Stuart Hall's formative influence. Hall's "agitated dialogue with Marxism" (Mulhern, 2000: 124) is largely at the root of Mulhern's critique of cultural studies.¹⁵ Unlike Hoggart, Hall had firm links with the New Left (to which Williams and Thompson were also connected). However, it is clear (e.g. in his 'Two paradigms' essay) that he wanted to go, in Mulhern's words, "beyond New Left 'culturalism'" (Mulhern, 2000: 108). Mulhern identifies in Hall's work a number of *regular* emphases and theoretical nuances which have decisively influenced the course of cultural studies: (1) a tendency to privilege, in the analysis of the contemporary, what is *new* (Mulhern, 2000: 99, 101); (2) a tendency to make the conjunctural (a concept drawn from Gramsci and developed by Althusser) overlap with 'the concrete' (Mulhern, 2000: 128); (3) 'a tendency to elusion' (Mulhern, 2000: 98).¹⁶

The first aspect (evident in many of Hall's subjects, from 'New Times' to 'new ethnicities', not to mention the 'New Left')¹⁷ has often offered the ground in which the 'old' – which includes Marxism, or aspects of it, alongside Kulturkritik (Mulhern, 2000: 162) – can be singled out for criticism (Mulhern, 2000: 117). The 'old' left, for instance, appears as synonymous with a clique of intellectuals irremediably disconnected from 'the people' (a notion which Mulhern rightly traces back to a much older tradition of thinking, most powerfully represented and popularised by George Orwell) Mulhern also criticises in Hall a "tendency to convert logical into temporal relations" (Mulhern, 2000: 118), whereby the new becomes "a value in itself and even an autonomous cultural force" (Mulhern, 2000: 118). For Mulhern this is Kulturkritik written backwards, its mirror image: if Kulturkritik dreaded the new, therefore seeking in tradition the answer to the problems of modern life,

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton has more straightforwardly charged Stuart Hall with "being inside and outside Marxism simultaneously before shifting decisively into the non-Marxist camp" (Eagleton, 2004: 40).

¹⁶ Mulhern treats these features of Hall's thought more as regular thematic 'propensities' (Mulhern, 2000: 99) than clearly formulated positions (Mulhern, 2000: 129), but considers them strong enough to be worthy of attention.

¹⁷ This sense of 'newness' is also patent in Hall's accounts of the CCCS (e.g. Hall, 1980a: 17).

cultural studies would now unashamedly embrace the 'new', in the form of the new regimes of power and organisation (such as the mass media, the 'spontaneous' trends of everyday life, the civil society as against the state). In this context, ('old') Marxism becomes a 'strategic' foil for the critique of 'determinism' and 'economism', in any case serving to confirm culture's "claim to social authority" (Mulhern, 2000: 130).

The same slant towards the new (now in the form of openness and contingency) seems to characterise Hall's understanding of 'conjuncture', which is placed at the centre of cultural studies. This is done through Gramsci, but ignoring the Italian thinker's proviso that the 'conjunctural' (i.e. 'occasional, immediate, almost accidental') elements of a concrete situation ought not to be separated from the 'organic' ones (i.e. the more permanent features of that situation). In other words, in Hall's work the conjunctural (now 'tendentiously' understood as *concrete*) is given priority over the organic (now often dismissed as 'abstract' – cf. Mulhern, 2000: 128). The result, as Mulhern concludes, is that precedence is given to the 'occasional, immediate, almost accidental' in a formation, at the expense of "the 'relatively permanent' aspects of historical situations" (Mulhern, 2000: 128-129).¹⁸ Hall's reading of Gramsci is taken to task on another point – organicism and organic intellectuals. Mulhern does not doubt that organisation and the value of intellectual practice occupied an important place at the CCCS (Mulhern, 2000: 105). The formation of 'a new kind of intellectual', modelled on Gramsci's 'organic intellectual', was one of Hall's stated aims, which (in retrospect) he came to dismiss in rather disappointing (even if 'modest') terms (Mulhern, 2000: 145-6). Mulhern attributes this to a misappropriation of Gramsci's concept. 'Organic intellectuals' were, for Gramsci, necessarily embedded in a social group (they were *of* and *for* the group), thus standing in striking contrast with 'traditional intellectuals', who were "broad and non-specialist", kept themselves apart and claimed to serve "a general social interest" (Mulhern, 2000: 147). Hall's 'organic

¹⁸ As an illustration of Stuart Hall's legacy of the new and the conjunctural, see Lawrence Grossberg's recent article on the 'futures' of cultural studies (significantly subtitled "Cultural studies, contexts and conjunctures"), an essay which draws heavily on Hall, and in which the 'propensities' that Mulhern identifies are overtly spelled out and elaborated. Here, Grossberg recommends "a radically contextualist and conjuncturalist understanding of the project of cultural studies" (Grossberg, 2006: 1). The concept of 'conjuncture' is given prominence, and identified with the new. 'New' and 'renewed' (Grossberg, 2006: 26) are the watchwords for a better practice, which needs to be able to engage with the 'new conjuncture', to which 'older', 'congealed' forms of cultural studies are not able to respond (Grossberg, 2006: 1). In the abstract, Grossberg describes this conjuncture as "a struggle, from both the right and the left, against liberal modernity and the attempt to shape an alternative modernity as the future" (Grossberg, 2006: 1).

intellectuals', on the other hand, though consciously taking sides (usually the side of some 'partisan popular tendency'), remain within the purview of the traditional (Mulhern, 2000: 147). It is in a mordant tone that Mulhern describes 'a possible version' of this kind of organicism, which he discerns as active in cultural studies: "Broad, non-specialist, non-elitist intelligence: or distraction on the town. This is organicism as farce" (Mulhern, 2000: 147). Finally, regarding the third aspect, Mulhern relates Hall's elusiveness to his recurrent descriptions (and 'reconstructions') of the CCCS, which foreground "diversity, openness and provisionality" (Mulhern, 2000: 98). Rather than being specific to the Centre, these features are maintained in Hall's subsequent writings, which appears to suggest that it was through Hall that they have become representative of the CCCS, if not of cultural studies in general.¹⁹

Mulhern's arriving point, the corollary of his argument, is the relationship between cultural studies and politics, 'the p-word', a word only second in use to that of 'culture' (Mulhern, 2000: 150). The notion of cultural studies as political (itself an issue of contention within the field) was built on two fronts, (1) the foregrounding of 'power' in relation to representation; (2) the foil of the old left, whose perceived shortcomings (economic reductionism, determinism, expressionism, racial/gender/sexual biases, inability to catch up with the 'new times') it was the task of the 'New Left' to address (cf. Mulhern, 2000: 148). While Hall would frequently speak of 'politics by other means', a move which some critics like Todd Gitlin, in hindsight, would come to associate with 'a consolatory logic' – "the reflex of a left-wing generation making its way in the great reactionary tides of the late twentieth century" (Mulhern, 2000: 150) – Mulhern detects a more disturbing propensity, namely, an 'unspeakable desire' (Mulhern, 2000: 156) or impulse "to subsume the political under the cultural, to undo the rationality of politics as a determinate social form" (Mulhern, 2000: 151), an impulse which cultural studies shares with *Kulturkritik*.

In the last part of his book, "Metaculture and Society" (which, again, evokes Raymond Williams's famous title), Mulhern develops his main argument: metaculture is not only a discourse on culture ('culture speaking of itself'), but also the displacement and devaluation of politics by culture (cf. Mulhern, 2000: 166). More importantly, it is "the discourse that

¹⁹ Hence Mulhern's comment: "if Stuart Hall cannot be taken to represent the Centre, then it cannot be represented at all" (Mulhern, 2000: 98).

spontaneously tends to dominate” (Mulhern, 2000: 155, my emphasis). Whenever it makes culture “the principle, the condition of valid social judgement” (Mulhern, 2000: 156), cultural studies subsides to this discourse. Its politics, therefore, are not a response to certain defeats of the left (Mulhern, 2000: 158; 160), nor are they ‘a novelty’, “a recent creation of distinctively recent conditions” (Mulhern, 2000: 160), but the prolongation of a discourse that ‘predates’ it: “The cultural impulse ‘to *be* politics’ is older and more general” (Mulhern, 2000: 160), as it was already and fundamentally present in Kulturkritik. Paradoxically, this impulse towards politics is effectively synonymous with the dissolution of politics. Metaculture is a form of metapolitics or, as Mulhern puts it, “Metacultural discourse is metapolitics, the *be* all and end all of (left) political reason” (Mulhern, 2000: 157).²⁰

Mulhern’s critique, as his discussion of Stuart Hall suggests, strikes at the very core of cultural studies. His critical impetus is, nonetheless, constructive. He concedes that cultural studies is ‘a heterogeneous formation’ (Mulhern, 2000: 155) and that the present ascendancy of metacultural discourse is not a *necessary* development (Mulhern, 2000: 167). It is metaculture, not cultural studies, which is in question here (Mulhern, 2000: 160). With Todd Gitlin, Mulhern appears to claim for cultural studies a more modest role, one in which it will not presume to be a substitute for politics, in which ‘less would be more’ (cit. Mulhern, 2000: 159). This necessarily rests on the recognition that there is an insurmountable discrepancy between culture and politics, as far as social authority is concerned (Mulhern, 2000: 169):

Yet it does not follow necessarily that metaculture constitutes the inescapable discursive condition of critical thought (...). The only necessity in the case is that of discrepancy itself, which, once grasped as such, appears in another aspect, not as a place of historic frustration and wish-fulfilment but as a space of possibility. (Mulhern, 2000: 172)

²⁰ In a different context, writing about the reception of Bourdieu in the US, John Guillory quotes Lawrence Grossberg on cultural studies to illustrate how “it has become increasingly important to justify academic practice by asserting it as the vehicle of political transformation” (Guillory, 2000: 20). He associates this trend with an important feature of the American intellectual field, namely “an intellectual ethos of voluntarism”, which finds Bourdieu’s ‘determinism’ uncongenial and which partly accounts for ‘Bourdieu’s refusal’ in America (Guillory, 2000: 20).

The answer is to support a kind of ‘cultural politics’ which is “not a special case of either politics or culture” (Mulhern, 2000: 173). It is also to reject the *unnecessary* ‘immodesty’ that underpins the desire to substitute culture for politics, and embrace ‘lucidity’ instead. This is no small gesture, contrasting in many ways with former pledges to ‘humility’ (cf. Grossberg et al., 1992: 15). For Mulhern, such ‘modesty’ “suberves a greater ambition, as the art of the possible” (Mulhern, 2000: 174), which is the realm of what Mulhern prefers to call (not without stirring up further controversy) ‘actual politics’. As the heated discussions that followed the publication of this book attest (especially on the pages of *New Left Review*), the problem is far from solved, emerging, as Mulhern had realised, at the level of enunciation itself, in how the relation between culture and politics is conceived and formulated, in the pervading (and often misrecognised) interference of metaculture in critical debates.²¹

Raymond Williams’s distinction between ‘project’ and ‘formation’ may be a useful one here. For Williams, the vitality (and politics) of cultural studies rested on its articulation with a project, which was in turn, and per force, always inserted in a specific (social) formation (Williams, 2007: 151-3). As Álvaro Pina has pointed out, Williams’s theory of culture is “a socialist politics of culture and must be recognised as such” (Pina, 2005: 238). It is this project/ formation articulation that cannot be disregarded or lost: in it lies the best of what cultural studies has stood for and achieved.²² Critics like Eagleton and Pina have defended that, far from being exhausted, Williams’s project is still relevant – indeed, far from being something of the past, we still have to ‘catch up with it’ (Pina, 2000). With Williams’s project in mind, Tom Steele has called for a return to cultural studies’ “radical and grounded origins”, to “a more direct concern with political economy and social movements, and to renew the political project of a democratic cultural education” (Steele, 1997: 7). What is being proclaimed, however, is not a return to a nostalgic and forgone

²¹ See Stefan Collini (2001; 2002; 2004); Francis Mulhern (2002; 2003) and David Simpson (2004).

²² This articulation was the distinctive feature of early cultural studies, as Tom Steele has pointed out, in relation to Williams:

He saw what he and others were doing was quite definitely not founding a new academic subject area but contributing to the process of social change itself. It was clear from those who originated these ideas that cultural studies began as a *political project of popular education amongst adults*. (Steele, 1997: 15, italics in original)

past. Nor is this a call to bring economics and politics to bear on a cultural studies analysis. At stake is something more crucial, namely, finding (as Williams once did) the way to re-articulate cultural studies with *a project which is firmly embedded in a social formation*, a project which is both relevant to the present times and committed to a broader (i.e. universalising) understanding of emancipation (cf. Pina, 2005: 246).

2.2. Literature and Cultural Studies

The links between cultural studies and literature can be traced back to the beginnings of this intellectual practice. Cultural studies emerged largely in response, on the one hand, to the theories and practices that dominated the humanities around the middle of the twentieth century (such as formalism and Leavisism) and, on the other, to Marxism (or aspects of it, such as determinism and economism). Literature often provided the point of departure for many of its practitioners, not least its ‘founding fathers’: E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams read English in Cambridge, as did Richard Hoggart in Leeds; all held extra-mural positions as English tutors; Stuart Hall was trained in English Literature in Jamaica.

And yet, the relationship with literature has been one of overriding tensions. Tom Steele has offered a picture of the ongoing, often fierce, disagreements that took place over the teaching of literature between the 1930s and the 1960s. Within the Workers’ Educational Association, for instance, literature was regarded with suspicion by its more politically-motivated members, and constituted a matter of dispute between its ‘culturalist’ and ‘workerist’ wings (Steele, 1997: 120). Its supporters, moreover, would also split between those who advocated a ‘sociological approach’ and those who defended a more traditional ‘spiritual values’ approach (Steele, 1997: 80).²³

This disagreement would also affect cultural studies. When Richard Hoggart founded the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1962), within the department of English studies, at the University of Birmingham, he had a special interest in the teaching of literature. Later, under Stuart Hall, during the ‘sociological turn’ of the CCCS, literature was

²³ The stance of the ‘Labourist Left’ was, in general, to dismiss the arts as “the soft subjects of workers’ education” and as “women’s subjects” (Steele: 1997, 11-12).

deliberately avoided, in an attempt to disentangle cultural studies from the ‘literary-critical tradition’ of English studies (Hall et al., 1980: 9). The consecration of cultural studies as the site *par excellence* for the study of popular culture further accentuated this trend. Appearing overly remote from everyday life, literature was either dismissed as a diversion from more radical traditions (Hall, 1980a: 19) or assumed to be far too immersed in the ‘culture and society’ tradition to provide a reliable terrain for cultural studies (cf. Grossberg, 1997: 14-15).

As Steele has pointed out, Hoggart regarded the humanities and the aesthetic – ‘the development of the aesthetic sense, the training of taste’ (Steele, 1997: 121) – as necessary tools to contradict the ‘functionalist approach to adult education’, and reduce the brutalising effects of modern life and mass culture (Steele, 1997: 121). The influence of Leavisism is clear. At the time, Leavis still held a subversive appeal: he stood for a ‘socially relevant’ approach to literature, and constituted an alternative to the metropolitan literary élites, and Bloomsbury in particular (Steele, 1997: 17).²⁴ Steele argues that Hoggart’s position in the ‘culturalist/workerist’ debate was determined by his rejection of social class as the defining feature of adult education. For the then English tutor, the problem no longer resided in one’s ‘sociological position’ (i.e. one’s class), but in ‘cultural loss or scarcity’ (Steele, 1997: 120-1). Hoggart also hoped to use the methods of literary criticism to understand other kinds of writing (Steele, 1997: 135). His approach was not theoretical, but grew out of his teaching practice – he was, in Steele’s phrase, “notoriously distrustful of literary theory” (Steele, 1997: 136).²⁵ Hoggart’s take on literature expanded Leavis’s literary criticism insofar as it took popular culture seriously. However, his attention fell on “the private and personal strengths of working-class culture” rather than in “the public domain of working-class organisations” or “the realm of the political” (Steele, 1997: 28). His work is, in consequence, as Steele observes, “more feminised than that of his contemporaries, in the sense that women and subjectivity occupy a more central space” (Steele, 1997: 29), but also less politically motivated (Steele, 1997: 16). According to Steele, “he became more

²⁴ Williams would later situate Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* in the wake of Q. D. Leavis’s *Fiction and the Reading Public* and George Orwell’s journalism (cf. Steele, 1997: 125-126; cf. Mulhern, 2000: 95). Besides the Leavises and Orwell, Hoggart would be attracted to the work of the American liberal critic Lionel Trilling (especially *The Liberal Imagination*, 1950), other influences being Koestler and Graham Greene (Steele, 1997: 133).

²⁵ As Steele notes, “Hoggart spent little time theorising the move from literary to cultural studies since they appeared to him such a natural extension of his adult educational work” (Steele, 1997: 136).

concerned with reading the signs of the times, which he saw as a logical extension of Leavis's work, than with Williams's work of cultural materialism or Thompson's theorised social history" (Steele, 1997: 16).

Under Hoggart, then, also because of what he perceived to be his academic limitations, the emphasis fell on the literary critical strand of cultural studies (Steele, 1997: 139). Hoggart's work on popular culture – which, as Steele insists, had been anticipated in the WEA from the early thirties (Steele, 1997: 27) – became central to the Birmingham centre, and came to be regarded as the defining feature of the emerging British cultural studies (Steele, 1997: 118), a trend which continued to be encouraged under Stuart Hall's directorship. Francis Mulhern has rightly expressed his misgivings towards Hoggart's project: commenting on Hoggart's inaugural lecture as chair of Modern English at the University of Birmingham, given in 1964, he stressed Hoggart's "continuing affiliation with the dominant national variety of Kulturkritik", evident in the way he formulated his concern with language and renewed his trust in literature, which Mulhern calls "the Leavisian topic of cultural emergency" (Mulhern, 2000: 94). Resorting to E.M. Forster's motto 'Only connect', he called for the need to overcome the split between 'high' and 'low' culture, which he consigned to a new area of enquiry called 'Literature and Contemporary Cultural Studies' (Mulhern, 2000: 95). As Mulhern points out, "Literary 'art', in the Leavisian school of English and contemporary cultural studies, bore witness to the possibility of human wholeness" (Mulhern, 2000: 96). There were disturbances in Hoggart's vision, Mulhern concedes (Orwell is seen as one – Mulhern, 2000: 96), but these constituted "a sign of strain, not a moment of rupture" (Mulhern, 2000: 97).

An attempt at 'rupture' would be more apt a description for the work of Raymond Williams. Williams shared many of Hoggart's interests and was experiencing many of his difficulties (namely those attached to adult education). A former member of the Communist Party, he was more pointedly looking for a way to conciliate Leavisism with socialism. The impetus of Williams's work, as Steele notes, derived directly from his practice as a tutor (Steele, 1997: 23). Williams insisted on an autonomous project which could be developed within the scope of adult education, an alternative 'cultural politics' (Steele, 1997: 24). For him, "adult education, at its best, was actually *a part of the process of social change*" (Steele, 1997: 25, my emphasis), an idea that implied a turn to the symbolic, without

nevertheless leaving behind older, 'workerist' concerns with class and social consciousness (Steele, 1997: 26).²⁶ The first challenge that Williams faced was how to approach "literature as literature and not as a branch of history or sociology" (Steele, 1997: 186), a challenge which he hoped to meet through a combined method of close reading and permanent inquiry into the relations between literature and history (Steele, 1997: 186):

Williams's own solution to the gulf between the 'social relevance' tutors and the textual purists was to propose that the social function of literature lay in training people how to 'read', that is to read actively and critically and be able to demystify textual material. While he maintained that making correlations between literature and its social context was both necessary and desirable, especially in adult education, this should always be a judicious operation. While, for example, social history proceeded by drawing abstractions, the discipline of literature lay in close reading. So, while inter-disciplinarity was desirable, it had to begin with the recognition that two distinct methodologies needed to be learned. (Steele, 1997: 189)

In many respects, this still constituted an extension and modification of the Leavisian project (Steele, 1997: 190). In the early 1950s, Williams's recommended reading list remained very conventional, including Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public* and Orwell's essays, Matthew Arnold's essays and T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* (Steele, 1997: 194-5).²⁷ His attempt at a 'left Leavisism' was doomed to fail, as Steel has pointed out: "The marriage of Leavisism and left politics had failed because it had not taken into account that Leavisism, despite its oppositional standpoint, was unhappily also hostile to socialism" (Steele, 1997: 24).²⁸ Williams's project, nevertheless, was to take a different direction in the subsequent decades. The project, initiated in the 1950s and earlier, to re-connect literature with the social (or rather, to show that they had never been

²⁶ A turn that was political too, the outcome of a changing political mood. It can be seen in the importance William Morris had for both Williams and Thompson: " 'William Morris' for some considerable time then came to signify a fecund marriage of the British romantic critique of capitalism and the non-Soviet Marxist tradition" (Steele, 1997: 27). He adds: "'Morris' then functioned as a sign for the unpartied left for whom communism had become identical with Soviet foreign policy, Trotskyism, however prescient its critique of communism, a kind of theological maximalism, and Labourism, after the collapse of the Atlee government, an unprincipled vehicle for career politicians" (Steele, 1997: 27).

²⁷ It displayed "a significant absence of any Marxist references" (Steele, 1997: 197). Williams's approach would change in the seventies, when he turned to Marxism (Steele, 1997: 190).

²⁸ E. P. Thompson made a similar remark concerning T. S. Eliot's influence on Williams (See Thompson, 1961a: 26).

truly disconnected) was to move away from Leavis and re-engage with Marxism.²⁹ Central to Williams's project was, however, a new understanding of 'culture'. As he first advanced in 1958, in his book *Culture and Society*, the idea of culture was inextricably linked to the social changes that had been taking place in England from the eighteenth century onwards. Based on a largely literary corpus, he considered the idea of culture as 'a response to Industry and Democracy', and to 'the new problems of social class' (Williams, 1961: 17). These ideas of culture, he concluded, "are joined, and in themselves changed, by the growing assertion of a whole way of life, not only as a scale of integrity, but as a mode of interpreting all our common experience, and, in this new interpretation, changing it" (Williams, 1961: 18). In the foreword to the Penguin edition, Williams further reinforced this idea of 'whole' and 'common' culture, by declaring that a 'new general theory of culture' was in the process of being achieved, which he described as "a theory of relations between elements in a whole way of life" (Williams, 1961: 12).³⁰

Literature thus provided the object of his analysis but also the launching pad for an engagement with other issues. From the 1970s on, Williams took on a new set of concerns which would result in what came to be known as 'cultural materialism'. His approach to literature now took issue with the assumption (associated with certain strands of Marxism) that the social material of literary works more or less directly 'reflected' the 'basic facts' or 'structures' of the society in which they had been produced (e.g. Williams, 1973;1977). As he would later clarify, his project required the bridging of the gap between culture-as-idea and culture-as-lived, as well as the rejection of a reflective, effects-oriented analysis (inspired by 'effect studies' of observational sociology, of which Williams was extremely critical) (Williams, 1995: 23-4).³¹

²⁹ On Williams's relationship with Marxism, Francis Mulhern wrote: "The simplest documentary evidence suggests a history in three acts: initial commitment, disillusioned withdrawal, critical re-engagement and return" (Mulhern, 2000: 83). However, he goes on to suggest a more uneven trajectory, ridden by tensions, which signals "a fundamental continuity, yet not a fundamental coherence", in other words, that points to "a persisting internal discrepancy" (Mulhern, 2000: 84).

³⁰ For Mulhern, this aspect is what really defines Williams's theory, early and late: his insistence on "the inseparability, the 'indissolubility' of 'the whole social process'" (cit. Mulhern, 2000: 88).

³¹ Williams distinguishes three areas of study in the sociology of culture: (1) the social conditions of art, which he redefines, in an attempt to disengage it from strictly psychologist/aesthetic understandings, as "a study of the situations and conditions of practices" (Williams, 1995: 23); (2) the social material in art works, an already extensive area which, nevertheless, developed under the influence of the base/superstructure theory and the idea of reflection (in both content and form); (3) the social relation in art works, whereby 'reflection' gives way to 'mediation' (Williams, 1995: 24). By 'mediation', Williams means, on the one hand, the

A common critique of Williams from within cultural studies (e.g. Grossberg) concerns his capitulation to the 'culture and society' tradition, which is associated with his disregard of popular culture. Steele does mention Williams's "comparative lack of interest in working-class novels" (Steele, 1997: 182), but prefers to speak of a lifelong 'tension' between "the idea of 'culture' as a way of life, 'culture' in the anthropological sense and 'culture' as the imaginative products of a people: Art" (Steele, 1997: 182). This tension was surely there. It is important to note, however, that the understandings of literature, popular culture and mass, commercial culture were often different to the ones we have grown accustomed to.³² In Williams's defence, Álvaro Pina has argued that he did succeed in overcoming the 'culture and society' divide, namely through the concept of 'structure of feeling', which, though often illustrated and explored in relation to literature, "does not privilege literature" (Pina, 2001).³³

Although it cannot be said that British cultural studies was "simply an outgrowth" of English (Steele, 1997: 118),³⁴ literature certainly remained an enduring interest to Hoggart,

medium of composition (the relations between social and artistic forms); and, on the other, "an indirectness of relation between experience and its composition" (Williams, 1995: 24), which confirms the move away from "the tracing of direct relations of content or of form" (Williams, 1995: 25).

³² Steele stresses the usage, in the late thirties and within the WEA, of the term 'popular culture' "to indicate an element of working-class struggle rather than mass, commercial culture" – a term which also implied "the idea of conscious agency" (Steele, 1997: 88; cf. 163). This point is also made in relation to E. P. Thompson, for whom, according to Steele, "popular culture is only of interest (...) insofar as it sustains resistance or rebellion" (Steele, 1997: 165). In *Culture and Society*, Williams compared the prejudice against popular culture to the prejudice against the novel, when it first appeared between 1730 and 1740 (Williams, 1961: 295). He makes a distinction between literature produced for the working people by others and literature produced by the working people, which was "if by no means always good, at least quite different in important respects" (Williams, 1961: 296). Moreover, he displaces the importance of 'reading' as the measure of cultural accomplishment and 'the quality of general living', pointing out that "there are other forms of skilled, intelligent, creative activity" (Williams, 1961: 297).

³³ As Pina points out, 'structure of feeling' successfully "articulates the social with the personal, emotion and affect with meanings and values, the lived with the desired, experience with change, material practice with semantic availability, the known with the knowable" (Pina, 2001). The unity between 'culture and society' was also realised in Williams's teaching practice, through his pedagogic project, which presupposed a *two-sided, interactive* relationship between 'expert knowledge' and 'everyday practice'. In Pina's words, "cultural studies emerged as an intellectual practice which moved from the expert knowledges to the everyday practice and from the everyday practice to the expert knowledges – and aimed at reconstituting the productive unity of society and culture" (Pina, 2000). Finally, it was realised in Williams's concept of a 'common culture', which was harnessed to *both* education and participatory democracy (Pina, 2001).

³⁴ Steele prefers to see the birth of the Birmingham centre more as "a caesarean rupture from the host than an easy birth" (Steele, 1997: 118-9). He plays down Hoggart's debt to Leavis, given his working class origins and his life-long commitment to working-class students (Steele, 1997: 119). Hoggart's aim was with constructing "a middle way" to correct the extremes of the sociological approach and Leavisism (Steele, 1997: 124). Moreover, other influences were crucial in the development of the new formation. E.P. Thompson had been interested in retrieving "radical and popular movements neglected in academic accounts" and in

Williams and Thompson.³⁵ These authors' connections to literature and English brought new perspectives to the social project that was more generally being shaped in adult education. The impact of cultural studies or (as Williams often referred to it) 'cultural politics' on literature was also immediately felt. Many concepts and related practices that had been central to literary studies began to crumble down under the pressure of the new practices demanded by the context of adult education – notions such as canon, period and literary value, and distinctions such as those between high culture and popular or mass culture were called into question. But here, too, the work of cultural studies has remained incomplete. Steele calls into question some of the alleged achievements of cultural studies – such as the “assault on conventional literary studies”, since “departments of English continue to flourish” (Steele, 1997: 30).

As Steele pointed out, “the teaching of literature was the primary site of ideological contestation in adult education during the 1930s” (Steele, 1997: 185). Literature was often deployed for conservative ends. Even within the WEA, debates over the teaching of literature were staged in terms of the embrace of a national, 'objective', liberal humanist culture as against a workerist, partisan, proletarianised (if not straightforwardly Marxist) one. From the late forties onwards, the Cold War had a decisive effect on the uprooting of communist ideals (or those perceived as such) from education (Steele, 1997: 178). Meanwhile, in left-wing circles (inside the WEA, but also the Communist Party), partly under the influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, culture was acquiring more prominence (Steele, 1997: 167). In what Steele regards as a “definite shift of focus”, away

revealing “another untold history from the ‘bottom up’” (Steele, 1997: 22), a project which was systematically pursued in Thompson's classes and which culminated in his groundbreaking work, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson's insights had a considerable impact on Williams (namely, in his 1960 review of the latter's *Long Revolution*) – according to Steele, it was through this “complementary pair” that “two of the most formative streams”, Leavisism and Marxism, were creatively brought into contact with adult education (Steele, 1997: 176). However, neither Williams nor Thompson is exclusively identified with one of these streams (Steele, 1997: 176-177).

³⁵ E. P. Thompson's links to literature were no less important (Steele, 1997: 145, 150, 152-3). His attachment to Marxism notwithstanding (of the three 'founding fathers', he was the one most influenced by it – he was a member of the Communist Party until 1956 and of the Communist Party Historian's Group), he had, according to Steele, “a belief in the absolute value of literary studies” which he thought could be 'disentangled' from 'bourgeois' values' (Steele, 1997: 155). Thompson made ample use of textual analysis, stylistics and hermeneutics in the study of historical documents (Steele, 1997: 159). Furthermore, he attributed to the 'literary' (and poetry in particular) an important role in the expansion of consciousness (Steele, 1997: 162).

from 'pure' politics into 'cultural struggle' (Steele, 1997: 170), literature came out as a winner.

On the other hand, what such a leading position meant was becoming increasingly less certain. Literature was itself undergoing redefinition. Steele refers to "a transitional moment [in the history of adult education] in which the study of literature becomes the study of 'culture', envisaged in both the symbolic and anthropological usages of the term, through interdisciplinary work" (Steele, 1997: 86). Williams's concept of a 'common culture' was behind this transition. From as early as 1958, with *Culture and Society*, 'common culture' emphasised the need to fully take into account diversity and resistance in relation to a dominant culture:

(...) even within a society in which a particular class is dominant, it is evidently possible both for members of other classes to contribute to the common stock, and for such contribution to be unaffected by or in opposition to the ideas and values of the dominant class. (Williams, 1961: 308)

In his review of Williams's *The Long Revolution*, E. P. Thompson perceptively noted that Williams's definition placed too much emphasis on the idea of 'common', underestimating the quality of 'struggle' in culture (Thompson, 1961a: 33; 1961b: 34; 36). Williams was keen to identify common culture with "the traditional popular culture of England" (Williams, 1961: 308). He also distinguished between 'valuable dissident elements' inside a culture and a *common* culture (Williams, 1961: 307), a distinction which has to be seen in the light of his commitment to democracy and socialism. In this way he gave the cue to the trend that was to prove the most prolific within cultural studies' engagement with literature, namely the re-shaping of the project of a 'common culture', a term which would often collude with that of 'Englishness'.

In 1981, Raymond Williams pointed out that most tendencies in Marxism and structuralism were at odds with the dominant paradigm of literary studies (Williams, 1981: 51). Such a paradigm, according to him, conceived of literature as the set or canon of printed texts of an 'imaginative' nature which were 'produced' by way of criticism and of a certain idea of 'Englishness' – literature thus meant not only 'Literature', but also '*English Literature*' (Williams, 1981: 52-4). Placing most of his early literary work within this orthodox

paradigm, Williams goes on to describe his own trajectory towards an alternative theoretical framework for the study of literature, which culminated in his project of cultural materialism (Williams, 1981: 64).³⁶ For cultural materialism, literature is still ‘central’, but it is now read “along with other writing, in a different perspective” (Williams, 1981: 64). The scope of analysis is prised open, to embrace “all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production” (Williams, 1981: 64-5). Furthermore, it is recognised that literature has to be opened up to other modes of perception and reconnected with the (subordinated) experiences of the socially excluded. Literature, in other words, is now taken as a site of alternative representations and projected desires, rather than being straightforwardly dismissed as a product of ‘bourgeois culture’. The complicity of literature in forging a consensus – which was national (‘English literature’), liberal-humanist, imperialist and masculinist³⁷ – became an important topic from the seventies onwards, even if often outside the precincts of the CCCS.³⁸

It was, indeed, mostly outside cultural studies that the meanings and implications of cultural studies to the study of literature were being tested and expanded upon. This was clearly the case of Alan Sinfield, whose cultural materialist approach to literature was first and foremost an intervention in the literary field (cf. this critic’s ‘apology’ for focusing on literary culture – Sinfield, 1989: 5), even though his theoretical concerns are part of a broader political project. Sinfield’s work developed against the backdrop of new historicism (a dialogue is especially conducted with the work of Stephen Greenblatt), then a

³⁶ Williams identifies two other tendencies that developed in opposition to the dominant paradigm, namely: the Marxist understanding of literature as involved in conflict-ridden historical processes and therefore constituting a challenge to a unified notion of ‘Literature’; and, within structuralism, ‘radical semiotics’ or deconstruction (Williams 1981: 65). About his ‘cultural materialism’, a bemused Mulhern asks: “Why, even as he characterised his developed position as ‘a Marxist theory’, one ‘within historical materialism’, should he also give it a name of its own, ‘cultural materialism’ (1977: 5)?” (Mulhern, 2000: 89).

³⁷ Raymond Williams’s work, which called into question traditional notions of literature and, more precisely, English (insisting, for instance, that literature is a socio-historical construct rather than an aesthetic given) laid the foundations for the challenge that followed. See, for instance, *Keywords* (especially, Williams, 1983: 184-5) and *Marxism and Literature* (1977). The influence of Williams can be discerned in the work of critics like Tony Davies (e.g. Davies, 1981), Terry Eagleton (e.g. 1983) and Edward Said (e.g. 1994).

³⁸ Literature’s return to cultural studies – by the hand of postmodernism and poststructuralism, after its ‘sociological turn’, was a return with a vengeance. It came divested of its former special status: literature now meant a text on a par with other texts, and more often than not an instance of popular culture. Furthermore, it now threatened to engulf all other aspects of the social, now that culture was regarded as a text that could be read. Williams would be one of the severest critics of this kind of literary approach to culture, which he disapprovingly called a “culturology of the social”, i.e. a mere extension of literary criticism (Robbins 1995: xi).

major challenger of traditional literary criticism in American academia. Although he recognises a common ground of interests (cultural materialism and new historicism having sprung out of the growing politicisation of literary studies since the late 1970s), Sinfield nevertheless underlines their differences.³⁹ Unlike ‘new historicists’, who “really believe in literary research”, cultural materialists want to go one step further, to ask “what it is all for” (Sinfield, 1992: 8). Therefore, rather than confining their analysis to close reading, cultural materialists are interested in “institutions of culture, including the Englit business”, and in “the general implications of intellectual work” (Sinfield, 1992: 8). The key assumptions here are (1) *there are* implications attached to intellectual work; (2) these are to be understood politically. Sinfield thus sums up cultural materialism:

Culture is political. That is the key axiom of *cultural materialism* – Raymond Williams’s term for analytic work which sees text as inseparable from the conditions of their production and reception in history; as involved, necessarily, in the making of meanings which are always, finally, political meanings. Literary writing, like all cultural production, operates through an appeal for recognition: “The world is like this, isn’t it?” it says in effect; and that has to be political. We make sense of ourselves and our situations within an ongoing contest of representations, and they come vested with varying degrees of authority. Some are endorsed by secretaries of state, professors, princes, and examination boards; to assert a subcultural framework of interpretation in the face of such ideological power, you need a good deal of self-assurance. (Sinfield, 1994: viii, italics in original)

For cultural materialists, then, literature is deeply steeped in the social/material world. A site of difference, division and power imbalance (a perception irreconcilable with the notion of a ‘common humanity’ – Sinfield, 1992: 10), the social is by consequence also a site of permanent conflict and contradiction. It is characterised, following Raymond Williams, by “the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance” (cit. Sinfield, 1992: 9). Since literature partakes of this quality and must by consequence be regarded as a ground of ideological contestation and *appropriation*, the focus of literary analysis should fall on the “strategic organizations of

³⁹ Sinfield nevertheless points out that the label ‘new historicism’ comprises a vast range of preoccupations, rather than a single approach (Sinfield, 1992: 7-8).

texts – both the modes by which they produce plausible stories and construct subjectivities, and the faultlines and breaking points through which they enable dissident reading” (Sinfield, 1992: 9). Even a ‘classic’ and established author like Shakespeare can be submitted to this type of analysis. Because he acts as a ‘powerful cultural token’ (Sinfield, 1992: 11) – whatever is said through him is bound to have greater effect – Shakespeare is especially prone to co-optation and appropriation. Taking *Julius Caesar* as an example, Sinfield shows how the ‘received text’ was at different times reorganized for the stage to produce different (by turns revolutionary, liberal, conservative) readings (Sinfield, 1992: 10-6).⁴⁰ Therein lies Shakespeare’s appeal and apparent timelessness (cf. Sinfield, 1992: 11).

Another strategy is “violence to the received text” (e.g. Sinfield, 1992: 20). At stake here is not to endorse the notion of the ‘radical’ elusiveness of the text (at the risk of dissolving it), but to draw attention to the social ‘lives’ of texts, to how texts are ‘kept alive’ by being accorded certain social meanings. Drawing on Stanley Fish’s famous query – “Is there a text in this class?” – Sinfield playfully formulates a rather different question: ‘is there a class in this text?’ (Sinfield, 1992: 285) For him, the range of readings available is rooted in the articulation between text and its many, shifting contexts – violence occurring whenever either of these fails to be considered. Sinfield’s reading of *Julius Caesar* is an instance of bringing a context hitherto suppressed back into the text, in order that it can participate in the contest over meaning *and authority*. His aim is “to check the tendency of *Julius Caesar* to add Shakespearean authority to reactionary discourses. Shakespearean plays are powerful cultural tokens, places where meaning is established and where it may be contested” (Sinfield, 1992: 21). To achieve this end, this critic resorts to Shakespeare’s original sources (such as Plutarch), and other historical documents (Sinfield, 1992: 20-1). His goal is to present a reading that, while drawing upon Shakespeare’s established authority, is capable of telling a different, ‘alternative story’. In a clear reference to Pierre Macherey, he maintains that “all stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to repress” (Sinfield, 1992: 21). His proposal, then, is to

⁴⁰ See also Sinfield’s discussion of the struggle to appropriate Shakespeare in the U.S. (Sinfield, 1992: especially 260-272). Sinfield illustrates how the “battle for the possession of Shakespeare” (one example is of a literal row!) was fought along class lines, between highbrow and lowbrow understandings (Sinfield, 1992: 264-5). According to Sinfield, far more was at stake than proving one’s refined tastes – Shakespeare “had become a place where ideas of the United States might be authorized” (Sinfield, 1992: 266).

work within the boundaries of 'Englit', but also against it, by challenging some of its basic tenets and (often unarticulated) presuppositions:

Conservative criticism has generally deployed three ways of making literature politically agreeable: selecting the canon to feature suitable texts, interpreting these texts strenuously so that awkward aspects are explained away, and insinuating political implications as alleged formal properties (such as irony and balance). (...) Even so, the three strategies are available also to dissident critics, who may offer their own texts, re-read canonical texts so as to produce acceptable political tendencies, and propose that formal properties inscribe a progressive politics (social realism, for instance, or internal distanciation). So dissident critics may join and perhaps take over the Englit game. (Sinfield, 1992: 21)

To these, Sinfield adds a fourth and a fifth strategy for dissident reading, namely: placing the text in its context, so as to uncover "the processes by which textual reading is transformed into cultural significance"; and "blatantly reworking the authoritative text so that it is forced to yield, against the grain, explicitly oppositional kinds of understanding" (Sinfield, 1992: 22). Both strategies constitute a challenge to the conventional, canonical understandings of literature as 'transcendent', complete and unassailable. The former (contextualisation) relocates the text back within the dynamics of (social and political) space and time. Seen as "a cultural intervention", the text is then available to be read in relation to the 'specific set of practices' attendant to its production (which tried "to render persuasive a view of reality"), and to those ever-changing practices that have shaped its subsequent readings (Sinfield, 1992: 22). Sinfield claims that "the (perhaps reactionary) values stated or implied in a text lose some of its power, since it is no longer assumed that they are simply to be endorsed as the insights of genius, transcending historical contexts" (Sinfield, 1992: 22). As for the fifth strategy, not completely unknown to creative writing (Jonathan Dollimore has referred to it as 'creative vandalism' – Sinfield, 1992: 22), it is now applied to literary criticism, resulting in the most extreme type of dissident reading. If, as mentioned above, the possibility of 'violating the text' is spelled out but not condoned, neither is the temptation to embark on a quest for the text's 'authentic' meaning (often simply equated with the author's 'intended meaning'). What the author 'had in mind', the 'spirit' of the work, is in this case made into an object of dispute (Sinfield, 1992:

23) – a practice that is predicated on the identification of the author with authority (a notion often attached to and reinforced by the idealist, transcendental conception of the author as an artist and creator).

In sum, the main idea underpinning Sinfield's cultural materialist approach to literature is that cultural producers are steeped in ideology and that they have a 'distinctive power' (i.e. an 'ideological power') (Sinfield, 1992: 26). And yet, this is not the end of the story. Given the fact that meaning is "produced culturally", "humanities intellectuals contribute to the contest to make some stories, some representations, more plausible than others" (Sinfield, 1992: 26). Sinfield therefore concludes:

As Walter Benjamin remarked, "cultural treasures" are usually a principle feature of triumphal processions; it is our task to resist this parading, to prevent such "documents of civilization" being coopted to enhance the plausibility of oppressive stories. What we make of Shakespeare is important politically because it affects what he makes of us. It is, we may say, a theater of war. (Sinfield, 1992: 26)

Meaning is produced culturally, out of continuous contest, the main sites of this contest being: (1) the conditions of plausibility, which will "determine which stories will be believed" (Sinfield, 1992: 30); (2) the attitude (recognition, defiance, indifference) towards one of the tenets of these conditions – authority.

The first aspect, as Sinfield acknowledges, relates directly to the question of the production of ideology (Sinfield, 1992: 32). Drawing on Althusser's essay on ideological state apparatuses, Sinfield understands ideology as a mediating, but also productive, social phenomenon: "Ideology produces, makes plausible, concepts and systems to explain who we are, who the others are, how the world works" (Sinfield, 1992: 32). Because it was already there when we 'came to consciousness', has become one with everyday 'common sense' and, therefore, "goes without saying", ideology has a stronger bid to set the terms of plausibility (Sinfield, 1992: 32). But, as Sinfield points out, ideology is not just to do with a given vision of reality, but also with the "frameworks of perception, maps of meaning" on which that vision rests (Sinfield, 1992: 32). Ideology pervades the entire social world, but is the more powerful the closer it is to the social sources of power. In other words, though accepting the co-existence of different 'scripts' and 'scriptors' (including those operating

‘from below’), Sinfield retains the idea of a ‘power elite’ associated with the state, “the most powerful scriptor”, for it controls the widest range of means (Sinfield, 1992: 33). However, he also resists giving in to what he calls “the ‘entrapment model’ of ideology and power, whereby even, or especially, maneuvers that seem designed to challenge the system help to maintain it” (Sinfield, 1992: 39). According to this model, alternative visions and discourses are, in the end, always appropriated; resistance is always coopted. For Sinfield, writing in the early nineties, this idea has found much favour in academia⁴¹, constituting a major obstacle towards the adoption and further development of the theory of ideology.⁴² Sinfield acknowledges the problem, “if we come to consciousness within a language that is continuous with the power structures that sustain the social order, how can we conceive, let alone organize, resistance?” (Sinfield, 1992: 35) His answer is twofold. Firstly, he proposes a conception of resistance which is at odds with the ‘ideology of individualism’, whereby resistance would always rest upon individual human agency, a dominant assumption of traditional literary criticism which was largely left unchallenged by poststructuralist interventions, including those of new historicism (Sinfield, 1992: 38). In his view, a focus on the individual forecloses the possibility of resistance:

The essentialist-humanist approach to literature and sexual politics depends upon the belief that the individual is the probable, indeed necessary, source of truth and meaning. Literary significance and personal significance seem to derive from and speak to individual consciousness. But thinking of ourselves as essentially individuals tends to efface the processes of cultural production and, in the same movement, leads us to imagine ourselves to be autonomous, self-determining. It is not individuals but power structures that produce the system within which we live and think, and focusing upon the individual makes it hard to discern those structures; and if we discern them, hard to do much about them, since that would require collective action. (Sinfield, 1992: 37)

⁴¹ Sinfield stresses this aspect: “the notion that dissidence is characteristically contained has caught the imagination of the profession” (Sinfield, 1992: 39-40). He connects this trend to the professionalization of literary studies: anxiety and complacency have been the only significant reactions to the current professional structure, respectively, from new historicists and Stanley Fish (Sinfield, 1992: 289-290).

⁴² Sinfield takes up Poulantzas’ “critique of a unitary conception of power” (Sinfield, 1992: 82) to put forward a complex view of the relationship between power and ideology:

For ideology, by definition, does not directly express the actual power structure – that is what it is designed to obscure: “Ideology has the precise function of hiding the real contradictions and of *reconstituting* on an imaginary level a relatively coherent discourse” (Poulantzas, p. 207). Any text stands in a complex relation to the power structure. (Sinfield, 1992: 83, italics in original)

In other words, the feeling of ‘entrapment’ associated with ideology derives from the fact that “personal subjectivity and agency” are “unlikely sources of dissident identity and action”, which makes Sinfield conclude: “Political awareness does not arise out of an essential, individual self-consciousness of class, race, nation, gender, or sexual orientation; but from involvement in *a milieu, a subculture*” (Sinfield, 1992: 37, italics in original). In other words, resistance does not rely upon the empowerment of individuals, but on collective action. This is how the ideology of individualism works: “Validating the individual may seem attractive because it appears to empower him or her, but actually it undervalues potential resources of collective understanding and resistance” (Sinfield, 1992: 38).⁴³

Secondly, Sinfield counters the totalising bend of ideology with the notion of ‘faultlines’. Faultlines are intrinsic to the structures in which they are embedded and which they upset – they can be ‘resolved’, but they are “by definition resistant to the fantasies that would erase them” (Sinfield, 1992: 41). For Sinfield, then, “dissident potential derives ultimately not from essential qualities in individuals (though they have qualities) but from conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself, even as it attempts to sustain itself.” Drawing on Williams, this critic adds:

Despite their power, dominant ideological formations are always, in practice, under pressure, striving to substantiate their claim to superior plausibility in the face of diverse disturbances. Hence Raymond Williams’s observation that ideology has always to be produced: “Social orders and cultural orders must be seen as being actively made: actively and continuously, or they may quite quickly break down.” Conflict and contradiction stem from the very strategies through which ideologies strive to contain the expectations that they need to generate. This is where failure – inability or refusal – to identify one’s interests with the dominant may occur, and hence where dissidence may arise. (Sinfield, 1992: 41-42)

Contradiction seeps into the text – it is at its core, since what interests people (writers and readers) is “an aspect of their life that they found hard to handle” (Sinfield, 1992: 46). Hence Sinfield’s conclusion:

⁴³ Cf. Sinfield on the shortcomings of a politics oriented towards individual rights (Sinfield, 1992: 293-294).

This is why it is not unpromising to seek in literature our preoccupations with class, race, gender, and sexual orientation: it is likely that literary texts will address just such controversial aspects of our ideological formation. Those faultline stories are the ones that require most assiduous and continuous reworking; they address the awkward, unresolved issues, the ones in which the conditions of plausibility are in dispute. For authors and readers, after all, want writing to be interesting. The task for a political criticism, then, is to observe how stories negotiate the faultlines that distress the prevailing conditions of plausibility. (Sinfield, 1992: 47)

For Sinfield, dissidence always takes place within the dominant, with which it is, at least partially, implicated, and which it has to invoke in order to oppose (Sinfield, 1992: 48, 47). The greatest challenge for literary (now called ‘political’ – Sinfield, 1992: 45) criticism, however, is not only to identify (and fill in) the gaps (or ‘faultlines’) into which dissidence can trickle, be “discovered and articulated” (Sinfield, 1992: 46), but also (perhaps more importantly) to “shift the criteria of plausibility” (Sinfield, 1992: 51).

Sinfield’s model of dominant culture and its many layers (seeking to accommodate, though not always through negotiation or in a peaceful manner, subordinate, residual, emergent elements, either in a dormant or overtly conflicting way) is indebted to the work developed at the CCCS under Stuart Hall (Sinfield, 1992: 45-6). According to it, dissidence is always a double-edged business – it is embedded in dominant structures, to which it needs to refer back in order to oppose. The main idea is that no outcome is ever completely determined. A dominant discourse (or text) cannot “prevent ‘abuse’ of its resources” – e.g. through the appropriation of the subordinate for other ends (given the fact that “even to misrepresent, one must present” – Sinfield, 1992: 45) or by shifting attention to the text’s middle rather than closure (Sinfield, 1992: 48). Nor can a “text that aspires to dissidence” control its meaning: “it is bound to slide into disabling nuances that it fails to anticipate, and it cannot prevent the drawing of reactionary inferences by readers who want to do that” (Sinfield, 1992: 48). Sinfield adds:

There can be no security in textuality: no scriptor can control the reading of his or her text. And when, in any instance, either incorporation or resistance turns out to be the more successful, that is not in the nature of things. It is because of their *relative strengths in that situation*. (...) Either outcome depends on the specific balance of historical forces. (Sinfield, 1992: 48)

There are several problems with Sinfield's approach. One is that even if they vow to disturb and *dissent* from the Englit game, his reading strategies ostensibly tap on the 'cultural authority' that emanates from it.⁴⁴ Apart from the introduction of dissident readings, it could be argued, the 'game' remains very much the same. The mediation of authority remains in place – even (it could be argued contra Sinfield) in 'blatant reworkings' of literary texts (Sinfield, 1992: 24), whose full critical implications ultimately rest on the (authoritative) texts they draw upon. Sinfield is aware of this limitation: he accepts the premise (one of the axioms of cultural studies, shared by the likes of Stuart Hall, Anthony Giddens and Tony Bennett) that the dominated themselves are implicated in the process of domination – no longer in the form of 'false consciousness' (as Marx would have it), but as an actual condition brimming with dissident potential (cf. Sinfield, 1992: 83). As Sinfield puts it, "subcultures cannot avoid some kind of implication with the dominant – often they are positioned with its defining others. But through this very mechanism, they may return to trouble the social order" (Sinfield, 1992: 299). Attributing subcultures a 'subversive leverage' seems a promising, but also risky move. Just as subcultures may "exert a fascination for the dominant, focusing subversive fantasies of freedom, vitality, even squalor" (Sinfield, 1992: 299), the reverse can also be the case. Chances are that we end up locked in a relationship (now rendered in terms of complicity and attraction rather than pure antagonism) which may include visible exchanges and power fluctuations from one pole to the other, but in which the overall power nexus (which defines who is the dominant and who is the dominated, what is culture and what is subculture) remains in place.

Another problem with Sinfield's model concerns his approach to texts. Sinfield hopes to escape the formalist influence of traditional literary criticism, by insisting that texts can be (and are) deployed for different purposes throughout different historical moments. He may contest the postmodernist idea that 'everything is a text', or 'everything is theater' (Sinfield, 1992: 50); and yet, the text is still open to appropriation and *effect*, even if

⁴⁴ Sinfield explains his preference for the term 'dissident' over 'subversive' as a way to "circumvent the entrapment model" (Sinfield, 1992: 49). Subversion implies 'containment', whereas dissidence implies "refusal of an aspect of the dominant, without prejudging an outcome". As he anticipates, this choice does not seem to signal a significant political opening: "This may sound like a weaker claim, but I believe is actually stronger insofar as it posits a field necessarily open to continuing contest, in which at some conjunctures the dominant will lose ground while at others the subordinate will scarcely maintain its position" (Sinfield, 1992: 49).

history, rather than another source of indeterminacy, continues to be the *decisive* factor in reading.⁴⁵ As he puts it, “formal textual analysis cannot determine whether a text is subversive or contained. The historical conditions in which it is being deployed are decisive” (Sinfield, 1992: 49). In other words, neither subversion nor containment can be a priori guaranteed. The recipient of this critique is still traditional (formalist) literary criticism: “This prospect scandalizes literary criticism, because it means that meaning is not adequately deducible from the text-on-the-page. The text is always a site of cultural contest, but it is never a self-sufficient site” (Sinfield, 1992: 49).⁴⁶ However, one needs to ask to what extent the indeterminacy/ open-endedness of the literary text effectively ‘scandalizes’ the literary establishment. It can be argued that, on the contrary, it is widely represented in it. The ability to tell a plurality of stories in a pluralist society is, per se, insufficient and the limitations of this kind of approach need to be addressed.

What is important to stress (and Bourdieu does this better than Sinfield, as we shall see) is that, because they are inscribed in something that is recognised and valued as ‘literature’, literary texts bring along with them, not just the weight of ‘authority’, but a very specific ‘conceptual framework’ too. Sinfield does not hesitate to mobilise the former – i.e. the authority and recognition of literary, canonical texts (his examples are all from the canon) –

⁴⁵ Cf. Sinfield’s reliance on history with Tony Bennett’s post-Marxist conceptualisation of the relationship between literature and history in *Outside Literature* (1990). Bennett rejects the distinction between literary criticism and history, along with the ‘inside/outside literature’ polarity. “There is no outside of literature” (Bennett, 1990: 5), he contends. His major premise is that literature lacks both a political and theoretical outside – in other words, “a position from which the history of its functions might be written that is not implicated in the theoretical and political constitution of the prevailing field of literary institutions, practices and debates” (Bennett, 1990: 5). The historical study of literature, therefore, no longer is about the relation between discourse and the real (understood as a pre-discursive, outside-discourse entity). Instead, it is about the relations between the various discourses of representation, history being one amongst many other possible discourses. The ‘outside’ of literature can thus only refer to other discourses, other “regions of textuality” (Bennett, 1990: 69).

⁴⁶ Sinfield’s objections to new historicism can perhaps clarify his theoretical position. He allows that new historicism is linked to the loss of confidence in ‘literary humanism’, that it “collaborates in the relativizing of canonical texts by stressing their historical situations” and through the “use of anthropology”, that it undermines the authority of ‘Great Books’ by placing them side by side with other texts and “often acknowledges their roles in a contested drama of state power” (Sinfield, 1992: 284). Two main tendencies frame these practices: either “a poststructuralist sense of meaning as sliding always into a black hole of infinite textuality, or towards an awareness of ideology and politics” (Sinfield, 1992: 284). And yet, new historicism often fails to “develop its political potential”: “It slides back into old historicism or takes the easy route into the new oblivious formalism of poststructuralist word games; it finds itself at odds with radical movements with which it could be allied” (Sinfield, 1992: 284). Finally, it caves in to a model of ‘ideological entrapment’ – “whereby resistance is not just controlled, not just anticipated, but actually sponsored by the dominant to secure its own power” (Sinfield, 1992: 285). It, fails, in short, to deliver what Sinfield considers to be the fundamental task: “how to develop into purposeful political action the dissidence that our societies do actually produce” (Sinfield, 1992: 285).

for the purposes of dissident reading. Even the notion of ‘quality’ is salvaged: rejecting the notion defended by ‘essentialist-humanists’ that ‘literary quality’ counters (and is simultaneously above) any political effects, Sinfield argues: “the more persuasive the writing, the greater its potential for political intervention” (Sinfield, 1992: 50). By placing so much trust in the reading process (and in readers) – political intervention is to be found in the gaps of the text, which leave open the possibility for readers to find and tell other, different, dissident stories⁴⁷ – Sinfield is perhaps underestimating one of the most important contexts of reading from which the literary work cannot be easily dissociated, namely, literature itself. By this I mean the cultural field (as conceived by Bourdieu) within which production took place, and which will provide *one* of the backdrops for the text’s reception. Sinfield does draw on Bourdieu (more precisely, his essay “Symbolic Power”, published in English in 1977) to discuss ‘the relative autonomy of writers’ in relation to Sydney’s *Arcadia*. He stresses that “writing, even when it is purposefully in the service of an ideology, will very often manifest a slant towards the interests of the writer *as writer*” (Sinfield, 1992: 92). Sinfield is far from taking this ‘relative autonomy’ of the writer as ‘necessarily disruptive’ (it may express itself only in relation to writing, in experimentalism); nonetheless, given the status of the writer, he considers that “the writer is well placed to gain a distinctive perspective on the relations of power in the society”, in particular as this “may open the workings of power and ideology to scrutiny and contest” (Sinfield, 1992: 92). Following Bourdieu, he points out that more than one factor need be considered – there are ‘different structural positions’ within the field. Furthermore, “the specific configuration will depend on the writer’s class of origin and his or her relation to the state, the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie, and on the characteristics of the institutions of cultural production in which he or she is involved” (Sinfield, 1992: 93). For Sinfield, the position of the writer does not guarantee a position of subversion. However, by showing/exposing ideology (and the debt to Macherey is clear), the writer is “likely to stimulate awareness of the importance of ideological production in the sustaining, negotiating, and contesting of power in the state” (Sinfield, 1992: 94). Further, Sinfield

⁴⁷ Sinfield insists that the writer, not the text’s reception, is his main focus of analysis (Sinfield, 1992: 94). The reader, however, remains a central piece in his approach. A text’s ‘wide acceptability’ signals that “it is, in fact, being read in diverse ways, producing diverse patterns of confirmation, negotiation, and perhaps even subversion” (Sinfield, 1992: 94).

(clearly influenced by Bourdieu) also highlights the struggles writers are engaged with within their field, on which their work is significantly shaped – struggles over issues like the feminisation of ‘literature’ (and, related to it, the correlation between the artist and the homosexual), or the ‘contamination’ of literature by bourgeoisie values or capitalism, struggles which are, as Sinfield argues, largely entrenched in a masculine/feminine chain of appositions, a “nexus of class, sex, and the humanities” (Sinfield, 1992: 276, cf. 274-275). What Sinfield does criticise is the currently reactionary ideological stakes of literature, namely its relation to the ideology of humanism put at the service of European (and more recently, U.S.) imperialism (Sinfield, 1992: 283). He also turns critically to the professionalization of Englit (a historical reality) and its attendant problems. English literature, especially in the U.S., has become ‘operationalised’ (i.e. orientated towards the market, professions, and thus closer to corporate capitalism) (Sinfield, 1992: 286). Sinfield discerns three problems and contradictions associated with this trend: first, “a profession is too narrow a base upon which to sustain the pretensions of good culture” (Sinfield, 1992: 286); second, professions tend to become self-referential, which means that “questions about the purpose and meaning of the activity drop out of sight” (Sinfield, 1992: 287); finally, it represents a move away from the universal, which undermines its traditional moral pretensions: “The collapse of Man has made the traditional project of Englit absurd; it has become an edifice built over a void” (Sinfield, 1992: 287). By consequence, this critic asks, “if professional attainment is the only reason for studying literature, why not choose a more useful major – law, for instance?” (Sinfield, 1992: 287)⁴⁸

In the end, what has been more difficult to accept for the literary establishment (rather than the plurality of readings), has no doubt been the ascription of different readings to different reading subcultures (blacks, women, feminists, gays), which remain excluded from and at odds with the liberal-humanist formation that continues to dominate the literary establishment. It is against the latter that cultural materialism mobilises itself, by “working with subcultures to reinforce and extend the potential of people who inhabit them”

⁴⁸ In his critique of Stanley Fish, Sinfield concedes that discourses “make sense only because they are shared” (Sinfield, 1992: 288). However, he rejects the ‘totalizing’ conclusion that locks the text within “interpretive communities” (which Sinfield identifies with the profession), since it “effaces the hierarchy, competition, deference, and coercion in the profession” (Sinfield, 1992: 288). For Fish, professional boundaries are to be respected – any political intervention stands outside the scope of literary criticism, a proposition that Sinfield firmly rejects. It is always possible, Sinfield declares, to “bend, stretch, violate, and extend the rules in all kinds of ways”, namely by taking into account subcultures (Sinfield, 1992: 289).

(Sinfield, 1992: 291); to allow homosexuals or Blacks to read in accordance to their subcultures, and not the established academic script (Sinfield, 1992: 291). Cultural materialism aims to “seek ways to break out of the professional subculture and work intellectually (not just live personally) in dissident subcultures”, thereby joining the voices that deny “the dominant a monopoly of plausibility” (Sinfield, 1992: 294). This is in keeping with the notion that literature is part of a field that, like society, is divided and conflict-ridden – it rests on the premise that “a divided society should have a divided culture” (Sinfield, 1992: 290).

Sinfield’s five clarifications at the end of his book shed some light on the limitations of his approach, which, his claims to the contrary notwithstanding, seems not only overly confined to the profession, but also part of a modest political project (reflecting the general mood of the eighties and nineties). These are: (1) he recognises that “working towards a subcultural affiliation” is not the only option, but stresses how important it is “to challenge the validity of the established voices that we might speak in – the voices of European Man, U.S. Man, the profession” (Sinfield, 1992: 297); (2) he is interested in “developing common ground between diverse subordinated groups, with special care not to be contaminated by the dominant” (Sinfield, 1992: 297); (3) he is against “retreating into a ghetto”; instead, his aim is to look at the intersection of the marginal and the mainstream, to mobilise dominant strategies and skills for the cause of subordinated groups (Sinfield, 1992: 297-298)⁴⁹; (4) he rejects the idea that, because they are ‘authentic’, subcultures are to ‘rescue’ or ‘vitalize’ Englit: “Subcultures merit attention, not through an external evaluation of their quality, but through the fact of their subordination” (Sinfield, 1992: 298).⁵⁰ His last (5) clarification, however, suggests a modest politics – not because he rejects other forms and understandings of politics, but because he acknowledges the lack of historical opportunities to put them into practice (a position which might strike some as defeatist, others as realistic or pragmatic):

⁴⁹ Even in his more specialised book on queer reading, Sinfield speaks of his effort to maintain “a steady awareness of other subcultures” (Sinfield, 1994: x) and stresses that he aspires “to a broad political relevance” (Sinfield, 1994: xi).

⁵⁰ It should be noted that Sinfield’s project targets the moving of the academy towards subcultures, the opening up to them, not the other way round. Problematising the trend (from the sixties on) that saw people from subcultures join the dominant culture (e.g. by becoming culture providers in universities, the arts, etc.), he has in mind a more structural change – one which would successfully confront the ‘monopoly of plausibility’ held by the dominant (cf. Sinfield, 1992: 294).

Finally, I do not offer attention to subcultures as a strategy for winning – for introducing socialism, interracial harmony, or a genuine sexual liberation. My argument has been conceived defensively, *in response to a disheartening historical conjuncture*. The main goal is to help sustain the dignity and resistance of subordinated groups, and to be ready for *the next propitious moment*. (Sinfield, 1992: 299, my emphasis)

Sinfield's greatest contribution has been his cogent critique of literature as the product of a specific formation from which he believes it can and *must* be extricated. His 1989 book, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, demonstrated how socio-historical events (predicated on political choices) not only furnish the backdrop against which literature develops, but also interfere in the course and form that it takes. In the wake of the work of Williams and Bourdieu, Sinfield stresses that literature relates to “a dissident middle-class fraction”, which by consequence is capable of generating “a certain radical potential” (Sinfield, 1989: 35). This came to the fore after the post-war, around the debate over national culture, which posited, for the first time, that the arts (like healthcare, education, and housing) should be made available to all. As Sinfield points out, “what had hitherto been, in the main, the culture of the leisure class was proclaimed (to the discomfort of that class) as a universal culture” (Sinfield, 1989: 2). The conclusion is clear: just as texts can be appropriated in different historical contexts by different groups (subcultures) for different (political) ends, literature *as a historical entity* is also available to be used for different political projects (as Sinfield is overtly trying to do). The two premises underpin Sinfield's cultural materialist approach to literature.⁵¹

Sinfield's and Williams's projects was significantly influenced, even stimulated, by the challenges to traditional literary criticism that had been gestating within Marxist Criticism, and which gathered momentum in the sixties and seventies. Macherey's contribution was no doubt one of the strongest and most valid of these challenges. As Eagleton has recently observed, his *Theory of Literary Production* (first published in 1966, translated into English in 1978) “sent shockwaves through British left-wing literary circles even before its

⁵¹ Andrew Milner has distinguished between Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore's ‘cultural materialism’ and Williams's, calling the former, because it ignores its Marxist legacy, simply ‘Cultural Studies’. He importantly adds, “Williams's cultural materialism was never intended simply as coextensive with Cultural Studies, but rather as a particular argument within and even against it” (Milner, 2002: 19).

translation into English” (Eagleton, 2006: vii). When it arrived in England, in the early seventies, it was well-received, given that Marxist criticism was “at its most militant and productive” (Eagleton, 2006: vii).⁵² The book was “an implicit riposte to Georg Lukacs” (Eagleton, 2006: vii) and an application of Althusserian concepts to literature (Eagleton, 2006: viii).⁵³ It therefore constituted a ‘theoretical intervention’, set on revising the relations between the literary text, ideology and history (Wall, 1978: viii). Eagleton thus sums up the book’s ‘pathbreaking originality’:

What is at stake in the book is nothing less than a dramatically new way of approaching literature, one which in its unostentatious, low-key way scandalously smashes a whole range of liberal humanist icons. The literary text is not to be thought of as an ‘expression’ of the human subject or as a ‘reflection’ of reality. It has no depth, centre, unity or singular point of origin. It is the product not of authorial intention but of a process of production, which like the production of a shirt or a scooter operates by procedures quite independent of what the producer has in mind. (Eagleton, 2006: viii)

Macherey begins by making a distinction between ‘criticism as appreciation’ (the ‘education of taste’) and ‘criticism as knowledge’ (the ‘science of literary production’) (Macherey 1978: 4). It is the latter sense that he proposes to adopt and expand upon. Criticism is a form of knowledge which presupposes both “the elaboration of a new discourse, the articulation of a silence” (Macherey 1978: 6) and, for that to be possible, the “separation or distance between knowledge and its object” (Macherey 1978: 6). Criticism as knowledge, in other words, presupposes the distance or gap between literature and criticism: “What can be said *of* the work can never be confused with what the work itself is saying” (Macherey 1978: 7); one cannot replace the other, but only criticism can be recognised as knowledge, since “the critic, employing a new language, brings out a *difference* within the work by demonstrating that it is *other than it is*” (Macherey 1978: 7). This idea had manifestly been absent from traditional criticism, which had been satisfied with “describing the finished product, preparing it to be transmitted and consumed” (Macherey 1978: 12). Traditional literary critics had been mere ‘technicians of taste’

⁵² Eagleton was himself becoming a prominent actor of this ‘militant’ strand of criticism, and his *Criticism and Ideology* (1976) was greatly responsible for Macherey’s warm reception in England.

⁵³ Althusser was Macherey’s mentor, former teacher, and greatest formative influence.

(Macherey 1978: 13) falling prey to a number of illusions or ‘fallacies’: (1) the empiricist fallacy, which understands the work as isolated and a factual given, and, as such, ready to be ‘consumed’ (Macherey 1978: 12); (2) the normative fallacy, which submits the work to the critic’s own standards or norms, and assesses its shortcomings in relation to a model (Macherey 1978: 17); (3) the interpretive fallacy, which presupposes that the work has a ‘secret’ that it is the purpose of criticism to decipher (Macherey 1978: 37-38). Macherey’s aim at this point is to defend the literary work (and its inherent complexity) from the unacknowledged manipulations of traditional literary criticism. The work’s meaning can neither be uncovered (this would mean to give in to the empiricist fallacy, which reduces the work to itself) nor deciphered (which would correspond to the interpretive fallacy). Further, criticism cannot replace the literary work – if it takes the empiricist path, as Eagleton has put it, it will only manage to ‘say less in saying more’ (Eagleton, 1986: 11). Macherey’s understanding of criticism was clearly built on a new understanding of literature and the literary work. It perceived the latter not as the outcome of individual creativity, but of a production process which can (indeed must) be described *and explained*. Macherey identifies two central productive forces – determinacy and improvisation (Macherey, 1978: 39) – which push to the fore the permanent, inbuilt tension between the work’s ‘premeditated diversity’, on the one hand, and its spontaneous, linear outward form, on the other. This is made clear in five basic observations: (1) the work is never innocent (despite its apparent spontaneity); (2) it is not completely self-conscious either; (3) it is “determined at every moment and at every level”; (4) it is vulnerable to the ‘irruption of the real’; (5) finally, despite its superficial ‘linear simplicity’, it is always and fundamentally complex (Macherey, 1978: 27, 39). In addition to this, there is a new understanding of what is the object of literature– not ‘reality’, understood as an empirical given, but ideology (cf. Macherey, 2006: 363).

This takes us to a core issue in Macherey’s theory: the relationship between the literary work and reality. Writers do not create the materials with which they work (another reason why it is wrong to refer to an author as a creator – cf. Eagleton, 1986: 11); rather, they use the language of everyday life which is also seen as the language of ideology or illusion (Macherey, 1978: 59). By so doing, writers are inadvertently making ideology and its gaps apparent (Macherey, 1978: 60). For Macherey, literary discourse is a ‘parody’ or

'distortion' of reality rather than a representation or imitation of it (Macherey, 1978: 61). By using the language of 'illusion', of everyday ideology, which is needed for it to acquire "a semblance of life" (Macherey, 1978: 64), the work takes a stand in relation to these 'myths', offering "an implicit critique of its ideological content" (Macherey, 1978: 64). Literary theory is, consequently and by necessity, always about either "denunciation or complicity" (Macherey, 1978: 62). As Eagleton remarks, Macherey's notion of ideology is derived from Althusser: it comprises "the shapeless, amorphous stuff of everyday experience" (Eagleton, 2006: ix). The literary work is neither free of ideology nor does it simply reflect it – "Instead, it is as though it distances ideology from the inside – frames, 'arrests' and objectifies it, and thus, by making its limits and inconsistencies perceptible, begins the process of undoing it" (Eagleton, 2006: ix). The literary work (as fiction) is thus suspended between knowledge and illusion. Fiction replaces illusion, by being "determinate illusion" (Macherey, 1978: 64), hence the importance of the work's irreducibility, the need to maintain its *necessary* silence. What the work does not and cannot say is ultimately what matters (Macherey, 1978: 87): it is in its silence that its 'latent knowledge', its *unconscious*, lays (Macherey, 1978: 92). History is to be found here, in what he calls "a splitting within the work" (Macherey, 1978: 94). The relation between history (or "ideological history") and the work is therefore extremely complex. Firstly, it is one of determination, but a kind of determination that works from within the work, and is inherent to the production process (Macherey, 1978: 93-4); secondly, albeit placed within the work (rather than being a mere explanatory appendix to it), history is essentially and fundamentally *not* the work – it is, in Macherey's words, "the reverse side of what is written" (Macherey, 1978: 94).

A particular aspect of this conception of criticism has attracted much criticism, even in Marxist circles. For Eagleton, Macherey posited theory as an intervention "into history from some apparently transcendental vantage point" (cf. Eagleton, 1986 [1975]: 20), a charge which would become recurrent in the eighties and beyond, in the work of 'post-Marxists' like Tony Bennett (e.g. 1990). The problem is intrinsic to Marxism, whose vantage point must by necessity be subtracted from the history which it proposes to challenge (its project and *raison d'être*), which means that that vantage point can only be historical *in relation to itself*. This was even more visible as a problem in the sixties, in

which the need to create a distance from what *was* in order to bring about what *was not*, was especially acute. As Macherey has recently reasserted, the book was written as a critique of aspects of both structuralist and traditional ('bourgeois') literary criticism. It was an attempt to conciliate the structuralist concern "to consider formal relations ahead of the mass of immediately experienced content" with the principles of Marxist materialism, which had at its centre 'the notion of realism' (Macherey, 2006: 362). The dilemma was, "How was it possible to be simultaneously a materialist and a formalist?" (Macherey, 2006: 362) His theory set out to break with traditional approaches to literature, which entailed "substituting the concept of 'production' for the concept of 'creation', and examining the conditions under which specific discourses take shape and are ordered as literary discourses" (Macherey, 2006: 362-363). This allowed him, he adds, to restore "an objective tenor to literary discourse, in so far as literary discourse bears in its text the direct imprint of these conditions" and to distance this discourse "from the reality which it supposedly reflected as faithfully as possible, yet without detaching it completely from that reality which it rendered in a different shape, indirectly, obliquely or disjointedly" (Macherey, 2006: 363). He proposed, in short, that, rather than 'a supposedly bare reality', literary texts reflected "the contradictory ensemble of its representations, an ensemble which can be aptly designated by the concept of ideology" – a word he insists has not yet become obsolete (Macherey, 2006: 363).

Eagleton has also reaffirmed that Macherey's theory had 'radical implications for criticism' (Eagleton, 2006: viii). It showed that criticism "is not a reflection or reduplication of the literary work, but a work *upon* it which displaces it into another space altogether, and in doing so understands it in a way that it could not in principle understand itself" (Eagleton, 2006: viii). He adds:

Rather than merely elaborating what one might call the self-consciousness of the work, reflecting the way in which, so to speak, it sees (or would like to see) itself, critical analysis, like psychoanalysis (...), is bent on revealing its 'unconscious' or hidden underside. (...) it grasps what is uttered in terms of what is not uttered – in the light of the text's symptomatic repressions, evasions, slippages, self-contradictions and eloquent silences. It is in the 'not-said' of the work, not in what it proclaims or portrays, that its relation to history is most graphically exposed. Criticism 'makes speak' what the work must at all costs repress simply in order to be itself. Its job is not to extract some secret truth

from the work, but to demonstrate that its ‘truth’ lies open to view, in the historically necessary discrepancy between its various components. (Eagleton, 2006: viii-ix)

Macherey’s influence has indeed been far-reaching, often assuming forms he had neither anticipated nor intended. His conception of the ‘silences’ of the literary work has also, in many respects, stimulated a variety of readings from marginal reading constituencies (or, in Sinfield’s phrasing, ‘subcultures’) – feminist, gay, postcolonial – that have called into question liberal-humanist and naïve realist forms of criticism. After a period of high regard, in which it was very influential, and following Althusser’s demise, Macherey’s work lapsed into oblivion. Towards the end of the eighties, the ideological study of literature and literary criticism was becoming less common, as Marxism was slowly giving way to ‘post-Marxism’. Furthermore, Macherey’s work also developed in a different direction. He was, like Eagleton notes, a philosopher, not a literary critic (Eagleton, 2006: viii), as his subsequent work demonstrates.

Meanwhile, under similar historical conditions, and sharing with Macherey analogous concerns, Pierre Bourdieu was developing his own sociology of literature. Macherey’s theory – even though reacting against the idealism and formalism of traditional criticism and structuralism – would not escape the charge of being, as Eagleton put it, “a peculiarly Marxist variety of formalism” (Eagleton, 1986: 18). Bourdieu’s approach to literature saved itself from such charge by heading in the opposite direction, that is, towards looking at literature as a *social* practice.

Bourdieu’s interest in literature had been a constant in his work; indeed, his key notion of field, dating back to the mid 1960s (Boschetti, 2006, 140), was first applied to literature (Boschetti, 2006: 135, cf. Bourdieu, 1998: 33).⁵⁴ Anna Boschetti has attributed this to the fact that “literature was a central theoretical object” at the time, especially in the French context (Boschetti, 2006: 135). In tune with Macherey’s attempt to displace the concepts of the writer as creator and the work of art as an ‘organic’ unity (cf. Eagleton, 2006: x), Bourdieu’s major motivation was to ‘de-sacralize’, the writer and the process of literary creation by submitting them to sociological analysis (Boschetti, 2006: 136). His aim, in

⁵⁴ Boschetti and Johnson date the notion of ‘field’ at 1966 (Boschetti, 2006: 140; Johnson, 1993: 6). According to the latter, ‘habitus’ was introduced in 1967 (Johnson, 1993: 5).

other words, was “to objectify the social determinants of cultural phenomena, questioning the charismatic conception of art and culture” and explaining them as “social products” – an enterprise that, in a milieu still dominated by close reading and formalism (which post-structuralism had failed to interrupt)⁵⁵, as well as ‘reverential attitudes’ towards writers, accounted for much of the hostility which his work persistently attracted (Boschetti, 2006: 138-9).⁵⁶ Bourdieu himself singled out art and literature as areas particularly well-suited to demonstrate “the heuristic efficacy of *relational* thinking” (Bourdieu, 1993a: 29, italics in original), one of the cornerstones of his theory of practice. Furthermore, although his work did incorporate many of the usual critiques levelled against Marxist theory of culture, he was not particularly interested in engaging directly with one of its most controversial propositions, i.e. the base/superstructure dichotomy, which at the time dominated cultural theorisation in Britain and which was being central in the constitution of British cultural studies. His interest in the symbolic was closely linked to his research and sociological practice. He turned instead to another conceptual divide – that between individual and society, ‘objectivism’ and ‘subjectivism’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 125; Bourdieu, 1984: 482-3), structures and representations (Bourdieu, 1990: 126) – which was particularly pronounced in post-war France, where Sartre’s existentialism appeared to be the only alternative to Levi-Strauss’s structuralism (Brubaker, 1985: 746). Setting himself against these two opposing and competing trends, Bourdieu was determined to “escape from structuralist objectivism without relapsing into subjectivism” (Bourdieu, 1990: 61). He wanted to stress “the intricate relation between objective structures and subjective constructions” and therefore transcend “the usual alternatives of objectivism and subjectivism, of structuralism and constructivism, and even of materialism and idealism” (Bourdieu, 1998: 12).⁵⁷ Although his vision of social space remained very much under the influence of

⁵⁵ And so had structuralism. Indeed, for Bourdieu, the reason why structuralism “was ‘taken’ so well in the academic world”, despite the strong disagreements it provoked, was because it continued the tradition of internal reading (Bourdieu, 1993c: 178).

⁵⁶ Brown and Szeman similarly correlate the indifference, if not straightforward hostility, shown by the U.S. academy towards Bourdieu’s work to this ‘anti-aesthetic’ impulse (see Brown and Szeman, 2000: 4). Although distancing themselves from such a ‘reactionary and mystificatory’ stance towards art, these authors seem nevertheless uneasy about Bourdieu’s treatment of the aesthetic, an issue which occupies most of their introduction.

⁵⁷ Hence the description of his work as “constructivist structuralism” or “structuralist constructivism” (Bourdieu, 1990: 123).

structuralism,⁵⁸ he strongly rejected the notion of agents as mere “epiphenomena of structure” (Bourdieu, 1998: viii). What he came up with was an entirely new framework, in which terms like ‘field’, ‘position’, ‘strategy’, ‘disposition’, ‘symbolic capital’, ‘symbolic violence’ and ‘habitus’ were coined to render a relational rather than substantialist sociological vision (Bourdieu, 1998: 8, 31).

To put it briefly, Bourdieu conceived of the social world as a dynamic space formed by a finite variety of fields (*champs*), i.e. “relatively autonomous ‘worlds’” (Bourdieu, 1990: 73), which are ‘structurally homologous’ (Brubaker, 1985: 748) and susceptible of description. ‘Fields’ are a crucial theoretical tool, as they allow for ‘methodical comparison’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 245). Social agents (a term Bourdieu prefers to ‘subjects’, in order to capture their active and creative qualities – Bourdieu, 1998: viii, 25) shape and orient their practices according to specific ‘interests’, usually associated with the pursuit of certain forms of ‘capital’ (cultural capital, economic capital, symbolic capital and political capital).⁵⁹ Agents act in keeping with the positions they occupy in a field. This is not done in a conscious, let alone deterministic, manner, since there is a multiplicity of interests which vary in time and place (Bourdieu, 1990: 87-8). The actions of social agents (which Bourdieu prefers to call ‘practices’, since they are neither arbitrary nor one-time occurrences) can be explained by way of the concept of habitus, a metatheoretical concept devised to bridge the (theoretical) gap between social agents and the social world (that is to say, between them and their immediate field). ‘Habitus’ designates “a system of predispositions acquired through a relationship to a certain field” (Bourdieu, 1990: 90). It serves to explain the regularities (which can be objectively described) in the behaviour of social agents, without considering them the product “either of a conscious strategy or of a mechanical determination” (Bourdieu, 1990: 90).

As succeeding critics have noted, Bourdieu’s work on literature was largely built against existing theories – be it the opposition between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ readings (text as against context), all kinds of ‘immanent criticism’ (from New Criticism to hermeneutics

⁵⁸ Pileggi and Patton have insisted on Bourdieu’s ties to ‘classical sociology’, which have failed to be recognised in the US, where Bourdieu has often been ‘decontextualized’ and “incorrectly dumped into ‘post-structuralism’” (Pileggi and Patton, 2003: 314). Bourdieu himself has criticised the misallocation of his work in the U.S. under ‘post-modernism’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 244).

⁵⁹ Bourdieu contends that in France economic and cultural capital ‘determine’, through their distribution, ‘the structure of that social space’. With reference to the GDR and Scandinavian countries he also adds the importance of political capital (Bourdieu, 1998: 15-16).

and deconstruction) or different types of ‘reflection theories’, engaged with teasing out the direct relations between works of art and social structures (Boschetti, 2006: 145-6; Johnson, 1993: 1, 13). Among the latter, Bourdieu singles out those approaches (often Marxist or Marx-inspired) that seek to elaborate class-based genealogical explanations of the work of art (e.g. the writer as the product of a given social class) or reveal the ideology of the work (e.g. the work as expression of the social interests of a particular class, as in symptomatic reading). He is, on the other hand, also determined to displace the doxa of ‘internal reading’, which sees the text as ‘pure literature’ and enjoys the approval of literature professors (or *lector academicus*’ – Bourdieu, 1993c: 177-8), as well as the notion of the author as ‘creator’, which often guides psycho-biographical criticism (Bourdieu, 1993d: 192, 193). In his view, only a ‘genetic sociology’ is capable of ‘grasping the essential’, i.e. “the genesis and the structure of the specific social space in which the ‘creative project’ was formed” (Bourdieu, 1993d: 193). The aim, then, is to grasp literature as a social practice, a task in which the concepts of field and habitus are paramount. Bourdieu is notably concerned with spelling out his own position within the map of existing theories (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993c), at one point mentioning his conscious reaction “against the authors most directly engaged in the semiologico-literary fashion of the time”, namely Roland Barthes (Bourdieu, 2000: 243-4). Rather than simply adding to previous theories or offering itself as an alternative to them, his proposal is set on shifting the ground (first and foremost by showing that it is possible to objectify it) and overcome its limits (namely, by conciliating what hitherto had appeared irreconcilable):

(...) one can critique symbolic structuralism, as conceived by Foucault and the Russian formalists, and yet preserve its achievements (the idea of a space of strategic possibilities or intertextuality) within a framework that transcends the opposition between internal analysis (text) and external analysis (context) by relating the literary (philosophical, juridical, scientific, etc.) field in which producers evolve, and where they occupy dominant or dominated, central or marginal, positions, on the one hand, and the field of works, defined relationally in their form, style, and manner, on the other. This is tantamount to saying that, instead of being one approach among many, an analysis in terms of fields allows us methodically to integrate the achievements of all the other approaches in currency, approaches that the field of literary criticism itself causes us to perceive as irreconcilable. (Bourdieu, 2000: 245)

Briefly, Bourdieu's approach to literature – which may well be seen, to take one critic's words, as “a radical contextualization” (Johnson, 1993: 9) – entails four kinds of analysis: (1) analysis of the field (in terms of the objective ‘positions’ available in the field); (2) analysis of the producers and their habitus (understood in terms of their ‘position-takings’, their ‘strategies’ and ‘trajectories’, rather than ‘biographies’); (3) analysis of works relationally (in a way significantly different from ‘intertextuality’); (4) analysis of the broader field of power (cf. Johnson, 1993: 9, 14, 21; cf. Bourdieu, 1990: 147; Bourdieu, 1993d: 194).⁶⁰

One of Bourdieu's aims is to avoid the two tendencies normally associated with ‘a sociological analysis of literary creation’, namely: ‘a macro-sociology’ (which tries to explain the writer with reference to ‘society’) and ‘a social micro-psychology’ (which does it with reference to the point of view of the individual), the standard example being Sartre's analysis of Flaubert (Bourdieu – 1993b: 162). By way of what he calls a ‘genetic structuralism’, Bourdieu proposes to inquire into “both the genesis of social structures – the literary field – and the genesis of the dispositions of the habitus of the agents who are involved in these structures” (Bourdieu, 1993b: 162). The writer, in other words, has to be studied in relation to an autonomous field, the literary field, whose specific principles and laws he/she understands. This is clear in his/her *practical* ability to ‘play the game’, to understand the ‘social conditions of the possibility of this social function’ (i.e. of being a writer) and to take a ‘tactical position’ accordingly. What is and isn't ‘literature’ is defined within the field (rather than stemming from an internal property, such as Jakobson's ‘literariness’ – cf. Johnson, 1993: 10). The habitus is what provides the writer with the practical skills that will allow him/her to be recognised as a writer. The literary field is, by consequence, not simply a ‘background’ or a ‘milieu’, as conceived in the studies of influences (Bourdieu, 1993b: 163), but a ‘veritable’ and ‘independent’ ‘social universe’ with its own laws, where agents compete for particular interests and forms of capital, within a broader scheme of relations of power. One of the strengths of the notion of ‘field’ lies precisely in the fact that it emphasises the specificity and autonomy of literature, whose rules cannot simply be transposed from the other fields (cf. Boschetti, 2006: 144). It is

⁶⁰ Elsewhere, Bourdieu writes: “The aim of the researcher is, in brief, to “construct the field of works and the field of producers and the system of relations established between these two sets of relations” (Bourdieu, 1990: 148).

therefore misleading to attempt to explain literary works in direct relation to the economic and social conditions of the moment of production. Rather, the literary field works like a *prism*: it “*refracts* every external determination: demographic, economic or political events are always retranslated according to the specific logic of the field, and it is by this intermediary that they act on the logic of the development of works” (Bourdieu, 1993b: 164, italics in original). Moreover, the literary field is “the economic world reversed” (Bourdieu, 1993a; Bourdieu, 1993b: 164), i.e. it is governed by the law of ‘disinterestedness’, which defines itself in opposition to success (financial success in particular). This is especially the case with respect to the position of ‘pure art’ or ‘art for art’s sake’, in which the abiding rule seems to be ‘the loser wins’ (Bourdieu, 1993b: 169). A final particularity of the literary field is the fact that it produces not only the object (in this case, literary works), but also the value attached to it, i.e. its ‘artistic legitimacy’ (Bourdieu, 1993b: 164).

The sociological understanding of a work is, therefore, not a straightforward matter, since it has to take account of a complex variety of determinations and interrelations which the concept of field seeks to capture. The writer cannot be separated from it: “any cultural producer is situated in a certain space of production (...) whether he wants it or not, his productions always owe something to his position in this space” (Bourdieu, 1990: 106). On entering the literary field, the writer is confronted with “a space of objective positions to which corresponds a homologous space of stances or position-takings (which operates as a space of possibles or options given to participants in the field at any given moment)” (Bourdieu, 2000: 245). As ‘a space of possibles’, the field of cultural production defines “all that one must have in the back of one’s mind in order to be in the game”, on which, for instance, the distinction between the professional and the amateur ultimately rests (Bourdieu, 1993c: 176). This is a field of forces and, consequently, a field of struggles over “the preservation or transformation of the established power relationships in the field” (Bourdieu, 1993c: 183). ‘Aspirant’ and ‘challenger’ are therefore key words (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993c: 187). Bourdieu believes that there is “an intelligible relation between the position-takings (the choice among the possibilities) and the positions in the social field” (Bourdieu, 1993c: 177) – that is, between what is objectively available to the cultural producer and what is objectively favoured by him/her:

The strategies of the agents and institutions that are engaged in literary struggles, that is, their position-takings (either specific, e.g. stylistic, or not, e.g. political or ethical) depend on the *position* they occupy in the structure of the field, that is, on the distribution of specific symbolic capital, institutionalized or not ('celebrity' or recognition) and, through the mediation of the dispositions constituting their habitus (which are relatively autonomous with respect to their position), on the degree to which it is in their interest to preserve or transform the structure of this distribution and thus to perpetuate or subvert the existing rules of the game. (Bourdieu, 1993c: 183, italics in original)

This rule of homology is extensive to the literary works. According to Bourdieu, there is "a homology between the space of creative works, the field of position-takings and the space of positions in the field of production" (Bourdieu, 1993c: 182). This means, for instance, that stylistic changes take place not only in relation to other works, but also in relation to the totality of the field. Hence Bourdieu's reformulation of 'intertextuality' as a 'space of works' which is also a 'field of position-takings' (Bourdieu, 1993c: 182).⁶¹

In striking contrast with Michel Foucault's concept of 'field of strategic possibilities', which excludes the social space and is confined to 'the field of discourse' (Bourdieu, 1993c: 179), Bourdieu's 'space of possibles' thus posits the writer as a social agent. This, however, does not tie him to biographical analysis (even at its best, as when deployed by Sartre – Bourdieu, 1993c: 180). Instead of biographies, Bourdieu prefers to speak of trajectories, which objectify the successive positions that the writer has occupied in the field (Bourdieu, 1993c: 189).⁶² From the sum of a writer's 'position-takings' emerges the

⁶¹ Foucault and the Russian formalists were "compelled to find in the system of texts itself the basis of its dynamics" (Bourdieu, 1993c: 179-180), in this way effacing the role of writers and their socio-historic contexts. Bourdieu, in turn, re-defines the concept of 'intertextuality', by placing the focus on authors (understood as social agents), rather than texts: "Literate, scholarly culture is defined by reference; it consists of the permanent game of references referring mutually to each other; it is nothing other than this universe of references which are at one and the same time differences and reverences, contradictions and congratulations" (Bourdieu, 1990: 103).

⁶² The field of objective positions varies in time and place; however it may include the following or their variants: the consecrated writer, the *'artiste maudit'* (Bourdieu, 1993c: 181); the positions derived from schools and -isms (Bourdieu, 1993c: 176); those associated with genres (such as the novel or the theatre) or sub-categories (such as the 'society novel' or the 'popular novel' – Bourdieu, 1993a: 30); the positions concerning art and politics ('social art', 'art for art's sake, 'bourgeois art' – cf. Bourdieu, 1993b: 165-7; 172); the positions arising from the degree of autonomy from the market (e.g. large-scale production or restricted production, two important sub-fields – Bourdieu, 1993c: 185); those formed along the orthodoxy/heresy axis (Bourdieu, 1993c: 182), often overlapping with the opposition between 'new' and 'outmoded' (Bourdieu, 1993c: 187); and, in general, the range of positions formed in relation to economic capital and cultural capital, measurable in quantitative and qualitative terms, whose nuances Bourdieu so skilfully describes.

‘differential deviation’ or ‘point of view’, which encapsulates the writer’s special contribution to and imprint on the field (Bourdieu, 1993c: 184).

A final but crucial element in Bourdieu’s analysis is the relation of the literary field to the field of power: being part of the latter, the literary field nevertheless occupies a ‘dominated position’. Writers and artists are ‘dominated among dominant’, theirs is a ‘structurally contradictory position’, which accounts for the ‘ambivalent relationship’ they maintain with both the dominant class (the ‘bourgeoisie’) and the dominated (‘the people’) (Bourdieu, 1993b: 165, 167). As Bourdieu explains, because they “form an ambiguous image of their own position in social space and of their social function”, artists “are subject to great fluctuation, notably in the area of politics” (Bourdieu, 1993b: 165).⁶³

In this ‘peculiar universe’, this ‘Republic of Letters’, change (whether originating inside or outside the field) is always felt structurally (i.e. it affects the structure of the field and its entirety), through the mediation of the field and its ‘refraction’ effect (Bourdieu, 1993c: 182, 183). Two kinds of factors stand out to account for change: on the one hand, the (structurally ambivalent) position that the literary field occupies within the field of power, which ‘affects everything’ that happens within the literary or artistic field (Bourdieu, 1993b: 165-6); on the other, what Bourdieu calls the ‘external factors’, on which the struggles occurring within the field greatly depend (Bourdieu, 1993c: 184-5). Economic crises, technical transformations, political revolutions, changes in the educational system (Bourdieu, 1993c: 181, 185) all impact (albeit in a non-deterministic way) on the literary field. Even internal changes (such as linguistic and stylistic), the result of struggles fought within the field, are linked to broader social struggles in which cultural producers find themselves inevitably caught.⁶⁴ Bourdieu concedes that there are significant differences between the field of restrictive production and the field of large-scale production: changes

⁶³ The notion of field of power was introduced, according to Bourdieu, “to account for structural effects which are not otherwise easily understood” (Bourdieu, 1998: 33). His example pertains to the literary field: “the double ambiguity in relation to the “people” and the “bourgeois”, which is found in writers or artists occupying different positions in the field, only becomes intelligible if one considers the dominated position that fields of cultural production occupy in the larger social space” (Bourdieu, 1998: 33). These relations are explored with further detail in Bourdieu’s essay, “Flaubert’s Point of View” (see especially Bourdieu, 1993d: 194-202).

⁶⁴ Bourdieu understands a style as “a mode of representation expressing the mode of perception and thought that is proper to a period, a class or class fraction, a group of artists or a particular artist” (Bourdieu, 1990: 50). He adds: “No stylistic characterisation of a work of art is possible without presupposing at least implicit reference to the compossible alternatives, whether simultaneous – to distinguish it from its contemporaries – or successive – to contrast it with earlier or later works by the same or a different artist” (Bourdieu, 1990: 50).

within the former are “largely independent of the external changes”, but this trend is in itself socially conditioned (Bourdieu, 1993c: 187).

To sum up, Bourdieu’s take on literature is guided by the rejection of the opposition between hermeneutics/sociology, text/context (Bourdieu, 1990: 148). Through the concept of field, he attempts to correct what he calls the ‘short circuit effect’, which arises from relating a work directly to a social group (Bourdieu, 1993c: 181). The relations between the literary work and the social world are fully acknowledged, but they are also viewed in all their complexity. That is to say, the literary field is neither a fish bowl (or, to take up a more noble metaphor, an ivory tower) nor the mirror image of the social world. Therefore, a sociological analysis of literature which grasps the social space in which literary works are situated in terms of ‘milieu’, ‘context’ or ‘social background’ is markedly insufficient (Bourdieu, 1990: 140). What has to be captured and studied is “the work of art as *an expression of the field in its totality*” (Bourdieu, 1990: 147, my emphasis) or, as Bourdieu put it:

The theory of the field does lead both to a rejection of the direct relating of individual biography to the work of literature (or the relating of the ‘social class’ of origin to the work) and also to a rejection of the internal analysis of an individual work or even of intertextual analysis. This is because what we have to do is *all these things at the same time*. (Bourdieu, 1990: 147, my emphasis)

Such an ambitious, multi-layered method requires, as Bourdieu recognises, ‘an enormous amount of work’: “It demands that you do everything done by the adepts of each of the methods known (internal reading, biographical analysis, etc.), in general on the level of one single author” (Bourdieu, 1990: 148).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Bourdieu’s seemingly eclectic methodology has appealed to many literary critics. Hipsky has praised its ability to conciliate ‘textualist approaches’ (on discourse and ideology), which highlight the force of (discourse- or ideology-constructed) historical structures, with the role played by agents (individuals and groups, institutions and social processes) – thus representing a “salutary complement to the ideological-discursive focus of much literary history currently being written” (Hipsky, 2000: 187). This is a valid point (as Hipsky’s analysis demonstrates); however, it cannot override the fact that such convergence of different methods is to be taken together with the vaster theoretical work of which it is a part (and into which concepts like ideology, for instance, cannot simply be imported in ignorance of Bourdieu’s own objections to it). Bourdieu himself was distrustful of eclecticism.

Conclusion

Throughout its five decades-long existence cultural studies has been the site of contentious and stimulating ideas on the study of literature. Bourdieu's socioanalysis of literature represents, in many ways, the converging point of many of these fermenting ideas. His project of social objectification, of making society 'visible' (Sulkunen, 1982), which underpins his work on the literary field, brings to mind Macherey's conception of literature as making visible the otherwise invisible contradictions of experience/ideology – that the work be 'displayed' was one of the four preconditions for it to 'receive its theory' (Macherey, 1978: 101). For Macherey, knowing the literary work entails the dual, back-and-forth movement of looking within the work and beyond it (Macherey, 1978: 94), an idea that also informs Bourdieu's approach to literature. Further, with this method of analysis, Bourdieu effectively provided an antidote to the 'fetishisation' of literature, which now stands open (as for Macherey) to rational explication.

Benefiting from the 'sociological turn' of cultural studies (to which he contributed), Bourdieu's influence on cultural studies has been more pronounced and longer-lived than Macherey's. His work was available in English translation from relatively early⁶⁶ and evidence suggests a two-way process of influence and interaction.⁶⁷ Bourdieu no doubt

⁶⁶ Bourdieu's first work (*Sociologie de l'Algérie*, 1961) was translated into English as early as 1962. Translations of two of his articles then came out in 1965 and 1967. Important landmarks were the publication of *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, with Jean-Claude Passeron (1977), *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and *The Inheritors* (1979). In 1980, two articles (one of which drawn from *La Distinction*, 1979) were published in *Media, Culture & Society*. *Distinction* came out in full translation in 1984. Other publications followed throughout the eighties, reaching a peak in the nineties (Shusterman, 1999).

⁶⁷ As Boschetti has noted, his reception in the UK was facilitated by the attention he received from British cultural studies, namely from Stuart Hall (1978) and Raymond Williams (1980), whose work Bourdieu was also aware of and helped to divulge in France (Boschetti, 2006: 146; cf. 150, n5). This much was acknowledged as early as 1980 by Nicholas Garnham, in the editorial to the special issue on Bourdieu of *Media, Culture and Society*. Garnham highlights the links forged by Bourdieu with "the British culturalist tradition", which had resulted in the introduction of the work of Hoggart, Williams, Thompson, Hobsbawm and Willis in France (Garnham, 1980: 207). He then goes on to justify the special issue by relating Bourdieu's work to the need of cultural studies "to think forwards from Hall's two paradigms" (Garnham, 1980: 207) and work towards the construction of "a properly materialist theory of culture and a cultural practice and a politics based on it" (Garnham, 1980: 208). In the opening article, Garnham and Williams draw on Bourdieu's notion of field to reflect on the 'misreadings and misunderstandings' that the application of Bourdieu's work to "the field of British media and cultural studies" may entail (Garnham and Williams, 1980: 209). This suggests, in short, not only that the reception of Bourdieu in Britain was a more careful, and therefore more successful, endeavour than in other international contexts, but also that the development of British cultural studies (especially in its cultural materialist variant) and Bourdieu's sociology were more closely linked than one

shares much common ground with British cultural studies, an intellectual formation to which it was more closely linked than geographical distance and socio-historical differences would suggest.⁶⁸ Like British cultural studies, he was committed to theorising the relations between ‘culture’ and ‘society’, the symbolic and the material (cf. Brubaker, 1985: 748).⁶⁹ Like British cultural studies too, he was interested in spelling out the (sociological) meanings and (social) implications of cultural artefacts, including literature. Bourdieu also favoured interdisciplinarity: although he came to rely on it more in the form of collaborative work than as a methodology (cf. Pileggi and Patton, 2003: 314), his theory of practice was the corollary of decades of research spanning the areas of ethnology, sociology and philosophy. There were important differences too, derived from Bourdieu’s particular academic and intellectual background. Bourdieu’s interest in culture was anchored in a more classical disciplinary framework (sociology): he was aware of the limits and false presuppositions that underpin (and undermine) the constitution of sociology as a science, but was nevertheless committed to a scientific project of objectification, grounded in a permanent effort of reflexivity.⁷⁰ Arguably, it was also comparatively less dependent on the critique of Marxism, which had been so central to the formation which gave birth both to the British New Left and to British cultural studies.⁷¹ Finally, Bourdieu has himself

would have expected. See Milner’s discussion of the differences and similarities between Bourdieu’s work and Williams’s cultural materialism (Milner, 2002: 165-168).

⁶⁸ In his account of the special convergence within which cultural studies arose, Raymond Williams gave voice to the same commitment to transcend the dichotomy between materialism and idealism (Williams, 1995: 12; Bourdieu, 1998: 12). Williams’s book came out for the first time in 1981, under the title *Culture*. The influence of Bourdieu may be discreet, but it is not to be underestimated: Bourdieu and Passeron’s book features in the bibliography (Williams, 1995). Furthermore, Williams had published an article on Bourdieu only a few months earlier (Garnham and Williams, 1980).

⁶⁹ As Boschetti has pointed out, one of its aims was “to bring to the fore the role of the symbolic in the production and legitimation of social order” (Boschetti, 2006: 138).

⁷⁰ Bourdieu’s trust in reason and science is pervading – they are the pillars of his politics too. He endorses what he calls “a rigorous sociology”, even if it is often “doomed to appear deterministic and pessimistic because it takes account of structures and their effects” (Bourdieu, 2003: 36). His work is committed to “a realist analysis of the functioning of fields of cultural production”, which will both avoid relativism and sidestep “the alternative of antirationalist and antiscientific nihilism, on the one hand, and the moralism of the rational dialogue, on the other, toward a genuine *realpolitik of reason*” (Bourdieu, 1998: 139, emphasis in original). This commitment to reason is politically -driven: “we can expect the progress of reason only from a political struggle rationally oriented toward defending and promoting the social conditions for the exercise of reason, a permanent mobilization of all cultural producers in order to defend, through continuous and modest interventions, the institutional bases of intellectual activity” (Bourdieu, 1998: 139-140). Boschetti has also stressed this aspect (Boschetti, 2006: 139, 146).

⁷¹ Bourdieu’s relationship with Marxism has, predictably, been a source of much disagreement. Referring to his concept of ‘capital’, which he considers to be ‘transhistorical’, Guillory has agreed with Craig Calhoun in that “Bourdieu’s account of capital lacks ‘an idea of capitalism’” (Guillory, 2000: 22). Guillory adds: “There

been a critic of cultural studies: his endorsement of science and the universal (within which he strives to put literature and the arts) certainly clashes with the anti-rational, anti-universalising, and even anti-intellectual currents that have flown into and often flourish in cultural studies. His attention to and defence of literature and the arts, moreover, clashes with the long-standing suspicion in cultural studies towards the equation of “culture with some sort of ethical standard” (Grossberg, 1997: 15).⁷²

Not surprisingly, it is regarding the subject of literature that differences between Bourdieu and cultural studies become more flagrant. The relationship between literature and cultural studies, as we have seen, has been a strained one, often amounting to topical and one-sided application of insights (from cultural studies) to literature. Two complementary projects have dominated cultural studies’ approaches to literature: (1) to expose in ‘English’ or ‘English Literature’ the “desire to evoke and disseminate an ideal of a unifying culture”, which has made Tom Steele refer to cultural studies as “the ‘truth’ of English studies” (Steele, 1997: 49); (2) to contradict such a ‘desire’ by opening up literature to more democratic ideas of culture, a project initiated by Hoggart and Williams (albeit in different ways), and given continuity in Alan Sinfield’s work on literature’s ‘faultlines’, which posits

is a market in Bourdieu, but there is no history of capitalism; no theory of the commodity or of surplus value, no conceptualization of money or financial instruments; (...)” (Guillory, 2000: 32). Despite doubting that Bourdieu was not interested in capitalism, Guillory is inclined to believe that Bourdieu’s ‘refusal’ of ‘the problematic of capitalism’ is “both determined and strategic, a move in the game of sociology” (Guillory, 2000: 23). For this critic, “his sociology is compelled continually to return to the question of the aesthetic precisely in order to settle accounts, as it were, with the discourse of economics” (Guillory, 2000: 29-30). Assuming that, in Bourdieu’s sociology, the market works like “a point of reference at the center of a complexly divided social space”, Guillory concludes, “Bourdieu’s investment in specific social fields is directly proportional to their distance from this point, with art and the institutions of culture lying at the farthest remove and the school and the family further in” (Guillory, 2000: 31). During the sixties, true to his suspicion of intellectual ‘fads’, Bourdieu also kept a distance from the *nouvelle gauche* (see Boschetti, 2006: 141-142). And yet, there is no doubt that Bourdieu’s vision evokes many aspects of Marx. British sociologist Bridget Fowler has taken pains to stress the links between Bourdieu and Marxism, which underlie her reluctance to describe Bourdieu as ‘a post-Marxist’ (Fowler, 2000: 2). In her view, Bourdieu’s sociology “reinforces a Marxist theory of modernity” (Fowler, 2000: 2); “emphasises the predominance of objectified economic power” (Fowler, 2000: 2); makes use of “recognisably Marxist concepts” (Fowler, 2000: 3); “extends Marx’s task of the demystification of ideological thought” (Fowler, 2000: 3); “further extends Marx’s materialism” (Fowler, 2000: 4); and “proposes a theory of symbolic revolution, which is an important supplement to Marx’s political revolution” (Fowler, 2000: 8). Fowler concludes, “Despite his independent reformulations of Marx, Bourdieu’s sociology, then, is profoundly faithful to his spirit” (Fowler, 2000: 5). More recently, Göran Therborn has not hesitated to place Bourdieu under the ‘Non-Marxist left’ (Therborn, 2007: 101).

⁷² Furthermore, according to Boschetti, Bourdieu’s theory exposes two of cultural studies’ major weaknesses: first, its propensity to a kind of ‘voluntarism’ that fails to distinguish between choice, on the one hand, and necessity disguised as choice, on the other; second, its close engagement with popular culture, which more often than not fails to come to terms with the symbolic violence at work in it (Boschetti, 2006: 148).

literature as a site of struggle between dominant or hegemonic meanings and subordinate or subaltern ones (Sinfield, 1992).⁷³ Both projects were largely aimed at the literary establishment, within the scope of which they typically developed, and had limitations – such as their implication (with Kulturkritik) in what Francis Mulhern has called ‘metaculture’. Furthermore, they came to occupy a relatively small place in mainstream cultural studies, with eyes increasingly set on popular culture and backs increasingly turned on literature – Williams’s own work moved away from literature to other concerns.⁷⁴

At the centre of these developments has been the pervading notion that literature is *elitist*. Bourdieu’s own interest in literature (as before him, Williams’s) was criticised on this score, i.e. for privileging ‘high’ culture in detriment of popular culture, as his favourite objects of study – the arts, museums, higher education, intellectuals, literature – seem to testify. And yet, the issue is far more complex. Although literature is deeply entangled with the aesthetic disposition and the social mechanisms of distinction, thus partaking of the process of social reproduction, this does not mean that it should simply be dismissed on grounds of elitism. Literary works are no more, no less, involved in this process than other cultural artefacts, and Bourdieu is far from supportive of what he calls ‘the cult of popular culture’, of ‘populist aestheticism’, which he regards as a mere inversion of conservative aesthetics.⁷⁵ Indeed, his aim is not to favour one type of culture (high culture, low culture)

⁷³ This idea can be discerned (though not as developed as in Sinfield’s well-argued case) in Bourdieu’s description of the ‘struggles over words’ – struggles over *polysemia* that end up by bringing about a shift of meaning, “thus putting into action a symbolic revolution which may be at the root of political revolutions” (Bourdieu, 1990: 97). Both notions (symbolic revolution and political revolutions) converge in Sinfield’s cultural materialism. Bourdieu’s model does not exclude this kind of analysis: struggle is a defining feature of the literary field and, by consequence, of literature. As Randal Johnson has pointed out it, “what is always at stake (...) is the legitimate definition of literature and literary practice”, which is what the struggles over the canon are ultimately about (Johnson, 1993: 19). And yet, Bourdieu conceives of these struggles more as the result of the actual interaction of history-bound social agents, which can be objectively described, than as an effect of textual polysemia (although this alternative is not excluded). Sinfield’s model of literary criticism proposed to ‘correct’ the negative tendencies of literary criticism by bringing other modes of knowledge (such as history and sociology) into it (Sinfield, 1992: 50).

⁷⁴ The defence or attack of literature in cultural studies often leads back to the work of Raymond Williams. See, for instance, Álvaro Pina’s response to Grossberg on Williams’s attachment to literature (Pina, 2000). Despite this interest in literature, Mulhern traces the populism of cultural studies to Williams’s work; although it was unintended and not ‘acted upon’, it was “there to embrace, as others would” (Mulhern, 2000: 92).

⁷⁵ Both take place within the ‘scholastic point of view’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 137). This process has been exacerbated by the conditions of increasing commercialisation, which have put at risk the autonomy of cultural fields. As it happens, one-time ‘cheap’ products (in an economic as well as symbolic sense) can suddenly become ‘chic’, i.e. they can be endowed with symbolic power (usually tied to their commercial upgrading), a phenomenon Bourdieu has referred to as ‘inverted snobbery’ (Bourdieu, 2003: 70-1).

over another – but to foreground and analyse the construction of such a fabricated distinction, create the conditions for this state of affairs to be overcome and clear the path for the development of other cultural forms and aesthetics.

Bourdieu repeatedly affirmed his deliberate dissociation from the tradition of philosophical or literary aesthetics. In the postscript to *Distinction*, he stressed that his work rested on the renunciation of “the whole corpus of cultivated discourse on culture” (Bourdieu, 1984: 485). *Distinction* exposed the legitimate aesthetic as the product of the repression of the ‘facile’, ‘impure’ taste – i.e. of all that is easy, simple, shallow, cheap, all that presupposes the surrendering to sensation, and appeals to immediate pleasure, the immediate satisfaction of the senses or enjoyment (Bourdieu, 1984: 486-8). Far from condoning the substitution of the legitimate aesthetic for a popular or populist aesthetic, Bourdieu comes up with a rather more challenging ‘ethical or political programme’: “we can escape the alternative of populism and conservatism, two forms of essentialism which tend to consecrate the status quo, only by *working to universalize the conditions of access to universality*” (Bourdieu, 1998: 137, italics in original).⁷⁶

There is a special place for literature in Bourdieu’s theory. In his programme towards the ‘universalization of the access to universality’ it is clear that art (and ‘restricted production’ in particular) has an important part to play. This idea runs through Bourdieu’s work. The struggle for the autonomization of the literary field had been concomitant with the desire to preserve one of the author’s most important functions in the social world, namely, that of making the implicit explicit. “An *author* in the proper sense of the word”, Bourdieu contended, “is someone who makes public things which everyone felt in a confused sort of way; someone who possesses a special capacity, that of publishing the implicit, the tacit” (Bourdieu, 1990: 81-2).⁷⁷ The act of publication, of becoming an author, is then an act of ‘objectification’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 82-3). The author is a creator, not in the sense given to it by “literary or artistic hagiography”, but insofar as s/he is the one who names, and is capable of naming the ‘unnameable’ – i.e. “that which is still unnoticed or repressed”

⁷⁶ Because he is fully aware of the fact that the artist was by then usually sitting on economic conditions (namely, inherited money – Bourdieu, 1993b: 170), Bourdieu supports public subvention to safeguard the access (and not only the independence) of all to the artistic and cultural fields.

⁷⁷ As Boschetti has demonstrated, this stance also reflects Bourdieu’s long-standing belief in the responsibility of writers to act as a ‘counter power’: autonomy in the turn of the twentieth-first century very much means autonomy from the market and the media, in keeping with the writer’s responsibilities towards his/her own field and the social world more generally.

(Bourdieu, 1990: 148-9). To represent means to bring to light, to make public and official (Bourdieu, 1990: 149). In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu's lengthy study of the literary field, this point is clearly brought out. Literature is placed on a par with – or even some steps ahead of (Bourdieu, 1996: 208) – social science: “the literary work can sometimes say more, even about the social realm, than many writings with scientific pretensions”, even if “it says it only in a mode such that it does not truly say it” (Bourdieu, 1996: 32; cf. Bourdieu, 1996: 208). Bourdieu's interest in literature cannot, therefore, be separated from this commitment to pursue and establish a ‘realistic vision’ that ‘breaks the spell’, the enchantment of the work of art (Bourdieu, 1993c: 190-1), which he views as “in the end more reassuring (...) more human than the belief in the charismatic virtues of pure interest in pure form” (Bourdieu, 1993c: 191). The ‘charm’ that he perceives in the ability of literature to ‘objectify’ the social, i.e. in the ‘literary objectification’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 33) produced by ‘literary alchemy’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 32), is therefore in tune with his own resolve to ‘objectify’ (through socioanalysis) such an act of ‘objectification’.

It is also a vision attached to an ethics. Throughout the nineties, Bourdieu came to focus for supporting the autonomy of the cultural or artistic field. Many critics saw in this a contradiction with his early work on social distinction, which had been critical of the ‘pure gaze’, the linchpin of the automatization of the field of artistic production (Bourdieu, 1984: 3).⁷⁸ In Bourdieu's defence, Boschetti has argued that his critical target has never been culture, but ‘charismatic or ‘prestige’ culture (Boschetti: 2006, 139). Brown and Szeman have similarly pointed out that Bourdieu's defence of the autonomy of fields does not represent “a narrow defense of the privilege of the ivory tower”, but the need to preserve these fields' independence, as arbiters and referees of the ‘quality’ and ‘significance’ of their productions (Brown and Szeman, 2000: 7).⁷⁹ Instead of a contradiction, it may be

⁷⁸ In his 1984 study, Bourdieu's attention fell largely on contrasting ‘high aesthetic’, ‘high-art aesthetic’ or ‘Kantian aesthetic’ with popular or working-class aesthetic (the ‘pure gaze’ and the ‘naïve gaze’), and show how they had been built against each other, the former as a dominant and the latter as a dominated aesthetic (Bourdieu, 1984: 32-4; 40-1). He nevertheless does not foreclose other possibilities, mentioning, in passing, ‘revolutionary aestheticism’: “The pure disposition is so universally recognised as legitimate that no voice is heard pointing out that the definition of art, and through it the art of living, is an object of struggle among the classes” (Bourdieu, 1984: 48).

⁷⁹ These authors, nevertheless, see in this ultimate (or last-instance) reliance on ‘value’ ‘an unresolved tension’ (Brown and Szeman, 2000: 8-9). Although he seems to believe that there is “an intrinsic value”, i.e. a value “above and beyond the uses to which they may be put in reproducing social classes” (which is why Bourdieu still speaks of ‘great works’), Bourdieu nevertheless lacks a theory of the aesthetic (Brown and

more accurate to speak of an ‘adjustment’ vis-à-vis the changing socio-historical situation. The autonomization of the artistic field was always deemed a historical conquest (cf. Boschetti, 2006: 141). Around the mid-eighties, writing about the literary field, the trend that seemed more evident to Bourdieu was towards higher dependence on ‘the specific history of the field’ and, concurrently, higher *independence* from ‘external history’ (Bourdieu, 1993c: 188). A decade later, he was granting more weight to the (negative) interference of external factors. In 1994 he recognised that this vision of art (i.e. one built on the indifference towards the market) was in the process of changing, “as fields of cultural production lose their autonomy” (Bourdieu, 1998: 110). It is this loss – the outcome of the growing importance of the market, in the wake of rapidly advancing neoliberal policies – that Bourdieu is opposing.⁸⁰ In other words, far from a turnaround on his prior critique of ‘prestige culture’, Bourdieu’s late endorsement of the autonomy of art is in line both with his critique of neoliberalism as the dominant doxa (which has created and legitimated the conditions for the economic assault on culture and the increasing overall ‘market tyranny’) and with his ethical programme of a democratic/universal access to a universal culture (cf. Boschetti: 2006, 139).

As Bourdieu himself concedes, there is a paradox at the centre of this formulation – how is it possible to conciliate the particular (art) with the universal (democracy), i.e. art as an ‘autonomous’ field and art as a democratic resource that ought to be made available to all?⁸¹ In the face of the overwhelming influence of the market on the arts, the solution can only lie in (controversially) aligning literature with truth. This link between literature and truth was already present in (indeed, was central to) Macherey’s theory, but, given its indebtedness to Marxism, it remained relatively marginal in the ensuing interpretations and applications of his theory. This aspect is, nevertheless, one of the most promising (and

Szeman, 2000: 8-9). One might argue, however, that this argument fails, as it sends Bourdieu’s engagement with the aesthetic back to the point from which Bourdieu tried so hard to extricate it.

⁸⁰ Bourdieu’s description of the artist’s struggle, in the nineteenth century, to achieve and maintain a degree of independence from the market already contained an element of admiration, an admiration which might be transferred to the twenty-first-century independent artist: “(...) the artist invents himself *in suffering*, in revolt, against the bourgeois, against money, by inventing a separate world where the laws of economic necessity are suspended, at least for a while, and where value is not measured by commercial success” (Bourdieu, 1993b: 169).

⁸¹ Bourdieu himself recognised the apparent paradox of such commitment: “Oddly, the ‘purest’, most disinterested, most ‘formal’ producers of culture thus find themselves, often unwittingly, at the forefront of the struggle for the defense of the highest values of humanity. By defending their singularity, they are defending the most universal values of all.” (Bourdieu, 2003: 81)

revolutionary) of his theory, as Macherey's afterword to the 2006 edition of *A Theory of Literary Production* has confirmed:

We can say that all literature is, in itself, though in various degrees, revolutionary, in so far as it reveals and actively contributes to certain fracture lines which run deep into historical reality and into the forms in which that reality is lived, imagined and represented. Seen from this angle, literature is no longer a matter of pure aesthetic creation, but becomes a form of knowledge, the material bearer of certain truth effects which require deciphering; and it is these effects which justify the interest that we bring to it. (Macherey, 2006: 363-364)

Macherey has pursued this task, the 'appraisal of these truth effects', in more recent work, which concerns itself with the relationship between literature and philosophy. In his book *The Object of Literature* (first published in French in 1990), he pointed out that the division between literature and philosophy was 'a product of history' (Macherey, 1995: 5): taking place in the eighteenth century, it was founded upon the division, legitimated by Kant, between reason and emotion, ethics and aesthetics. As Macherey argues, "Freed from any rational concerns, art can then assert its independence from ethics, politics and philosophy, which inevitably exploit it for their own ends" (Macherey, 1995:4). Macherey's aim is to call into question such separation: "we might say that philosophy is mere literature, or that the truth about philosophy will ultimately be found in literature"; furthermore, "it will be a silent truth that is relegated to the margins of its text" (Macherey, 1995: 1). In this sense, literature is "the repressed of philosophy" (Macherey, 1995: 2). In other words, "literature and philosophy are inextricably entwined" (Macherey, 1995: 3). Macherey prefers to speak of a 'literary philosophy', given that none of these categories is reducible to the other. As far as literature is concerned, it has "an authentic value as an intellectual experience", it "exists only by virtue of a philosophical concept", but, most importantly "that concept does not exhaust the complex reality of literary texts" (Macherey, 1995: 5).

This idea of literature's complexity is not new; in fact, it had been crucial in his early theory, in which one of the central elements had been the literary work's fascinating blend of determinacy and improvisation (Macherey, 1978: 39). Even though a work cannot be rewritten as a different work (hence its determinacy), which is partly due to the fact that it complies with its own laws, it is nevertheless also open to novelty, in the form of the

“irruption of the real” (Macherey, 1978: 27). Insofar as it is perceived as a kind of knowledge, the literary work is thus described as ‘an addition to reality’ (Macherey, 1978: 6), “a second reality” (Macherey 1978: 53), which therefore possesses a “capacity to generate novelty” (Macherey, 1978: 6). This capacity is a characteristic of the language of the literary work, which “suggests itself the category of truth to which it is to be referred. Language does not designate; it begets, in a new form of expression” (Macherey, 1978: 44). The work is, therefore, both ‘irreducible’ and the bearer of the new:

What do we mean when we talk of the specificity of the literary work? First, that it is irreducible, that it cannot be assimilated into what it is not. It is the product of a specific labour, and consequently cannot be achieved by a process of a different nature. Furthermore, it is the product of a rupture, it initiates something new. If we have properly grasped this quality of novelty we will not *confuse* the work with what is extrinsic to it; we will want to *distinguish* it emphatically from what surrounds it. (Macherey 1978: 51, emphasis in original)

Macherey’s turn to ‘literary philosophy’ is, therefore, not at all at odds with his earlier work. As he went on to explain, in an essay dating from 1991, his ‘literary philosophy’ does not correspond to ‘a literature of ideas’, but rather to a process intrinsic to the text’s ‘very composition’, a ‘kind of thought’ which cannot be reduced to ‘the philosophical model of interpretation’ (Macherey, 1998: 22). Speaking of his essay *What Does Literature Think About?*, he adds:

In fact, I have rejected the conception according to which literature contains an already completely formed philosophy, to which it only has to own up. But I have attempted to show that literature, with its own means, also produces thought, in a way which constantly interferes with the procedures of philosophy. What does literature think about? could therefore also be extended as follows: “What does Literature Make it Possible to Think About?”, what does it enable to be thought about, provided that one pays attention to it, that is, when one makes the attempt, as I have sought to do through a philosophical reading of its production. (Macherey, 1998: 23)

We can already find in Macherey’s early writing the contention that the truth of the work is neither ‘extrinsic’ nor ‘concealed’ (Macherey, 1978: 38); rather, “the text possesses and contains its own kind of truth” (Macherey, 1978: 51). His later work seeks to draw

literature to philosophy “in order to re-establish the common relation to truth that governs their respective approaches” (Macherey, 1998: 23). He adds, “For I am convinced that literature and philosophy tell the truth, even if they don’t, strictly speaking, speak the truth” (Macherey, 1998: 23).⁸²

The relationship between literature and philosophy – which again posits literature as truth – has been more recently articulated in the work of philosopher Alain Badiou. Very briefly, Badiou shares with Macherey many of his claims.⁸³ He rejects ‘the romantic myth of authenticity’ as well as the myth of ‘the poem as sacred’ (Badiou, 2005: 74). Like Macherey, he considers that poetry and philosophy are not rivals: even though they are different, one cannot be reduced to the other. But Badiou moves even further: for him, ‘the poem *produces* truth’, whereas ‘philosophy produces nothing’ (Badiou, 2005: 81). According to him, there are four areas (susceptible of expansion) in which truth can be produced: art, love, politics and science. Philosophy is an exercise of thought conditioned by changes in these areas. Badiou has explored the relationship between literature and philosophy in his writings on Samuel Beckett, which he regards as a truth procedure, given that they enable the advancement of thought, of philosophy (notably, of Badiou’s own thought – cf. Power and Toscano: 2003: xii; xxvi). Badiou’s question, as Nina Power and Alberto Toscano have pointed out, is “what is thought in Beckett’s work?” or, “what do Beckett’s many texts allow us to think which was previously unthought, whether in literature or philosophy?” (Power and Toscano: 2003: xviii). For Badiou, unlike art, philosophy produces no truths, it has “no ‘truths’ of its own”, which makes art “entirely irreducible to philosophy” (Power and Toscano: 2003: xxvi), an idea that is at the centre of Badiou’s concept of ‘inaesthetics’ (cf. Power and Toscano: 2003: xxvii).

All this amounts to the recognition that literature may have a distinct and special role to play, namely as a bearer of transformative alternatives rather than a ‘consumer product’, as Macherey insists:

⁸² Macherey points out that ‘truth’ is meant in a Spinozean way: “truth no longer thought of as *conventia* of the idea with an object that remains external to it, but as *adequatio* of the idea with itself and with all the effects it can produce, the idea being transformed into the idea of the idea by the fact of this complete adherence to itself” (Macherey, 1998: 23-24).

⁸³ Like Macherey, Badiou stresses literature’s ‘complex thought’ (cf. Power and Toscano: 2003: xxviii). Macherey also claims that “there is something happening in every book” (Macherey, 1978: 41), an idea which could find an echo in Badiou’s central concept of ‘event’.

Disconcerting mirror of ideologies, literature offers the most discrete and often also the most ironic, critique of ideology. That is why literature is not a mere *divertissement*, as would be the case with some consumer product offered to the faculty of taste and its vain judgements. Literature, in its special dimension, is one of the forces for the transformation of the world. (Macherey, 2006: 364)

However controversial these contentions may appear (especially in the light of ‘pluralist’, ‘populist’ cultural studies), they nevertheless open up many doors for the study of literature (if not for the project of cultural studies itself). First, they challenge the ongoing confinement of literary studies to traditional forms of criticism or to new ones that have not been able to move away from old confines. Second, they put again on the table the need to distance ourselves not only from a naive ‘realism’ (as Macherey set out to do in the 1960s), but also from a world of overwhelming consumer culture, which we have come to perceive and accept as our only and inescapable *reality*. The work of Raymond Williams, Alan Sinfield and Pierre Bourdieu has been crucial in establishing literature’s ‘ordinariness’ – literature is taken back to its departing point, the social world, from which it is seen to emerge through a process of production (rather than of creation, or of individual genius) which can be objectively described and accounted for. Because it is part of the world, literature (re)produces its ideology, i.e. all contradictions of experience, which naturally seep into its fabric. It is a mirror in which we can see, albeit in a distorted form, the ideology that shapes (and distorts) our lives. Literature thus also becomes a space of gaps and cracks, of ‘faultlines’, in which other stories ask to be told. As Sinfield has argued, these are stories of dissent which challenge the limits of our ‘plausibility’.

And yet, if reading ‘against the grain’ in this way has proved engaging and even empowering, there are limits to what it can do. ‘Displaying’, ‘objectifying’ the world is not enough, if no alternative vision is discerned that allows us to move beyond these ‘reflections’ and ‘distortions’. Macherey’s connection of literature with truth and the ‘irruption of the real’ as well as Badiou’s conception of literature as a truth procedure are, in this respect, important additions. Not only do they release literature from its alliance with an elitist, undemocratic, and ossified ‘culture’, but they also point to its inherent productive qualities, to its capacity to add to reality, to be, in Macherey’s words, a ‘second reality’.

These ideas come through more clearly when we actually read the works, which I propose to do in my next chapters, by engaging with Forster's and Orwell's fiction.

Identities and ‘Others’: Englishness in Forster’s and Orwell’s fiction

E. M. Forster’s name has become a by-word for Edwardian comedies of manners which project a particular image of Englishness. Even *A Passage to India*, as Richard Allen has noted, can be read more as a work about England and Englishness than about India (Allen 2000: 100). Englishness has likewise been at the centre of Orwell’s work and reputation: as Raymond Williams remarked, ‘Much of Orwell’s writing about England is so close and detailed, his emphasis on ordinary English virtues so persistent, that he is now often seen as the archetypal Englishman, the most native and English of writers’ (Williams: 1971, 16). And yet, the presence of Englishness in the work of these authors is part of a vaster trend in British culture, which has come under intense critical scrutiny in more recent years. Briefly, Englishness – a concept that yokes together ideas of identity, nation and culture – carries two important assumptions: first, that the English are exceptional (or ‘peculiar’) in that, unlike other peoples, they lack a nationalistic sentiment; second, that what defines them is a number of qualities, embodied in certain concrete objects, institutions and social practices, which stand above the flux of history, and thus appear permanent, essential, but also intrinsically *vague*.¹

¹ The idea that the English have no nationalism, but only a form of patriotism, usually referred to as ‘Englishness’, which is deeply entrenched in the collective consciousness, has been taken for granted by many critics and theorists. Writing in the mid eighties, Bill Schwarz argued that English nationalism had the peculiarity of not only being unacknowledged as such, but of also being inextricably bound up with unacknowledged conservative politics (Schwarz 1986: 163-164). Schwarz regards these two features as the result of a long historical process. By favouring the term ‘Englishness’ instead of ‘English nationalism’, the English had been able to build an identity that could present itself as being as devoid as possible of any ideological connotations. Its character of vagueness has also constituted an unrecognised obstacle to the eventual admission to its core of ‘outsiders’ (cf. David McCrone on the ethnic and racial connotations of the term ‘English’ – McCrone 2002: 305). Schwarz has noted how Englishness greatly relies on elusive sensual aspects (Schwarz 1986: 155). As simple an experience as walking in the countryside is dependent on the sightseer’s ability to appreciate the specific Englishness of the landscape – an ability that cannot be learned or easily passed on to someone else. Stanley Baldwin, in 1924, already made this connection between England, the countryside and the senses: “To me, England is the country and the country is England. And when I ask myself what I mean by England when I am abroad, England comes to me through my various senses – through the ear, through the eye and through certain imperishable scents” (cit. Howkins, 1986: 82). More recently, in a book that proposes to analyse “the enigma of English national identity” (Kumar, 2003: ix), Krishan Kumar has again pointed out that the history of the English shows “a studied disavowal of nationalism and a reluctance to reflect on their character as a nation” (Kumar, 2003: xii). Adopting a modernist perspective, which claims that, as with other nations, English nationality was *made*, Kumar connects this *calculated* effacement of English national identity over the past three centuries to the need to safeguard the cohesion of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, since, being the dominant party, it would be “impolitic” for the English “to beat the nationalist drum” (Kumar, 2003: x).

As Robert Colls and Philip Dodd have argued, any critical study of Englishness will necessarily depend on the willingness to examine “an unexamined English national identity”, an effort which first and foremost requires its reinsertion into history (Colls and Dodd, 1986: n/p). For these authors, Englishness is inextricably connected with the definitions of politics and culture which were forged during the period between 1880 and 1920. It is therefore the product of successive political settlements, challenges and negotiations brought about and carried out under specific historical conditions, across different areas – from language, literature and music to the national and political culture. However, three aspects stand out in what is a very complex formation, namely: the reliance of Englishness on figures of ‘otherness’ (i.e. of social and national exclusion); its association with the political culture of liberalism; and its links with capitalism.

The first aspect is discussed by Philip Dodd, who views Englishness as an intrinsically relational concept, a matter of representation of “itself to others and those others to themselves” (Dodd, 1986: 2). “The definition of the English”, this critic adds, “is inseparable from that of the non-English; Englishness is not so much a category as a relationship” (Dodd, 1986: 12). This relationship, furthermore, is of a special kind: it enacts and confirms the relations of power, ‘fixed’ in the later years of the nineteenth century, which were the outcome of successive historical confrontations with a number of national and social ‘others’, both at home (the Celts, women, the Irish) and overseas, in the imperial colonies, where Englishness found new ground to re(de)fine itself and expand its hegemonic reach.² It is, therefore, a relationship organised in terms of core/periphery, in which the core largely functions as a measure of normality and value (cf. Dodd, 1986: 12). Drawing on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, Dodd nevertheless points out that this process is never one of simple imposition: the establishment of

² The empire did play an important role in the construction of English national identity. As many critics have argued, it provided the necessary ‘Other’ against which Englishness could be defined. Bill Schwartz pointed to this omission in Colls and Dodd’s book (Schwartz, 1987: 148), and emphasised the role of Empire: “the modern symbolic unities of England can make no historical sense unless the imperial determinations are painstakingly reconstructed – above all, the dominating inescapable centrality of India for the self-image of the English” (Schwartz, 1987: 149). More recently, Krishan Kumar has underscored how Englishness functioned along the lines of “inclusion”, “expansion” and “outwardness” (Kumar, 2003: ix), and was only made possible through the imperial mission. According to Kumar, the nationalism of the English was above all a “missionary or imperial nationalism” (Kumar, 2003: x, 250). As such, he argues, it “cannot be understood from the inside out but more from the outside in” (Kumar, 2003: xii). Kumar believes that it was only with the collapse of the British Empire, that the English first felt the need to turn to themselves and tackle the issue of their national identity (Kumar, 2003: 196, 224). Before that, Englishness/ Britishness consisted in a form of imperialism rather than nationalism (Kumar, 2003: 193, 196). Imperialism for this critic, however, carries neutral, even positive, connotations – e.g. for counterbalancing ethnic and nationalist excesses (Kumar, 2003: 193-195) and expressing a ‘civic’ kind of nationalism – a perspective that is at odds with the line of studies I am following here.

Englishness as a national culture has been achieved through negotiation and ‘active consent’, involving “an interlocking membership and an overlapping vocabulary of evaluation” (Dodd, 1986: 2).³ Two major operations are, therefore, at work here: one towards expansion (especially geographic); another towards incorporation as the subordinated peoples are invited (or force their ways) to join in, a process which presupposes the fixation of identity (albeit a negotiated one) within the established terms of the relationship (cf. Dodd, 1986: 10-11).⁴

There is no overstressing this idea that all negotiations have to take place ‘within the established terms of the relationship’. It is important to add, however, that these terms have a specific, historical actualisation in the political culture of liberalism, the second aspect of Englishness that I wish to emphasise. As Robert Colls has argued, between 1880 and 1920 the dominant political force was what he calls “a capacious Liberalism”, in relation to which “other views had to accommodate, or be accommodated by” (Colls, 1986: 29-30). Nineteenth-century Liberalism (which provided the bridge between ‘English freedom’ and ‘the national character’ – Colls, 1986: 30) had developed as a cluster of ideas within the 1688 settlement, the outcome of the Glorious Revolution, under which England had become a constitutional monarchy. This constituted “the climax of Parliamentary national duty”, as Colls claims: “the idea of English freedom had been defined, the history of English continuity had been preserved, and the resolved nation could proceed once more” (Colls, 1986: 31). Henceforth, everything was cast ‘in continuity’ (Colls, 1986: 36), which meant that “the true measure of the English state lay in its qualities of healing and absorption” (Colls, 1986: 35).

Colls points to a third important aspect: the 1688 settlement also lent itself to a commercial interpretation of freedom, whereby the state came to be regarded as opposed to the industrious, entrepreneurial, individual: “Discrete political man had paved the way for discrete economic man where independence, and freedom from the state, became recast as private (commercial) rather than public (constitutional) virtues” (Colls, 1986: 33). Ellen Meiksins Wood has taken this argument one step further, by claiming that in England, capitalism emerged as “an indigenous national economy”

³ This author, nevertheless, does recognise a strategic intentionality built in this process, as he argues that “Englishness and the national culture were reconstituted *in order* to incorporate and neuter various social groups – for example, the working class, women, the Irish” (Dodd, 1986: 2, emphasis in original).

⁴ According to this author, the idea of an ‘essential’ identity was shared by the English and ‘the cultural nationalists of Wales and Ireland’ alike: “Both sides sought an *essential* identity for the Celts” (Dodd, 1986: 14, emphasis in original). On the negotiated relationship between the Celts and the English that ensues, Dodd concludes: “The Celts are licensed their unique contribution to and place in the national culture: the cost is that they know their peripheral place as the subject of the metropolitan centre” (Dodd, 1986: 15).

(Wood, 1991: 1). For this author, the commonly-held view that England lacks a 'modern' state (in the way that France, for instance, has one) is evidence that the state in England "was evolving in tandem with the capitalist economy" (Wood, 1991: 1). Wood is responding to the so-called Nairn-Anderson theses, developed between the 1960s and 1970s, which viewed Britain's industrial decline as a deviation from capitalism's normal development. According to these theses, the apparent weaknesses of British capitalism were due to Britain's attachment to an out-dated superstructure (namely, "a pre-modern state and an anachronistic culture" – Wood, 1991: 12), as result of capitalism's precocious appearance in England. For Wood, on the contrary, these weaknesses are part of capitalism's own contradictions. Briefly, Wood considers that capitalism – understood as a historical process rather than a 'logical', 'natural' expansion of commercialism – was born in England "in the early modern period, as an indigenous national economy, with mutually reinforcing agricultural and industrial sectors, in the context of a well-developed and integrated domestic market" (Wood, 1991: 1). Capitalism was crucial in shaping the technological innovations implicated in the 'industrial revolution' (Wood, 1991: 6), as well as England's political institutions. Features like a 'minimalist' State (Wood, 1991: 21); the separation of civil society from the State and the supremacy of the former, and the primacy "of economic forms over political or military", rather than being 'deviant', are all distinctive of capitalism (Wood, 1991: 24). Its subsequent expansion to other countries was the outcome of historical developments in the context of imperialism and growing international competition. Capitalism, therefore, ought to be seen as an older and more crucial element in the shaping of Britain (and, by consequence, Englishness) than usually conceded. In sum, to take up Wood's words, "the formation of state and dominant culture has been inextricably bound up with the development of capitalism, conforming all too well to its economic logic and internal contradictions" (Wood, 1991: 19).

These three facets of Englishness (cultural, political and economic) are indeed present in Forster's and Orwell's work, but have rarely been taken up together. There are benefits in doing so. The historical perspective, as I hope to show, allows us to adopt a critical distance from the works and leads us to conclusions different from those normally arrived at in literary studies of Englishness. Though writing at different historical moments and pursuing different literary projects, these authors came to their imagined pictures of Englishness through their forays into what they perceived to be the realm of 'otherness'. I will draw, for the purpose, on the trope of the 'tourist' or 'traveller', a trope which not only has a biographical grounding with these authors, but

which manages to materialise a series of relations – semantic, political, cultural, sexual and economic – that are at the core of their representations of Englishness. My analysis will thus depart from Forster’s Italian novels, in which Englishness is construed in relation to a tourism-mediated Italian ‘Other’; proceed with Forster’s visions of a pastoral Englishness, turn to Orwell’s own fictional visions of Englishness written during the thirties and then close with the debate over what has come to be known as ‘heritage’ cinema, in which some of the literary texts that I am looking at have been centrally involved. The question of Empire will inevitably crop up in my discussion, but I shall consider it on its own (and from a slightly different angle) in my next chapter.

3.1. The English abroad: Tourism and the Italian ‘Other’

The adventures of the English abroad have a regular presence in Forster’s novels. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* opens at Charing Cross Station, with Lilia’s mother and in-laws seeing her off to Italy, where most of the action takes place; the first part of *A Room With a View* is likewise set in Italy, in touristy Florence; *A Passage to India* hinges on the arrival of two English ladies, Adela Quested and Mrs Moore, in India. Even in those novels where tourism is not as central to the plot, we find references to it: in *Maurice*, Clive travels to Greece to be cured of his ‘malaise’ (M, 104); in *Howards End*, it is abroad, in Germany, that the Schlegels make their acquaintance with the Wilcoxes (HE: 22). Finally, Forster’s unfinished novel, *Arctic Summer*, written between *Howards End* and *Maurice*, opens with the hero, described as “the tourist Martin Whitby”, at the Basle train station, “the changing-house of Europe”, heading for a holiday in Italy (AS: 3).

This connection is at the very root of Forster’s career as a writer, which began in Italy, and, as James Buzard has put it, ‘in tourism’ (Buzard, 1993: 292). After obtaining an ‘undistinguished trip’, Forster set out to Italy on a one-year tour with his mother (1901-1902). Italy stirred his imagination, bolstered his confidence (Furbank, 1977: 92-93) and gave him his literary ‘vision’ (Furbank, 1977: 96), together with plenty of material for his fiction. His ironic eye fell on the English tourists who populated the Italian ‘pensioners’, with their guidebooks, cultural prejudices and imported habits. These observations flowed into his early work: his first short story, “The Story of a Panic” (1904), has been aptly described as “a fantasy of deliverance from the tourist world” (Buzard, 1995: 15); and both the Lucy novel, which later became *A Room with a*

View, and *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, his first published novel, dwell on the adventures and misadventures of the English abroad.

Forster approached the English tourist in the tradition of the ‘guidebook satire’, a sub-genre that had been around from as early as the 1830s and 1840s, mercilessly poking fun at tourism and tourists (Buzard, 1993: 285). The satire explored the negative connotations of the term ‘tourist’, which, in opposition to the ‘traveller’, was viewed as “the dupe of fashion, following blindly where authentic travellers have gone with open eyes and free spirits” (Buzard, 1993: 1). By the first decades of the twentieth century, this negative overtone had become stronger and more widespread (Buzard, 1993: 2); following the expansion of tourism itself, it was now part of a vast anti-tourism discourse with many ramifications – a ‘touristic relationship to a situation’, for example, came to denote superficiality and routine (Buzard, 1993: 3). What distinguished the traveller from the tourist, then, was their association with authenticity, and the guidebook, the textualised mediation of tourist experience, came to stand for tourism’s lack of authenticity.

Forster was well aware of this anti-tourism discourse and drew heavily upon it to build his own satirical portraits of the English in Italy. At the beginning of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Philip Herriton advises his sister-in-law: “And don’t (...) go with that awful tourist idea that Italy’s only a museum of antiquities and art. Love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvellous than the land” (WAFT, 19). Underpinning Philip’s words is, as James Buzard has put it, “the boundary dividing that phoney culture which is tailored to tourists’ needs from ‘the authentic’” (Buzard, 1995: 16). The same contrast is staged at the beginning of *A Room with a View*, with the heroine and her chaperone cousin venting their disappointment at their viewless rooms. The lack of views is symptomatic of the cultural narrow-mindedness and inauthenticity of the ‘Pensione Bertolini’, a pension geared up to the needs of English tourists, which displays portraits of Queen Victoria, the Poet Laureate and a notice by the English chaplain on its walls, and whose landlady speaks with a Cockney accent – as Lucy despondently puts it, ‘it might be London’ (ARWV, 23).

Although the distinction between traveller and tourist is no longer relevant (there are only tourists now), it is clear that tourists fall into two categories: those who travel for the antiquities and the art (following the guidebooks available, such as Baedeker), and those who are interested in the people, not ‘the land’, and therefore long to travel ‘off the beaten path’. The narrator’s sympathies seem to lie with the second type. Like a refrain, Philip’s advice is voiced throughout Forster’s work, namely in his last novel, in

Fielding's response to Adela Quested's desire to see 'real India': "try seeing Indians" (API, 48). Tourism – the sum of activities organised to mediate the encounter of the English with the locals – is especially picked out for satirical purposes. Mr Eager, who willingly takes up the role of a tourist guide and tour organiser (despite continuously disparaging tourists), is portrayed as pompous and bigoted. Similarly, all organised efforts of the Anglo-Indian colony to introduce Adela and Mrs Moore to India are depicted as contrived, false and ultimately offensive – an example is the famous 'bridge party', which prompts Ronny's ironical remark to Adela, "You wanted something not picturesque and we've provided it" (API, 59).

And yet, Forster's views on tourism are not reducible to the staple anti-tourism guidebook satire. Not all tourist experiences are negative, as the excursion to Fiesole to 'see a view' (which creates the opportunity for George to kiss Lucy) suggests. Furthermore, the guidebook is not always an object of condemnation; as Buzard reminds us, Forster had a "long-standing respect for the products of Murray and Baedeker" and was prone to having "his characters say favourable things about them" (Buzard, 1993: 285).⁵ Indeed, he seems to relish in the touristic discourse, which he incorporates, with a self-conscious ironic competence, throughout his fiction.⁶ No doubt an exponent of such mastery is the famous "mock-Baedeker description" of Monteriano (Buzard, 1993: 311) in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (WAFT, 29), which resonates throughout the novel, merging with the actual (mostly visual) experiences of the characters and the narrator's own rendering of Italy. Introducing Philip Herriton's first visit to Monteriano, the narrator not only adopts this character's touristic standpoint, but addresses readers as tourists: "When the bewildered tourist alights at the station of Monteriano, he finds himself in the middle of the country" (WAFT, 33). Details on the Italian scenery and 'local colour' follow: we see them through Philip's eyes, as he sits in his carriage and contemplates the passing images (WAFT, 39). In many other occasions, the narrator dispenses a wealth of information on frescoes, paintings, painters, saints, and the history of Monteriano, almost in guidebook guise (e.g. WAFT,

⁵ Forster himself would write two guidebooks – *Alexandria: A History and Guide* (1922) and *Pharos and Pharillon: A Novelist's Sketchbook of Alexandria Through the Ages* (1923).

⁶ Forster's relationship with tourism was far from simple. On the one hand, he was attentive to its inconsistencies and impact on both tourists and hosts; on the other, he also viewed tourism as a tourist, i.e. 'from within' (Buzard, 1993: 292). As Furbank makes clear, he himself had been a rather conventional type of tourist during his first visit to Italy, which had brought him into contact with what he referred to as "the orthodox Baedeker – bestarred Italy", not the 'Italian Italy' (Furbank, 1977: 85). As James Buzard has pointed out: "His art provides what Louis Althusser called 'an *internal distance* (...) from the very ideology from which it emerged' – a view both implicated in the system of meaning and revealing of the conditions and strictures inside the system's ideological boundaries" (Buzard, 1993: 292, italics in original).

94, 95, 103, 104, 132, 133). Finally, although Lilia and Philip's faults are linked to Baedeker – as the book's central place in Gino's memorial to his deceased wife (WAFT, 114) and Philip's romantic attachment to it (WAFT, 29-30; 103) seem to suggest – it is ultimately their failures of judgement that are emphasised.

If the facile guidebook satire is avoided, so is the uncritical presentation of the quest for (unmediated) authenticity. Meeting the natives, in Forster's fictional world, is more often than not an occasion for the narrator to indulge in his ironical powers of observation. It is also *a source of trouble*. Mrs Moore and Adela's dalliance with Indians results in the unsettling experience of the Marabar caves. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Lilia follows Philip's advice and stops at the little village of Monteriano, where she “does feel in the heart of things, and off the beaten track” (WAFT, 24). She marvels on “the Italians unspoiled in all their simplicity and charm” (WAFT, 26), and falls in love with and marries one, the son of a dentist, twelve years her junior. Her unconventionality costs her dearly: she is unhappy in marriage and dies giving birth. As Buzard observes, Lilia has taken “too literally Philip Herriton's anti-touristic advice”, but she is “uninclined to love, understand, and *leave*, as even Philip takes for granted she must do” (Buzard, 1993: 309, emphasis in original). Philip's own position is ambiguous: his confessed admiration of Italians rests on the assumption (shared by the likes of Harriet and his mother) that the English and the Italians are fundamentally *different*, as his words to Gino, uttered in a moment of rage, appear to confirm: “you will both be unhappy together. She is English, you are Italian” (WAFT, 46). Even the narrator seems to take for granted this perception: “It was in this house that the brief and *inevitable* tragedy of Lilia's married life took place” (WAFT, 49, my emphasis), to the point of agreeing with Mrs Herriton's practical but parochial stance: “the struggle was national (...) Mrs Herriton foresaw it from the first” (WAFT, 67).

The national dichotomy, which presents Italy as England's ‘Other’ is, indeed, structural to the novel. The contrast emerges from the first pages: a foggy London provides the backdrop for Lilia's journey to Italy, whose ‘intoxicating’ views Philip recalls with relish (WAFT, 20). His passion for Italy makes him sneer at parochial, stifling Sawston (WAFT, 27). In striking opposition to Italy, England is “the realms of common sense” (WAFT, 33), or in the narrator's words, “a joyless, straggling place, full of people who pretended” (WAFT, 113). Italy, on the other hand, is the place of beauty, where “so many things have happened” (WAFT, 92); nothing in it, “not even discomfort” is ‘commonplace’ (WAFT, 91). More than just a symbolic touchstone (like the Baedeker may be said to be), Italy appears to possess the ability to *change* those who are willing

or ready to be changed. Italy brings out the best (or if that's the case, the worst) in people: under her spell Philip and Miss Abbott become 'more graceful' (WAFT, 104). The latter swings back and forth between her Sawston self – “good, oh, most undoubtedly good, but most appallingly dull” (WAFT, 105) – and her Italian self, which gains in “grace and lightness” (WAFT, 104).⁷ Harriet, on the contrary, is “curiously virulent about Italy, which she had never visited” (WAFT, 26), and when she finally does, she remains “acrid, indissoluble, large; the same in Italy as in England” (WAFT, 105).⁸ At the beginning of the novel, Philip hopes that Lilia may be improved by Italy (WAFT, 23). He believes that “Italy really purifies and ennobles all who visit her. She is the school as well as the playground of the world” (WAFT, 22).

Philip Herriton's views of Italy and, by extension, of England are at the centre of the novel, whose 'object' was, as Forster would explain to R. C. Trevelyan, the 'improvement of Philip':

The object of the book is the improvement of Philip, and I did really want the improvement to be a surprise. (...) In ch. 5 he has got into a mess, through trying to live only by a sense of humour and by a sense of the beautiful. The knowledge of the mess embitters him, and this is the improvement's beginning. (WAFT, 161)

Described as “the cultivated tourist” (WAFT, 94), Philip contrasts positively with Sawston (and his sister Harriet) for his tolerance and liberal open-mindedness. Philip has been identified with the narrator, and even with Forster (namely, by Forster himself – Forster, 1977: 33). As Miss Abbott puts it, he is “the only one of us who has a general view of the muddle” (WAFT, 132). But his liberal views are not completely satisfactory and he is put to the test, not least by Miss Abbott's more 'extreme' positions who force him to act and take sides. Philip's shortcomings seem to be of a permanent nature, intrinsic, as it were, to his liberal stance: they are etched in his face, which betrays 'a curious mixture of good and bad', “below the nose and eyes all was confusion” and even Philip concedes: “I shall never carve a place for myself in the world” (WAFT, 70).

⁷ Miss Abbott hesitates and changes sides throughout the book. Having allowed Lilia's second marriage (in fact, suggested and encouraged it), Miss Abbott backs out and flees with Philip back to England. She then returns with the second rescue party, adopting an almost heroic stance: “she was here to fight against this place (...) to champion morality and purity, and the holy life of an English home” (WAFT, 113). In the end, she sides with Gino, as Philip concludes: “For the second time, Monteriano must have turned her head” (WAFT, 130).

⁸ The same can apply to Gino, who stands for ('real') Italy. The shifts in Miss Abbott's perception of him – from being “a native of the place” (WAFT, 35), “splendid, and young, and strong not only in body, and sincere as the day” (WAFT, 76) to “a thoroughly wicked man” (WAFT, 86) – reflect her own failures or improvements.

However, he has “a sense of beauty and a sense of humour” (WAFT, 70) and is, accordingly, ‘intoxicated’ by ‘the idea of Italy’ (WAFT, 20). Italy is emblematic of Philip’s commitment to be different from and superior to Sawston: two years before, he had done his continental tour and “returned full of passion for Italy, and ridiculing Sawston and its ways” (WAFT, 27). Meanwhile, he had grown ‘a little disenchanted, a little tired’, finding himself increasingly relying on humour (WAFT, 71). Italy therefore provides the benchmark against which his improvement is to be measured. And yet, despite his passion for Italy, Philip takes the news of Lilia’s engagement with embarrassment: “For three years he had sung the praises of the Italians, but he had never contemplated having one as relative” (WAFT, 31). When he meets Gino, his prejudice irrupts: he loves his beautiful face, but “he did not want to see it opposite him at dinner. It was not the face of a gentleman” (WAFT, 41). Lilia confronts him with this contradiction: “Indeed, Philip, you surprise me. I understood you went in for equality and so on” (WAFT, 43). In fact, we come to realise, Philip’s love for Italy is largely an idealisation: he loves ‘romance’ Italy, not the Italy that has impinged on him in the form of an Italian in-law. His first ‘rescue mission’ to Italy (to ‘save’ Lilia) recounts this process: it is with shock that Philip receives the information that there are dentists ‘in ‘fairyland’ (WAFT, 37). Having miserably failed to prevent Lilia’s marriage and having endured humiliation at Gino’s hands, he retreats to Sawston, where he appears to side with his mother. When, months later, Miss Abbott presses the family to take measures regarding Lilia’s baby, his resentment against Gino bursts out:

Let her go to Italy (...) Let her meddle with what she doesn’t understand! (...) the man who wrote it [Gino] will marry her, or murder her, or do for her somehow. He’s a bounder, but he’s not an English bounder. He’s mysterious and terrible. He’s got a country behind him that’s upset people from the beginning of the world. (WAFT, 88)

Italy here appears as the total (‘mysterious and terrible’) ‘Other’. For Philip, we are told, the ‘real’ Italy is the Italy ‘in the height of the summer’, when she has no tourists (WAFT, 89). Only then can she emerge in a pure, uncontaminated form.

It is at this (un-touristic) time of the year that Philip’s second visit takes place (significantly, in the company of that other ‘absolute’ – ‘indissoluble’ Harriet). He has come on a second appointed mission (to ‘save’ Lilia’s baby). Duly accepting the instructions received from Sawston, but still reluctant about his obligations, Philip takes refuge in an indifferent, humorous mood (WAFT, 89). His love of Italy, however, cannot diminish his sense of superiority: “he was here, however, as an emissary of

civilization and as a student of character” (WAFT, 130-131), and he envisions his reunion with Gino as “an intellectual duel with a man of no great intellect” (WAFT, 97). However, when he learns from Miss Abbott that Gino is sorry for having hurt him on his last visit, Philip forgets his high moral ground and relapses back to his old aesthetic vision: “romance had come back to Italy; there were no cads in her; she was beautiful, courteous, lovable, as of old” (WAFT, 103). More than ever before, he is prepared to ‘fail honourably’ (WAFT, 133).

For Miss Abbott, this is manifestly insufficient: whereas she can see that there are sides and bring herself to take one (she even allows herself to change sides – WAFT, 132), Philip – the one who has ‘the general view’ of things – can neither condemn nor wholeheartedly embrace one of the parties. The death of the baby is, therefore, partly the outcome of his failure to act, as Gino’s violent ‘punishment’ seems to suggest. Through violent physical contact (Gino nearly beats him to death), Philip not only crosses over superficial (touristic) conventions – for Buzard the scene is “a dark parody of the anti-tourist’s goal, ‘true contact’ with the alien” (Buzard, 1993: 312) – but also redeems himself from his (liberal) guilt. The scene closes with the two men drinking the baby’s milk (Miss Abbott significantly declines), which ritualistically seals their friendship. Henceforth, as Philip puts it, “he was bound [to Gino] by ties of almost alarming intimacy” (WAFT, 134). Through Gino, Philip is reconciled with Italy, the ultimate proof of his ‘improvement’.

Philip’s tourist fantasy is clearly a sexual fantasy – and a homoerotic one too. Although the novel offers a fairly conventional heterosexual plot, which tells the story of Lilia and Gino’s unhappy love, of Miss Abbott’s impossible love for Gino, and of Philip’s unrequited love for her, there is also a sense that something is just not right. The expected ‘chemistry’ between the sexes is not there, as successive reviewers and critics of the novel have pointed out (e.g. Leavis, 1966). Men’s attraction to women has been replaced by the attraction of the English (men and women) to Italy. Moreover, Italy’s personification is the Italian *man*. Indeed, the England/Italy divide that the novel presents and constructs is, to a large extent, a divide between men (the chauvinist but attractive South) and women (the feminist, unattractive North). This Lilia finds out at her own peril. As the wife of an Italian man, she is no longer fit to be “that privileged maniac, the lady tourist” (WAFT, 54) and therefore loses her freedom. Like all Italian women, she has to conform to a life confined to house and church (WAFT, 53-54). She cannot walk on her own or receive visits and is treated as a ‘precious possession’ (WAFT, 59).

However responsive the narrator may be to women's predicament, his ultimate sympathy does not lie with them. Italian women fail to attract the narrator's or any of the characters' sympathy (or even attention): Perfetta, Gino's widowed cousin, who is called to help (and spy upon – WAFT, 54) Lilia, is depicted as cunning and coarse (even with the baby – e.g. WAFT, 125). The English women fare no better, as they seem to be permanently scheming to have their ways: Mrs Herriton has schemed to prevent Lilia from marrying her son and, then, to control her daughter-in-law and granddaughter (WAFT, 23). English men like Philip are 'run' by their mothers and other women (WAFT, 136). Even Miss Abbott, the most likeable of the feminine characters, is tainted by her fervent adherence to moral causes, which puts her in the same league as the other Sawston women (including Harriet). As far as Lilia is concerned, it is tacitly suggested that she may be responsible for her own misery: like the Anglo-Indian women of *A Passage to India*, she fails to learn the language (WAFT, 55) and Miss Abbott suggests that she must have mismanaged Gino (WAFT, 76).

Italy, on the other hand, is presented as a man's country, as Lilia comes to realise, "Italy is such a delightful place to live if you happen to be a man" (WAFT, 53; 54). Indeed, being a man appears to be Gino's sole concern and purpose in life (WAFT, 51, 54). After 'taming' Lilia, he is ironically described as "that glorious invariable creature, a man" (WAFT, 63). His roughness and physical strength is stressed throughout the book (WAFT, 62; 115; 117) and he remains admirable despite his incongruities and infidelity (WAFT, 63-64). Gino is clearly an object of fascination for the three main English characters: he is regarded as 'mysterious and terrible' not only by Philip (WAFT, 88), but by Lilia (who is aware of his 'deep brutality' – WAFT, 62) and Miss Abbott (who nevertheless claims to understand him – WAFT, 88; 115).⁹

The homoerotic attraction between Gino and Philip is hinted at throughout the book: their chance meeting at the opera, for instance, is described as a lovers' rendezvous (WAFT, 110-111), an idea reinforced by Gino's 'light caress' (WAFT, 112).¹⁰ But Philip and Gino's love can only be (literally) articulated through Miss Abbott (whom Gino has also praised – WAFT, 57). Philip is convinced that he loves her (WAFT, 155),

⁹ Despite the constant allusion to his unfathomable depths, Gino is nevertheless regarded as a boy (e.g. WAFT, 69; 76) who lacks malice and wears his meanings on the surface (e.g. WAFT, 154). These features will be explored (albeit with different effects) in the characterisation of the Indian Aziz, which resembles Gino's, as some critics have noted (e.g. Woolf, 1973: 327).

¹⁰ There are inklings in the novel that Gino may be open to homosexuality: his attachment to Lilia is far from overwhelming – "falling in love was a mere physical triviality" (WAFT, 69), that is, more a question of public and reproductive pride than anything else. There is also the question of what appears to be a pronounced streak of misogyny in Italian society. Discussing Lilia at the *Caffé*, one man concludes, "sono poco simpatiche le donne. And the time we waste over them is much" (WAFT, 57).

but when she confides to him that she loves Gino, he too acknowledges his love for him (WAFT, 158). The homoerotic fantasy (and a fantasy it must remain) is, therefore, allowed into the novel in two ways: vicariously, through Miss Abbott, and symbolically, through Philip's love for Italy.

There is, however, another possible reading. Gino has managed to disturb Philip's 'romantic' vision of Italy – "he hated Gino, the betrayer of his life's ideal" (WAFT, 71) – but such vision is in the end replaced by a better one (which testifies to Philip's improvement), namely, an unromantic vision which can accommodate the physical side of love. As Buzard has argued, through disillusion with 'romantic' Italy, Philip finally attains "an awareness of an undegrading total love" (Buzard, 1993: 313). This, in fact, may lie behind his decision to move to London. Furthermore, unlike Miss Abbott, Philip plans to go back to Italy, where the homoerotic fantasy can temporarily be lived (just as it could for Forster, whose first sexual experience took place in Alexandria, in 1916, as a tourist – Furbank, 1978: 40). After all, it was in tourism – at the height of summer, when Italy is her absolute self – that Philip's special intimacy with Gino was attained. This was done, moreover, at the expense of Gino's baby, the 'hybrid' outcome of his relationship with an English woman, and the novel's only challenge to national absolutes. Authentic Italy thus becomes the preserve of those who can understand its magnetic 'Otherness', which in the novel amounts to the male English tourist, who is able to find in ('masculine') Italy the homosexual embrace that ('feminine') England denies him.

A Room with a View, Forster's second novel on Italy (which he began writing before *Where Angels Fear to Tread*), takes the tourist experience and its attendant problems to a different level. The gallery of tourist portraits is richer than ever: besides Lucy Honeychurch, the young first-time traveller, and Miss Bartlett, her spinsterish chaperone, it includes Mr Emerson, a socialist journalist; George, his morose, sensitive son; Miss Eleanor Lavish, the 'clever lady' (RWV, 27) who is writing a novel about 'modern Italy' (RWV, 55); two reverends, the pedantic Mr Eager and the perspicacious and untypical Mr Beebe (according to Lucy, "no one would take him for a clergyman" – RWV, 30); and two old ladies, the Miss Alans. Their characterisation still draws on the customary tourist stereotypes of the guidebook satire, but it also moves beyond them in important ways. Committed to the pursuit of 'the true Italy' (RWV, 36, 37), Miss Lavish is Baedeker's staunchest critic, whom she scornfully dismisses, "He does but touch the surface of things" (RWV, 36). Constantly looking for an 'adventure', her stance is not very different from Philip Herriton's, that other dedicated 'student of

character': "the true Italy is only to be found by patient observation" (RWV, 37). Speaking of her new book, she stresses, "I intend to be unmerciful to the British tourist" (RWV, 69). However, her impressions on tourists are not very different from those held by her political opponent, the conservative Mr Eager, who disapproves of her ways as a 'New Woman' (RWV, 56-57). Mr Eager is part of the English 'residential colony' at Florence, and is proud to announce that "he knew the people who never walked about with Baedekers" (RWV, 71). He sees himself as the guardian of real Italy – so much so that he considers the murder in the Piazza (witnessed by Lucy) a 'desecration' of "the Florence of Dante and Savonarola", which he reveres (RWV, 72). If Miss Lavish turns to modern Italy and Italians for fulfilment, Mr Eager turns to the past and the secluded life of the English colony (RWV, 81). Despite their differences, both Miss Lavish and Mr Eager agree that, as the former puts it, "the narrowness and superficiality of the Anglo-Saxon tourist is nothing less than a menace" (RWV, 81). Lucy provides a striking contrast to their snobbery: when asked by Mr Eager if she is travelling "as a student of art" (RWV, 80) or, by Miss Lavish, "as a student of human nature" (RWV, 81), Lucy simply replies, "Oh no. I'm here as a tourist" (RWV, 81). Cecil's first impression of her in Rome is also that she is 'a typical tourist' (RWV, 81). Contrary to these experienced travellers, Lucy's dependence on Baedeker is more than evident. On Lucy's first day out, following Miss Lavish's instructions, Lucy puts aside her Baedeker so the two can 'drift': "for one ravishing moment Italy appeared" (RWV, 39), but it is not the Italy that Lucy wants to see. When she is left on her own (having lost *both* Miss Lavish and the Baedeker), she feels helpless, "unwilling to be enthusiastic over monuments of uncertain authorship or date" (RWV, 40). And yet, she rapidly overcomes her bewilderment, as the narrator remarks: "the pernicious charm of Italy worked on her, and, instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy" (RWV, 41). Lucy's problem is not that she clings to Baedeker – Mr Emerson, described as someone who 'speaks the truth' (RWV, 29), *minds* the loss of a Baedeker (RWV, 42) – but that she cares too much about what other people think or say – "she was accustomed to have her thoughts confirmed by others or, at all events, contradicted" (RWV, 67).

Once again, the guidebook proves insufficient to define the tourist. Another metaphor is deployed: that of having (or yearning for) 'a view'. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, when told that Monteriano had *a view*, Harriet had retorted, "Not for me, thank you" (WAF, 92). Now, Miss Honeychurch and Miss Bartlett long for one. It is clear, however, that having a view means different things to different people, as Charlotte and Lucy's actions, immediately after moving to their rooms with a view, suggest: Charlotte

fastens the shutters and locks the doors, whereas Lucy opens the window (RWV, 34). When she is received as a guest in Windy Corner, Charlotte (always the one to flaunt her self-abnegating qualities) insists that she does not need a view (RWV, 161). Speaking of the Miss Alans, who have decided to go off to Athens, maybe Constantinople, Mr Beebe ironically observes: “No ordinary view will content the Miss Alans. They want the pension Keats” (RWV, 197). And yet, it is evident that ‘a view’ cannot be reduced to a tourist context. Back in England, walking in the wood, Cecil tells Lucy: “I connect you with a view – a certain type of view. Why shouldn’t you connect me with a room?” Lucy agrees: she connects him with a room with no view (RWV, 125). There is a sense, then, according to which ‘a view’ is something more important and essential: the Emersons do not care for a view and offer their rooms to the two newly-arrived (RWV, 25). Upon visiting Windy Corner, asked to comment on the views, George voices indifference: “I never notice much difference in views” (RWV, 177). For Mr Emerson, George reports, the only perfect view is “the view of the sky straight over our heads” (RWV, 177) and he puts men into two classes: “those who forget views and those who remember them, even in small rooms” (RWV, 178). The scene takes place at Windy Corner, when Cecil is about to read out from Miss Lavish’s novel an ‘account of a view’, which, by mistake, turns out to be the fictionalised account of George and Lucy’s embrace at Florence (RWV, 179). A view is received, but in the form of an insight, a revelation, rather than of a conventional visual stimulus (usually identified with a pictorialist landscape).

James Buzard contends that tourism in *A Room with a View* provides the frame for Lucy’s *Bildung* (Buzard, 1993: 291), which he understands in terms of sexual awakening. Lucy’s role as a tourist – a sightseer – is thus steeped in sexual meanings: “in this scheme, the tourist is the public image of the sexually uninitiated or even maladjusted individual, the virgin or voyeur, who has never learned to ‘really live’” (Buzard, 1993: 298). The epitomes of virginity and voyeurism are, of course, the ‘Forsterian maiden aunts’, who “take up the tourist’s protected viewpoint, remaining untainted by what they observe” (Buzard, 1993: 298), and who are represented in the novel by the Miss Alans. It is this role that is challenged in the murder scene of the piazza, which sets off Lucy’s sexual awakening. Having ventured on her own, and at improper hours, to do some sightseeing, Lucy finds herself in the middle of a fight between two Italian men which culminates in the murder of one of them. She faints in George’s arms and has her postcards spattered with blood. Her earlier complaint, “nothing ever happens to me” (RWV, 61), seems to have been addressed. Buzard reads

the scene as prefiguring Lucy and George's sexual desire and fulfilment: the murder works as a symbolic 'displaced consummation' of their love, a "distorted representation of their own future fulfilment" (Buzard, 1993: 299); and the blood of the Italian man stands for Lucy's loss of virginity (Buzard, 1993: 297-298). Lucy's sexual *Bildung* cannot, therefore, be separated from the tourist experience.

And yet, in *A Room with a View*, the tourist experience has become not so much irrelevant as *natural*. The novel is no longer primarily concerned with the encounter between British and Italians: there are no major Italian characters and the few Italians that make an appearance are instrumental to the plot. As Buzard has showed, Italians are frequently reduced in Forster's fiction to sexual and narrative instruments – often in a context of violence.¹¹ This certainly applies to the scene of the piazza, in which the murder of the Italian man has implications (symbolic and real) for Lucy's 'adventure': having fulfilled its role in an "allegory of a tourist's sexual/social emancipation" (Buzard, 1993: 298), the Italian body is rapidly removed and the narrator returns to Lucy and George. The shift away from the Italian 'Other' thus corresponds to the shift towards a more conventional sexuality. The novel's heterosexual love triangle – George-Lucy-Cecil – replaces the rather more convoluted (and unconventional) triangle – Philip-Gino-Miss Abbott – which posited the Italian as disturbing and homoerotic. The homosexual element has now been displaced from centre stage to a minor, bucolic, scene – the pond scene (which takes place in England rather than Italy) – in which another erotic triangle, George-Mr Beebe-Freddy, is briefly allowed to emerge.¹²

It is clear that the experience of authenticity is no longer to be found (if it ever was) in the tourist's superficial, voyeuristic attraction to the foreigner. The quest for the authentic 'Other' (regarded as elusive but not completely dismissed in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*) is now written off. It is still present, but it feeds into the novel's satire. Miss Lavish, for instance, is a predator of 'otherness': "I confess that in Italy my sympathies are not with my own countrymen. It is the neglected Italian who attract me" (RWV, 70). Her imaginative rendering of George and Lucy's kiss, who now become

¹¹ In 'The Story of a Panic' it is Gennaro, the Italian servant, who dies, so Eustace can be liberated (CSS, 33). Buzard has called the attention to this aspect (Buzard, 1993: 300) and identified in it a trend in Forster's stories. Another example is 'The Road from Colonus' (1904), which leads this critic to conclude, "once more the tourist encounter with the real is played out upon the indigenous body, and with especially destructive force upon the male body" (Buzard, 1993: 302). The 'instrumental' role of the Italian is also evident during the excursion to Fiesole, in which it is the Italian driver who guides Lucy to George, rather than to Mr Beebe, thus creating the conditions for their embrace.

¹² Homosexuality is especially associated with Mr Beebe, who is "somewhat chilly in his attitude towards the other sex" (RWV, 54) and maintains a sceptical attitude towards marriage. Cf. Mr Beebe's creed, stated before the bath: "In this – not in other things – we men are ahead. We despise the body less than women do" (RWV, 145).

'Antonio' and Leonora (no doubt the writer's, *Eleanor Lavish*, alter ego) (RWV, 179), suggests that her 'sympathies' may be of a romantic and sexual nature. Likewise, Cecil may be travelling to Italy for the same reasons. In fact, even though he is described as 'medieval', an allusion to his self-conscious prudishness and asceticism, there are some inklings of homosexuality: Mr Beebe calls him "an ideal bachelor" (RWV, 104) and Cecil regards himself as an 'Inglese Italianato', a description which connects him to Philip Herriton, another closeted homosexual (cf. Buzard, 1993: 310). Cecil explains to Lucy that the expression means 'un diavolo incarnato', which makes her wonder how this can apply "to a young man who had spent a quiet winter in Rome with his mother" (RWV, 116) – a description which ironically evokes Forster's first sojourn in Italy.¹³ Because of the novel's focus on Lucy, the relationship between the English tourist and the Italian 'Other' has been forced to the margins of the novel, suggesting (as in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*) that tourism may be the realm of disreputable sexuality.

Buzard concludes his reading by attributing to the novel's a subversive attention to sexuality: even though it offers the happy ending of a conventional marriage plot, it is "a marriage plot written by a homosexual man seeking some sanctioned vehicle for his own desires" (Buzard, 1993: 298). This reading has been confirmed by queer critics like Robert K. Martin and George Piggford, who have praised *A Room with a View* for representing "sexuality as a potentially destabilizing force that undermines class and convention" (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 13). The novel does make a claim to be subversive and, to a certain degree, it succeeds. However, I wish to diverge from these critics on two points: first, by relocating the novel's subversive force *within* rather than outside the text (as Buzard does when he connects it to Forster's homosexuality); second, by refusing to reduce its subversive content to a matter of sexuality. It is true that Lucy's sexual coming of age, frequently hinted at when she is playing the piano (RWV, 52; 59; 111), is at odds with the conventions of Sawston society (which she has always taken for granted), as well as of the staple romantic plot: when the marriage plot is brought to a close as early as chapter eight – with Lucy becoming engaged to Cecil Vyse (RWV, 102) – the novel is hardly in the middle. However, what follows cannot simply be reduced, in keeping with the romantic script, to Lucy having to choose between two suitors (in fact, she does not recognise George as one), as some critics have understood it (e.g. Burra, 1989: 327). Even a reading that posits the distinction between marrying Cecil and marrying George as embodying the choice between 'false

¹³ Asked which characters were closer to representing him, Forster mentioned Philip, adding "And Cecil has got something of Philip in him" (Forster, 1977: 33).

love' and 'true love' is not entirely satisfactory. Forster had reservations concerning the romantic pursuit of authenticity, hence his critique of Philip Herriton's experience of Italy as 'Romance' (taken up again in *Arctic Summer* by Martin Whitby – e.g. AS, 29). He was also keen to distance himself from 'lady-like' and 'chivalrous' codes of behaviour (RWV, 60; cf. AS, 25).

I therefore propose a reading which regards Lucy's trajectory not as a matter of sexual *Bildung*, but of her coming to terms with the 'real', understood as that which comes uninvited and which affects the totality of her perceptions and, by consequence, of her life. Though rejecting the tourist search of authenticity, the novel does not entirely dismiss the possibility of experiencing truth. The question, then, is not so much one of 'authenticity' (in the Romantic sense) but of allowing something to *happen*. Drawing on Alain Badiou, I wish to argue that Lucy's choice between marrying Cecil and marrying George is not so much a choice between something that is true and something that is false (*in itself*), as a choice between something that *has happened* and something that *has not happened*. In other words, it is a matter of there being an *event*, in Alain Badiou's use of the term. Briefly, according to this philosopher, an event disrupts the normal order of things (what Badiou calls 'the situation'); it commands 'fidelity', thus triggering off a *truth procedure* from which a subject is to emerge (or fail to do so).¹⁴ Lucy's *Bildung* follows this scheme very closely. From the novel's first pages, whenever she is in the presence of the Emersons, she is made aware of "something quite different, whose existence she had not realized before" (RWV, 25). The episode at the pension, when she and Charlotte exchange rooms with the Emersons, brings to her life "the sense of larger and unsuspected issues" (RWV, 33). In Santa Croce, alone with Mr Emerson, "she was again conscious of some new idea, and was not sure whither it would lead her" (RWV, 42).

¹⁴ I am drawing here, and in the analysis that follows, on Alain Badiou's philosophy, and on *L'Être et L'Événement* (1988) in particular. See the English translation, *Being and Event* (2007). A useful summary of Badiou's thought can be found in Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens's introduction to the English edition of *Infinite Thought*. As they make clear, central to Badiou's philosophy is the question of ontology, and the relationship between identity and agency, which Badiou's concept of 'event' seeks to address:

In *L'Être et L'Événement*, Badiou's solution is simply to assert that 'events happen', events without directly assignable causes which disrupt the order of established situations. If decisions are taken by subjects to work out the consequences of such events, *new situations* emerge as result of their work. Such events do not form part of 'what is', and so they do not fall under the purview of Badiou's general ontology. Thus the relation between the being of the subject and the general domain of Badiou's ontology is a *contingent* relationship, which hinges on the occurrence of an event and the decision of a subject to act in fidelity to that event. (Feltham and Clemens, 2005: 7, emphasis in original)

Lucy's falling in love with George, which takes place at the Piazza and overlaps with the scene of the murder, has all the contours of an *event*. According to Badiou, because it disrupts the order of things, to the point of appearing more 'real' than the usual, familiar situation from which it emerges, an event is difficult to define and name.¹⁵ These characteristics are present in Lucy's case. Immediately before the murder scene, the narrator announces: "it was the hour of unreality – the hour, that is, when unfamiliar things are real" (RWV, 61-62). Afterwards, Lucy cannot find a name for it – the term 'adventure', used by Miss Bartlett, Mr Beebe and Miss Lavish (RWV, 67), does not seem suitable. What happened in the Piazza (in a chapter simply called 'Fourth Chapter') is initially referred to as "a muddle – queer and odd, the kind of thing one could not write down easily on paper", and as 'the tangle' (RWV, 68). Lucy is equally hesitant about what it exactly refers to and it is only slowly that she realises that "the real event – whatever it was – had taken place, not in the Loggia [where the man had been stabbed], but by the river [where she had stopped with George]" (RWV, 80). Finally, she also associates it with truth. Even though she repeatedly cries to Charlotte, "I want to be truthful" (RWV, 93), she invariably fails to do so. By deciding to rely on her cousin's (common) judgement – "I shall understand myself. I shan't again be troubled by things that come out of nothing, and mean I don't know what" (RWV, 94) – she fails, in Badiouian terms, to 'act in fidelity to the event'. After the kissing scene at Fiesole – which Charlotte, who refers to George's kiss as 'a disaster' (RWV, 99), but not Lucy, treats as an event – the two cousins flee to Rome, and place themselves under the protection of the Vyses. On her return to England (which opens the second part of the book), she becomes engaged to Cecil (who refers to their engagement as 'the great event' – RWV, 107). Even when she finally decides to break off her engagement,

¹⁵ An event is what makes change possible. As Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens put it, it is "a totally disruptive occurrence which has no place in the scheme of things as they currently are" (Feltham and Clemens, 2005: 20). They add:

The occurrence of an event is completely unpredictable (...) not only must an event occur at the evental-site of a situation, but someone must recognize and name that event whose implications concern the nature of the entire situation. Thus it is quite possible that an event occurs in a situation but that nothing changes because nobody recognizes the event's importance for the situation. This initial naming of the event as an event, this decision that it has transformational consequences for the entirety of a situation, is what Badiou terms an 'intervention'. The intervention is the first moment of a process of fundamental change that Badiou terms a 'fidelity', or a 'generic truth procedure'." (Feltham and Clemens, 2005: 20-21)

Badiou identifies four areas in which truth can be produced, namely: art, love, politics and science.(e.g. Badiou, 2007: 16-17). Philosophy does not produce truth; it is an exercise of thought conditioned by any of these four 'generic procedures' (Badiou, 2005: 81). On his notion of 'intervention', Badiou wrote: "I term intervention any procedure by which a multitude is recognised as an event" (Badiou, 2007: 202).

following George's second kiss – which is presented as 'real', in striking contrast to Cecil's kiss, perceived as 'a failure' (RWV, 127) – Lucy continues to 'pretend', preparing to embrace spinsterhood, to join the "vast armies of the benighted" (RWV, 194), as her arrangements to travel with the Miss Alans and the fact that she is becoming more like Miss Bartlett evince (RWV, 214-215).

Love, in the narrator's words, is "the most real thing that we shall ever meet" (RWV, 181). Though susceptible to a romantic interpretation, this assertion carries deeper resonances. George and Lucy's encounter is endowed with the status of a more general, philosophical 'truth procedure' – for Mr Emerson, love *and* truth are necessarily entwined (RWV, 225). George immediately understands this and is ready to accept its implications: for him, "something tremendous has happened" (RWV, 64), a conviction from which he never varies (cf. RWV, 186). For Lucy, the full recognition of this insight has to wait – she insists on 'lying' ('to George', 'to Cecil', 'to Mr Beebe, Mrs Honeychurch, Freddy and the servants', and 'to Mr Emerson' – as the chapter titles announce). She first has to go through a process in which she is confronted with the social 'visions and divisions' that she has known all her life (George is from a lower class). Lucy's sexual awakening is therefore also entwined with a kind of political awakening, as the guiding presence of Mr Emerson – credited with a "strange standpoint" (RWV, 58) and described as a socialist (RWV, 29) – seems to suggest. Mr Emerson is the only character in the novel that is openly committed to truth – "for we fight for more than Love or Pleasure: there is Truth. Truth counts, Truth does count" (RWV, 225). He facilitates Lucy's development, not only by helping her come to terms with her love for George, but also by providing her with a benchmark of truth, which proves especially useful in relation to Cecil (whose insensitive prank has brought the Emersons to Summer Street). When, in a manner that evokes Philip Herriton, Cecil tells her that 'the classes ought to mix' and 'I believe in democracy', Lucy retorts: "No, you don't (...) You don't know what the word means" (RWV, 136); when he compares himself to Mr Emerson ('he's a clever sort, like myself' – RWV, 157), Lucy disagrees; and when she ponders that Cecil's views on the Church are similar to the Emersons', she nevertheless concludes that they are "somehow different" (RWV, 169). Truth makes things appear in a different light – i.e. as they really *are*. Thus, it is only after breaking up with him that Lucy realises that, despite wrapping himself in an image of 'unconventionality' (RWV, 102), Cecil is rather 'conventional' (RWV, 192). In the end, Lucy emerges from the *truth procedure* as a full subject – she has married George on an

equal footing, even if at the expense of her family, who she has ‘alienated’, the narrator tells us, ‘perhaps for ever’ (RWV, 228).

The reading I offer clashes with the postmodernist assumptions that underpin Buzard’s analysis of Forster’s work. According to this critic, Forster moved away from the guidebook satire because he had recognised that the ‘authentic’ is *always* an elusive category, and that there is no ‘real’ outside textuality.¹⁶ He contends that Forster was aware that “the approach to the ‘real’ in culture or history always proceeds through some prior textualisation” and that tourism afforded Forster a frame “in which quixotic efforts to tear down the discursive and material structures surrounding ‘the real’ appear wilfully self-deluded” (Buzard, 1993: 291). By putting Forster inside an overwhelming ‘textualisation’, Buzard is succumbing to a textual vision of the world, for which tourism is not so much the totalising metaphor as a partial reality. He is thus also conceding too much to an entrapment model of reading that allows for little or no alternatives. The novel itself – not so much through its gaps as through its excesses, that is, through the supplement of meaning that it has unintentionally produced – points to a different conclusion. Buzard’s analysis can certainly apply to the tourist situation, which understands and enacts the quest for the ‘real’ in terms of a quest for the ‘authentic’, i.e. as a quest which is confined to issues of identity (whether in the form of desire for the ‘Other’, for ‘real’ Italy, or for ‘a view’). As a reality-transforming industry (of which, as Buzard claims, Forster was well-aware – cf. Buzard, 1993: 321), tourism draws heavily on the fixation and subsequent transaction of ideas of ‘selfhood’ and ‘otherness’. Its panoply of artefacts, facilities and staged events – the Anglicised pensions, the ‘restored’ frescoes, the ‘definitive’ guidebooks, the ‘typical’ postcards, the excursions and guided tours to see the ‘real’ Italy/ India – all express the same yearning for a fixed, authentic, identity.

And yet, if we consider that the real is the outcome of an event (rather than an expression of being), Buzard’s interpretation does not suffice. The novel’s subversive force resides in allowing into the plot, not the experience of authenticity (‘real’ Italy or ‘true’, ‘romantic’ love), but the experience of ‘something happening’ – an experience which is transformative of the subject and of the ‘situation’ and which cannot be

¹⁶ Buzard does reference Lacan, but understands him in a textual, postmodernist sense – that is, (1) the real is elusive; (2) access to it can only be textual: “Forster’s characters repeatedly enact a failed encounter with the ‘real’ which they believe themselves to have met. To adapt a phrase of Jacques Lacan’s, they constantly attend ‘an appointment to which [they] are always called with the real that eludes [them]’” (Buzard, 1993: 314). My contention is that this reliance on text (and the paramountcy of textuality itself) must be understood as a historic-specific rather than universal phenomenon. It is typical of postmodernism (which I take, following Jameson, as ‘the cultural logic of late capitalism’ – Jameson, 1984), of which tourism is only one expression.

reduced to sexuality. Both *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View* show that even in situations where everything has been anticipated and brought under control (as tourism proposes to do), events can still find their way in. Tourism itself reflects the desire for something to happen (albeit under controlled conditions, with as few ‘side effects’ as possible) – Miss Lavish is continuously looking for ‘an adventure’. In tourism, however, the event is invariably protracted or deferred; it is a promise rather than an actual experience. What Forster’s Italian novels show is that, even against all odds, things can *happen*, or, as the narrator of *A Passage to India* will later put it, “adventures do occur, but not punctually” (API, 46-47). Coming to terms with this notion of the real is Lucy’s task and challenge; herein lies the novel’s subversive power.

3.2. Englishness and its social ‘Others’: a country house called England

What the tourist experience is or ought to be, a major theme in Forster’s work, rehearses yet another theme, namely, what the English *are* and what *England* is (and ought to be). Like a nemesis, the English abroad remind his compatriots of what they have (or would like to have) left behind. As Buzard points out, “abroad, the tourist is the relentless representative of home” (Buzard, 1993: 8). This is not necessarily a matter of joy (as Miss Lavish’s impatient outburst suggests, “Oh, the Britisher abroad!” – RWV, 39), but it provides another foil (apart from the locals) against which Englishness may be defined. At the turn of the century, the continental tour, and travelling to Italy and Greece in particular, was ascribed a ‘patriotic function’: tourists were supposed to return “‘better Englishmen’ than when they departed, having seen by contrast with other societies the great qualities of their own” (Buzard, 1993: 8). Thus conceived of as an educational venture, tourism was also “a struggle for cultural credentials” (Buzard, 1993: 288), in which anti-tourist assertions worked as a matter of ‘distinction’ (in Bourdieusian terms). As this critic stresses,

Snobbish ‘anti-tourism’, an element of modern tourism from the start, has offered an important, even exemplary way of regarding one’s own cultural experiences as authentic and unique, setting them against a backdrop of always assumed tourist vulgarity, repetition and ignorance. (Buzard, 1993: 5)

This clearly applies to Mr Eager, who reproaches his Italian driver, “he is treating us as if we were a party of Cook’s tourists” (RWV, 83). It also applies to Miss Lavish, who,

upon knowing that George Emerson works for the railways, mockingly associates him with “the image of a porter” (RWV, 86). It is also the case of Philip Herriton, who turns to Italy (which supplies him, as Buzard points out, with his ‘epistemological footing’ – Buzard, 1993: 310) to create an ironic distance from Sawston, and is thus also guilty of snobbery. It is, finally, the case of Cecil Vyse, that other ‘Inglese Italianato’, whom Italy, we are told, “had quickened [...], not to tolerance, but to irritation” (RWV, 130) towards ordinary English life.¹⁷

These attitudes to England, Cecil’s in particular, contrast with Lucy’s, who has returned from Italy with her ‘senses expanded’, “with new eyes” (RWV, 130). The fact that the second part of *A Room with a View* takes place in England, where we find, as Mr Beebe notes, “all the Pension Bertolini” (RWV, 147, 204), suggests that England is essential for Lucy to complete her education. Italy must be rejected so England can be adequately appreciated: “She might be forgetting her Italy [as Cecil insinuated], but she was noticing more things in her England” (RWV, 175). More strongly convinced of her ‘radicalism’, Lucy has also become more aware of her protected suburban life in Summer Street:

Hitherto she had accepted their ideals without questioning – their kindly affluence, their inexplorable religion, their dislike of paper bags, orange peel and broken bottles. A Radical out and out, she learned to speak with horror of Suburbia. Life, so far as she troubled to conceive it, was a circle of rich, pleasant people, with identical interests and identical foes. In this circle one thought, married and died. Outside it were poverty and vulgarity for ever trying to enter, just as the London fog tries to enter the pine-woods, pouring through the gaps in the northern hills. (RWV, 129-130)

Even though she has decided to marry Cecil (the idea of marrying George remains at this point inconceivable), Lucy does not share his snobbery: “though her eyes saw its [English society’s] defects her heart refused to despise it entirely” (RWV, 130).

This, in a way, reflects Forster’s own development as a writer. The ‘Lucy novel’ was interrupted by what would become his second novel, *The Longest Journey* (1907), which Forster had originally planned as another Anglo-Italian story. The decision to set it in England was brought about by a small incident, told in Furbank’s biography. On a visit to the countryside in 1904, Forster came upon a lame shepherd boy, who struck him for his dignity and generosity. In his diary, Forster wrote:

¹⁷ Cecil is linked to Miss Lavish through her pseudonym, Joseph Emery Prank (RWV, 176), which evokes his *prank* on Sir Harry Otway, whose snobbery he had wanted to ‘punish’ by bringing to Summer Street the Emersons to become his tenants (RWV, 136). Cecil’s act, of course, turns against him: he loses Lucy to George and it is, therefore, his own snobbery that is ultimately punished.

This 'incident' assures my opinion that the English *can* be the greatest men in the world: he was miles greater than an Italian: one can't dare to call his simplicity naïf. The aesthetic die away attitude seems contemptible in a world which has such people. (Cit. Furbank, 1977: 117)

The episode had such resonance with Forster that he drew upon it to shape its protagonist, the congenially lame Rickie Elliot. As Furbank puts it, the lame boy was regarded as a symbol: it combined "so many elements with meaning for him: the ideal English landscape, heroic human quality in a working-class guise, and an inherited handicap (as it might be, homosexuality) courageously overcome" (Furbank, 1977: 119). The novel was Forster's most autobiographical. It pitted the life of the unfortunate Rickie (a frustrated writer, trapped in an unhappy marriage and a life teaching in the stuffy and oppressive Sawston School) against that of his half-brother, the spontaneous and vigorous Stephen Wonham, who leads a fuller life in the unspoiled countryside. And yet, Forster was not satisfied with the result: the incident of the boy, he felt, "spoiled it [the novel] as a work of art (...) but gave it its quality" (Furbank, 1977: 119). It also made him realise the kind of writer he wanted to be, which his meeting with Henry James would further confirm. Though impressed by James's work, Forster could not relate to his literary vision, as Furbank recounts:

However, he decided, James could never mean much to him personally. There was something stuffy and precious in the Lamb House atmosphere; it was not his own road. As he returned to the twilit street, he glimpsed a young labourer in the shadows, smoking as he leaned against the street-wall. *There*, Forster told himself, was the reality he was after. (Furbank, 1977: 164-165, emphasis in original)

The figure of 'the young labourer in the shadow' (as, before that, of the lame shepherd boy) points to the kind of 'reality' that Forster longed to address in his fiction – a reality which stood outside Cambridge and the comfortable suburban life which he led with his mother. Forster's literary route was, then, one that rejected certain *foreign* (i.e. Italian, American) versions of aestheticism, to embrace a kind of autochthonous, *English* realism, the figure of the social 'other' being as much crucial to his literary project as to his vision of Englishness. The two converge in one of the most celebrated classics of English literature, *Howards End* (1910), the book which made Forster's reputation

when he was in his early thirties, and which has ever since been perceived as a sociological study of England at the turn of the century.¹⁸

Howards End tells the story of two families, the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes, whose lives intersect around a country house, Howards End, in a way that is deeply symbolic of England's past, present and future. The Schlegels – siblings Margaret, Helen and Tibby – are a cultivated London-based family of German descent who share a love of the arts and (especially the sisters) of 'personal relations', and slightly progressive views (regarding, in particular, feminism and the 'social question'). The Wilcoxes, on the other hand, are an entrepreneurial family, with strong imperial links, who are indifferent to 'culture', 'avoid the personal note in life' (HE: 101) and hold a practical view of things.

The main oppositions between Wilcoxes and Schlegels is national. Despite their aunt's (Mrs Munt) polite, almost apologetic, remark, "Of course I regard you Schlegels as English (...) English to the backbone" (HE, 23), the narrator goes on to correct her: they "were not 'English to the backbone', as their aunt had piously asserted" (HE: 42). Their father was a German émigré who had come to England as a way to escape Germany's materialism and utilitarianism (HE: 43). Mr Schlegel's Germany, we are told, is the Germany of "Hegel and Kant", not of commercial success and imperialist expansion; he is "the idealist, inclined to be dreamy", whose "gaze was always fixed beyond the sea" and "whose Imperialism was the Imperialism of the air" (HE: 42). It is not without irony that, at a moment when Germany was England's major competitor, both in industry and empire, becoming in consequence 'England's bogeyman' (a perception which would soon result in war), Forster should make it the spiritual house (in exile) of non-materialistic values. These values are the chief legacy of the Schlegels. They have also inherited, albeit in various degrees, the German (or continental) malady, namely: an attraction towards abstraction and theory. There are important differences between the brother and the sisters: Tibby is described as 'intelligent', but also 'dyspeptic and difficile' (HE, 44); he is more keen on books than people (HE: 250), while the sisters are interested both in ideas *and* people (as their busy social life, with tea parties and discussion societies, suggests).¹⁹ Together, the Schlegel sisters are made to represent the

¹⁸ Francis Mulhern has called *Howards End* "the earliest of Bloomsbury's studies in cultural sociology" (Mulhern, 2000: 35).

¹⁹ As Paul Delany has pointed out, Tibby is different from his sisters in that he fails to 'connect' (by the novel's standards, a feminine quality), which makes him no better a person than the Wilcoxes (Delany, 1995: 74; cf. HE, 302). Delany adds, "Tibby is damned for his cold self-sufficiency, whereas his sisters are redeemed by their sympathy, their eagerness for connection with the world" (Delany, 1995: 75). It is significant that it is Tibby who precipitates the tragic finale, by giving Leonard Bast's name to Charles Wilcox as Helen's probable 'seducer' (HE, 303). In other words, Tibby stands for the liberal-minded

‘inner life’ as against the ‘outer life’ – the world of ‘telegrams and anger’ (HE, 41), which is presented as the province of the Wilcoxes.

But it is the differences between the sisters – and the consequences these differences will have on their distinct development – that the novel concentrates upon. Helen, the younger sister, is more strongly connected with their German side: often referred to as ‘a very exceptional person’ (HE: 32, 34), but with a propensity to extremes, to lack ‘balance’ (HE, 272), she appears to be oversensitive (she leaves the concert earlier because the music has ‘moved her deeply’ – HE: 48). When in crisis (the crisis that her extremism has brought upon her), it is to Germany that she turns in search of a refuge (HE, 250).²⁰ Margaret, on the other hand, though perceived by Charles Wilcox as a ‘German cosmopolitan’ (which from him is no compliment – HE: 110), is more in tune with what is considered to be ‘English’: more balanced and practical than Helen, she professes “to live by proportion”, though, she importantly adds, only as “a last resource”, not as a prig would (HE: 83). As a child, in the eternal contest between her German and English relatives, she had supported none, her early conviction being that “any human being lies nearer to the unseen than any organization, and from this she never varied” (HE: 44). The difference between the two sisters is at a point spelt out: “the younger was rather apt to entice people, and, in enticing them, to be herself enticed; the elder went straight ahead, and accepted an occasional failure as part of the game” (HE: 44). Margaret knows that there is a ‘game’ and, unlike Helen, is willing to play it. Unlike Helen and Tibby, she also has a firm grasp of reality, and a strong desire to ‘connect’ (HE, 188).

The sisters are put to the test – and have their differences fully brought out – in their contact with the Wilcoxes. Helen’s experience ranges from enrapture to disillusionment, disgust and final reconciliation, as she falls in and out of love with the younger son of the Wilcoxes, clashes with Mr Wilcox, and ends up raising her child at the Wilcoxes’ country house (now her sister’s possession). Margaret, on the other hand, after a series of ‘false starts’ (cf. Widdowson, 1977: 80), comes to understand Mrs Wilcox and to love all that she stands for: the country, permanence, tradition. Her marriage to Henry Wilcox is more the result of her practical sense (in fact, it is a solution to her problems – as had been the case with Ruth Wilcox – cf. Widdowson, 1977: 79) than of unchecked emotion (Helen’s prerogative). As Margaret tells Helen, justifying her engagement to

effete whose relative indifference to the world has disastrous consequences (a role that Philip Herriton had very nearly come to play).

²⁰ As Peter Widdowson has noted, Helen is, to a certain extent, “purer than Margaret”, in that she is less tempted by ‘Wilcoxism’ (Widdowson, 1977: 74); and yet, what worries Forster about her is “her predilection for the abstract and theoretic” (Widdowson, 1977: 74), to which her extremism is attributed.

Henry, “there is the widest gulf between my love-making and yours. Yours was romance; mine will be prose” (HE, 177).

But it is Leonard Bast, the middle-brow, East-End clerk, which will provide the sisters with a more important touchstone. Leonard’s presence is from the outset taken as a symbol: he is a ‘hint’ that “all is not for the best in the best of all possible worlds, and that beneath these superstructures of wealth and art there wanders an ill-fed boy” (HE: 57). Positioned “at the extreme verge of gentility” (HE: 58), Leonard represents the outer limits of the novel’s social universe. As the narrator points out, he is not a personification of *absolute* poverty: “We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet. This story deals with gentlefolk, or with those who are obliged to pretend that they are gentlefolk” (HE: 58). Being lower middle class – or ‘petit bourgeois’ – Leonard is poised between the ‘abyss’ of absolute poverty and the realm of plenty and ‘gentility’. It is in relation to the latter that he is defined, in relation, that is, to what he *lacks*: “he was inferior to most rich people, there is not the least doubt of it. He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as lovable” (HE: 58).

Above all, more than money, Leonard lacks *culture*. The novel treats the question of the social ‘other’ – the poor – as essentially a cultural question. Leonard’s defining feature is his tragi-comic craving for culture (HE: 52), the rich men’s most prized possession. Struggling to read Ruskin, the young East-End clerk despairs, “Oh, it was no good, this continual aspiration. Some are born cultured; the rest had better go in for whatever comes easy. To see life steadily and to see it whole [a quote from Matthew Arnold] was not for the likes of him” (HE, 67). On his painstaking educational efforts, the narrator ironically observes, “he hoped to come to Culture suddenly, much as the Revivalist hopes to come to Jesus” (HE: 62). Leonard’s ‘pursuit of beauty’ (HE: 53) is likewise mocked when he tells the Schlegel sisters (not without some hesitation and self-consciousness) about his night walk, which had taken him from the ugly confines of the City to a pitch-dark countryside (HE: 125).

One of Forster’s severest critics, D. S. Savage, objected to his representation of culture on grounds that it is made to rely on money: “culture is *not* dependent upon wealth; it is only to the parasites of the spirit that it appears as an object which can be externally appropriated” (Savage, 1950: 66). That culture depends on money may be the view of some protagonists – of Margaret at her most practical (it would certainly be the view of the Wilcoxes if they were to care for culture). And yet, the novel offers a more ambiguous picture. In fact, if Leonard is trapped within his poor economic situation, he

is also trapped within an idea of culture which is manifestly inadequate. Leonard's yearning is described as a desire to 'acquire culture' (HE: 52), and must therefore be seen in line with other characters – Philip Herriton, Miss Lavish, Mr Eager, Cecil Vyse – whom Forster had satirised in earlier novels for just that reason. Leonard's reliance on books to understand (and enlarge) his experience also evokes Forster's previous critique of the tourist guidebook (one of Leonard's books is, significantly, Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* – HE, 61). When recounting his night 'adventure' to the Schlegel sisters, the young clerk makes a positive impression for daring to 'go off the roads' (HE, 126) and 'pushing back the boundaries' (HE, 128). The sisters deplore his constant references to books and authors, and when he states that 'it all came about from reading something of Richard Jefferies', Helen corrects him: "Excuse me, Mr Bast, but you're wrong there. It didn't. It came from something far greater" (HE, 127). In the end, even if he keeps sliding back to 'a swamp of books', Leonard has earned the sisters' admiration, "he had troubled to go and see for himself" (HE, 127).

The Schlegels clearly value experience over learned (and pedantic) knowledge. Their attitude towards working class education thus appears completely at odds with Mr Eager's patronising comments apropos the Emersons (which could well be applied to Leonard Bast):

'Generally,' replied Mr Eager, 'one has only sympathy with their success. The desire for education and for social advance – in these things there is something not wholly vile. There are some working men whom one would be very willing to see out here in Florence – little as they would make of it.' (RWV, 74)

This ambiguous, if not dual, attitude – 'sympathy with their success', 'something not wholly vile', 'little as they would make of it' – mirrors the dominant discourse on working class education, which oscillated between its support and its dismissal as a futile exercise.²¹

And yet, Margaret's own opinion about working class education betrays no fewer doubts, as the thoughts prompted by Leonard's visit reveal:

Culture had worked in her own case, but during the last few weeks she had doubted whether it humanized the majority, so wide and so widening is the gulf that stretches between the natural and the philosophic man, so many the good chaps who are wrecked in trying to cross it. (HE, 122-123)

²¹ Adult education was also a necessary evil, a way of checking the growing restlessness of the working classes and ward off the threat of revolution and (later) Bolshevism (cf. Steele, 1997: 65).

For all the ambiguity (himself involved in adult education at the Working Men's College, Forster holds back from taking a more clear position),²² it is not surprising that the novel has been attributed an 'unconscious elitism' (Widdowson, 1977: 92). Indeed, there seems to be a clear difference between wealthy people yearning for culture – it has 'worked' for Margaret and even when it does not 'work', as in Mr Eager's case, the failure is merely ridiculous – and people like Leonard doing it. The novel confirms Margaret's misgivings: Leonard's failure will have more serious consequences (not least, death), to the point that his efforts are made to appear an act of hubris. The reasons for his failure are multiple. It is not just that he lacks the (mainly, economic) means to 'acquire' culture, or that he can never be expected to truly understand it, since it is 'too much' for him to take – as his grotesque death, buried under the Schlegel's bookcase, symbolically suggests (HE, 315). Perhaps more important is the fact that all recognised sources of culture lie outside his immediate range of experience – be it books, concerts, lectures or 'heroic' walks in the country. Culture, in this sense, is anything but *ordinary*, and not so much a matter of acquisition *as of inheritance* (to take up Leonard's words, "some are born cultured; the rest had better go in for whatever comes easy").²³

With the exception of D. H. Lawrence – it was one of the few things that the writer praised in the novel (Furbank, 1978: 10) – the character of Leonard Bast has been badly received by critics. For Peter Widdowson the Basts appear 'created' rather than 'known and observed', their dramatic presentation fails to convince and Jacky is "one of the few really wooden caricatures in all of Forster's fiction" (Widdowson, 1977: 91). For D. S. Savage, their presentation is guided by "a suspicious bias" (Savage, 1950: 58): Leonard was 'unconsciously falsified' so he could "fit within the preconceived interpretation of

²² By Forster's time the College had been taken over by the WEA (Workers' Educational Association). Furbank offers the following description:

It had been founded in 1854, in the period – just after the defeat of Chartism and the year of revolutions – when there was a concerted effort by intellectuals, and the 'clergy' generally, to heal the class-war by means of 'culture'. (...) The College, unlike the earlier Mechanics' Institutes, set out to provide a full liberal education, with a social life modelled on Oxford and Cambridge – teachers and students meeting in fellowship and equality. (...) In the main, the students were skilled craftsmen or clerks and the like. (Furbank, 1977: 174)

Forster curiously makes Leonard a solitary (and hopeless) autodidact, thus avoiding engagement with a social milieu that he knew at first hand.

²³ For Furbank, Leonard represents Forster's critical take on "the culture-snobbery of the under-educated", a variation of one of Forster's major themes, namely 'culture put to the wrong end' (Furbank, 1977: 173).

reality which underpins the structure of the novel” (Savage, 1950: 59).²⁴ To a certain extent, this is true. Leonard’s sketchy characterisation emphasises the fact that there is nothing in him or in his life that can pass as ‘culture’. He belongs to a generation that has lost its rural roots (as Margaret immediately notes – HE, 122) and therefore lacks all the essential attributes associated with culture (i.e. tradition, continuity, a ‘lineage’). Leonard’s characterisation, however, is also symptomatic of one of the novel’s major themes – the unbridgeable gap between the classes, which the novel struggles to overcome by way of ‘connections’, a problem whose dimensions Forster’s own limitations only reflect and confirm. In this sense, one cannot but agree with Forster²⁵ that he has ‘brought it off’ – though his success refers not so much to a character as to the signalling of a problem.

Leonard is first and foremost an *outsider*. Like Gino and the Italians of the short stories, he arouses a kind of touristic voyeurism in other characters (if not readers and critics). When he is announced at Wickham Place, following Jacky’s visit, he is immediately treated as a curiosity: “Even Tibby was interested. The three hurried downstairs” (HE, 122). Margaret then places him as a ‘type’ (HE, 123). Even though the Schlegels look down on his cultural aspirations, there is no doubt that it is Leonard’s patchy cultural knowledge that enables them to have a conversation. This contrasts strikingly with Helen’s reaction to Jacky Bast (only reported in indirect speech), whose Cockney accent had earned her the nickname of ‘Mrs Lanoline’ (HE, 120), and who had been mockingly dismissed by Helen, “she doesn’t really mind. The admirable creature isn’t capable of tragedy” (HE, 121). The Wilcoxes may not be interested in acknowledging Bast’s existence, let alone admitting him in their circle; yet, the Schlegels’ attention to the young clerk fails to go much further. Leonard is described as another instance of the episodic attention that the Schlegel sisters pay to anything that lies *outside* their protected world (an image which evokes Lucy’s world, as well as her tourist position – RWV, 129-130). When Margaret meets Leonard at the Queen’s Hall concert, the narrator wryly observes, “everyone interested the Schlegels on the whole at that time” (HE: 50). Their curiosity is later confirmed: “To the Schlegels, as to the undergraduate [a fleeting acquaintance of Bast’s], he was an interesting creature, of whom they wanted

²⁴ The relationship between money and culture is indeed falsified, but the novel’s ‘gaps’ or ‘faultlines’ allow for different readings. For instance, the narrator’s comment apropos Leonard Bast’s distrust of Margaret – “To trust people is a luxury in which only the wealthy can indulge; the poor cannot afford it” (HE: 48) – is contradicted by the fact that Margaret’s aunt, Mrs Munt, also distrusts Leonard (HE: 55). Cf. Gordon Comstock’s similar prejudices (less skilfully contradicted) in Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, which I discuss below.

²⁵ In the *Paris Review* interview, Forster admitted that he had no personal knowledge of the life led by people like the Basts, but added, “I believe I brought it off” (Forster, 1977: 28).

to see more” (HE, 129). Indeed, had it not been for Helen’s obstinacy – which Margaret calls “the unbalanced patronage of the Bast” and regards as a reaction to the Wilcoxes, in the wake of her early romantic disappointment (HE, 272) – their interest in Leonard Bast might have faded away quickly (as it had in the undergraduate’s case). Towards the end of the novel, Helen accepts Margaret’s ‘diagnosis’, and adds, “I shall never rave against Wilcoxes any more” (HE, 305). Her romantic involvement with the clerk has been less than superficial: for her, as the narrator remarks, Leonard “did not count for much” – he “seemed not a man, but a cause” (HE, 303). Helen (who once referred him to Mr Wilcox as ‘a special case’ – HE, 138) will eventually confirm this insight, by confessing to Margaret that he has meant little to her and that she is forgetting him (HE: 327). It is Paul that remains in her memory, as announced early in the novel, “To Helen, at all events, her life was to bring nothing more intense than the embrace of this boy who played no part in it” (HE: 39). More than a passing interest, Leonard is an embarrassment, to the characters as well as Forster. After being ‘disposed’ of (cf. Savage, 1950: 66), now a corpse, he is accorded the dignity of fatherhood and (unlike Jacky) ‘tragedy’:

There was nothing else to be done; the time for telegrams and anger was over, and it seemed wisest that the hands of Leonard should be folded on his breast and be filled with flowers. Here was the father; leave it at that. Let squalor be turned into tragedy, whose eyes are the stars, and whose hands hold the sunset and the dawn. (HE, 321)

Forster’s dismissal of the ‘unthinkable very poor’ translates into the dismissal of the working class (approachable, as the narrator suggested, only by ‘the poet’ or ‘the statistician’ – HE, 58). As Widdowson has pointed out, the novel is concerned with the middle classes, with depicting “the various levels of the middle-class petit-bourgeois, John Bull and liberal intelligentsia” (Widdowson, 1977: 29; cf. 63). This aspect ought to be considered together with the novel’s treatment of capitalism, a suffusing but silent presence in the novel which has largely remained unexamined.

Some critics have yet noted that *money* is the “focal point” of the novel, “the *Leitmotif* which accompanies the Schlegels throughout the book” (Savage: 1950: 58; cf. Delany, 1995: 67). The novel diligently follows Mrs Munt’s, Margaret’s and Helen’s financial investments (HE, 28), and records how money is a source of permanent concern and trouble in Leonard’s life (e.g. HE: 59). Money, however, is regarded not so much as a problem (understood in relation to a capitalist system), but as *the* solution. Though indignant that her millionaire landlord is having Wickham Place pulled down to build

flats, Margaret thinks, “Thank goodness she, too, had some money, and could purchase a new home” (HE, 117). Discussing Leonard Bast with her friends, Margaret concludes: “Money: give Mr Bast money, and don’t bother about his ideals. He’ll pick up those for himself” (HE, 134). After Leonard’s downfall, Helen ‘anonymously’ settles a sum of money to be paid to him, but he proudly rejects the offer (HE: 252). In case there remain doubts concerning her generosity, she is duly rewarded with an increase in her investments.

The novel’s main thesis had been anticipated in *A Room with a View* by Miss Lavish, who had pointed out to a shocked Miss Catherine Alan “that England, our great and beloved country, rests on nothing but commerce” (RWV, 56). *Howards End* picks up this idea, but gives it a twist, by attaching it specifically to the class of intellectual social reformers (to which, no doubt, Miss Lavish belongs). It is sensible, ‘realist’ Margaret who spells out what her aunt regards as a ‘new idea’:

You and I and the Wilcoxes stand upon money as upon islands. It is so firm beneath our feet that we forget its very existence. It’s only when we see someone near us tottering that we realize all that an independent income means. Last night, when we were talking up here round the fire, I began to think that the very soul of the world is economic, and that the lowest abyss is not the absence of love, but the absence of coin. (...) Helen and I, we ought to remember, when we are tempted to criticize others, that we are standing on these islands, and that most of the others are down below the surface of the sea. (HE: 72)

Aunt Juley labels Margaret’s words as ‘cynical’ and then ‘socialist’, to which Margaret replies:

Call it what you like. I call it going through life with one’s hand spread open on the table. I’m tired of these rich people who pretend to be poor, and think it shows a nice mind to ignore the piles of money that keep their feet above the waves. (HE: 72)

Paul Delany has seen in Margaret’s speech Forster’s own determination to ‘unmask’ a certain reality – “to lay bare the tangled economic roots of complacent liberalism” (Delany, 1995: 67). For this critic, *Howards End* is therefore not only concerned with emotional connections, but also with “the subtle connections between a class’s mentality and how it gets its means of life” (Delany, 1995: 67). Margaret, like Forster, belongs to the ‘rentier class’ – “those who lived mainly on investment income”, whom the Victorians called the ‘Independent classes’ (Delany, 1995: 67) – but, unlike most belonging to these classes (especially, it is suggested, the liberal intelligentsia), she is

ready to acknowledge her *dependence* on money and on those involved in the production of wealth. This, of course, provides the link with the Wilcoxes, whose undisputed entrepreneurialism – understood as the capacity to build roads (HE, 324) and empires, and, more tacitly, to make money²⁶ – is their final redeeming feature. Indeed, even though they are mostly depicted in negative colours, the Wilcoxes, as Margaret insists, are the ‘the right sort’ (HE, 119), they ‘keep England going’ (HE: 268).

What is, then, Forster really ‘unmasking’ or exposing? According to Delany, his main targets are commercialism and imperialism: the former is guilty of the destruction of the countryside and of a nobler ‘race’ of Englishmen; the latter is responsible for the moral bankruptcy which comes with the domination of other peoples. The recognition of these connections was becoming more difficult to make, as investments moved further away from home. As Delany points out, “From about 1855 to 1914, Britain exported capital on a huge scale” (Delany, 1995: 71), a trend which was partly linked to the decline of manufacturing industries (based especially in the North) and to the expansion of Empire. The investment of the Schlegel sisters in ‘Foreign Things’ (HE, 28) is in line with this new development: “The English investor now thinks in global, rather than just regional or national terms” (Delany, 1995: 71). Forster was clearly not concerned with the slow demise of industry (which was not so evident by then and, in any case, was not a matter close to his heart). However, he did disapprove of imperialism because it involved ‘immoral methods to organise it’; as Delany puts it, he disapproved of “the application of the Imperial mentality to class rule in Britain” (Delany, 1995: 72).

Forster’s ‘unmasking’ is, then, only partial: he goes as far as pointing to the ‘connections’, but no further. Though assuming an air of radicalism (making Delany conclude: “Margaret’s position is indeed ‘like socialism’ in saying that consciousness is determined by its economic base” – Delany, 1995: 69), Margaret’s denunciatory gesture is far from definitive and ultimately self-defeating. Asked by Aunt Juley, in the follow-up of her exposition, ‘Are you for the rich or for the poor?’, Margaret significantly replies: “Too difficult. Ask me another. Am I for poverty or for riches? For riches. Hurrah for riches!” (HE: 73). Her gesture, then, though rightly implicating the intelligentsia in the very financial practices that they deplore, also undermines (given their inability to reject that world) all claims to criticism – “all our thoughts are the thoughts of six-hundred-pounders, and all our speeches” (HE: 72). The novel thus fails

²⁶ Empire-building (regarded as ‘work’) is, to Margaret, more important than money. Consequently, she praises Paul Wilcox for going ‘out to his duty’ in Nigeria: “He doesn’t want the money, it is work he wants, though it is beastly work” (HE, 119). Despite her awareness of the intellectuals’ dependence on money (and her own), she seems strangely oblivious to the fact that money is the driving force of imperialists like the Wilcoxes.

to conceive of any 'honest' intellectual stance in these circumstances, and not even Helen (the arch-idealist) will be spared from or allowed to contradict this position.

Margaret's statement has led D.S. Savage to see the novel as "a justification of economic privilege" (Savage: 1950: 58). It is clear, however, that such a justification (if there is one) can rest neither on the values that the Schlegels represent (which are basically abstract, 'disconnected' from reality) nor on those of the Wilcoxes (which, as Delany points out, amount to little more than Social Darwinism – Delany, 1995: 72). This role is fulfilled by England, symbolised by the house of Howards End. The dilemma that faces England is laid out at the beginning of the novel, when Mrs Munt arrives at Hilton station, on her way to Howards End: "The station, like the scenery, like Helen's letters, struck an indeterminate note. Into which country will it lead, England or Suburbia?" (HE: 29-30) This links up with a second question, this time formulated by the narrator: to whom does England belong?

Does she belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who have added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity? (HE, 178)

Howards End leads, undoubtedly, to England, as long as it belongs to the right person, and the novel's idea (or vision) for the future of England no doubt hinges on who is to *own* it. Mrs Wilcox, of old English (yeomanry) stock, who was born there (HE: 82), is the perfect embodiment of the house and its surroundings. Together they stand for the past, the 'ancestors', nature, 'instinct' and continuity (HE: 36). From this knowledge she draws her conciliatory powers, revealed, for instance, in the Helen/Paul crisis at the beginning of the novel (HE: 36-37). In contrast with Wickham Place, there are no discussions at Howards End (HE: 87) and, despite belonging to Mrs Wilcox, Howards End is described as "irrevocably masculine" (HE: 56). When Margaret's friends ask her opinion about Germany, Mrs Wilcox declares, "I have no side", and gives her husband's views. The narrator adds, "She was no intellectual" (HE: 86). Mrs Wilcox belongs neither to the world of the Wilcoxes (as Miss Avery is eager to point out – HE: 267; 268) nor to that of the Schlegels (she fails to 'blend' with Margaret's friends – HE: 84); her time has come to an end, as her withering away and subsequent death (significantly, in London) suggests. In short, Ruth Wilcox's England is intrinsically rural, masculine and conservative – when she dies, her husband remembers her for her 'steadiness' (HE: 100) and her son for her 'gentle conservatism' (HE: 102). It is also

undeniably upper-class – even though she is not ‘high-born’ (HE: 36), Mrs Wilcox is credited with a more important kind of aristocracy (rural, English born and bred, almost mystical).

Widdowson is right to point out that Mrs Wilcox exists only on a symbolic plane – she is “scarcely a ‘character’ at all” (Widdowson, 1977: 77). Her role in the plot is to provide a bridge between her husband and Margaret, a union which will more suitably embody the values of modern England. And there can be no doubt that England must now be understood as liberal rather than ‘conservative’, as Margaret muses on her second visit to Howards End: ‘Left to itself, this country would vote liberal’ (HE, 263). Critics have been unanimous in identifying Margaret with Forster (e.g. Furbank, 1977: 173; Lago, 1995: 41). For Widdowson, Margaret is “Forster’s main proponent of liberal-humanist values in the novel” (Widdowson, 1977: 18), her voice often converging with that of the narrator (cf. Widdowson, 1977: 64; 111). It is through her presence and agency that a liberal England – one capable of ‘connecting’ Schlegels, Wilcoxes and, at least ‘virtually’, Basts – takes shape and is articulated. The idea of ‘connection’ – which provides the novel’s epigraph – is also voiced by Margaret:

Only connect! That was the whole of the sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die. (HE, 188)

As an expression of this kind of impulse towards connection, Margaret’s marriage to Henry is a failure (HE, 188). Her role is rapidly reduced to ensuring that the Wilcoxes’ worst faults are curbed or softened. Her assertiveness offers a corrective to the traditional order of gender relations that Mrs Wilcox personifies: whereas Mrs Wilcox states, “I sometimes think that it is wiser to leave action and discussion to men” (HE: 87), Margaret tells Tibby that for women “‘not to work’ will soon become as shocking as ‘not to be married’ was a hundred years ago” (HE, 118). On the other hand, her ‘feminine touch’ – in contrast with the Wilcoxes’ house, Wickham Place is described as “a female house”, which is “irrevocably feminine” (HE: 56) – will make up for the faults and defects of the Wilcoxes, namely: their arrogance towards servants (especially the younger Wilcoxes – e.g. HE: 34; 104), their insensitivity towards women, their hypocrisy and double standards (such as Henry’s attitude towards Jacky and Helen – HE, 300). Nonetheless, despite these, the Wilcoxes exert an enormous fascination on

the sisters.²⁷ Their faults are tolerated for most of the novel and, to a certain extent, excused as the by-products of (if not indispensable qualities for) the Wilcoxes' busy, productive lives. At times, too, the Wilcoxes' shortcomings seem to amount to a question of manners, of lack of personal skills, sensitivity, and perhaps intelligence (Henry's 'obtuseness' compounds all of these – HE, 188). In the end, having taken the reins to take care of her pregnant sister and her now 'broken', 'eternally tired' husband (HE, 326), Margaret cannot but become the actual, as well as spiritual, owner of Howards End.

Forster's vision proposes that neither Money (the Wilcoxes) nor Culture (the Schlegels) are to (ought to?) inherit Howards End/'England'. This role is to fall upon Helen's son, who combines the Wilcoxes' and the Schlegels' middle-class values with Leonard's 'spark of life'. As Peter Widdowson has put it, "The new heir of Howards End/England, then, is an amalgam of all the essential forces, with Margaret and her liberal-humanist culture as a sort of Regent" (Widdowson, 1977: 86). This, however, Widdowson adds, is achieved despite *the failures of Love* (Widdowson, 1977: 85) and of Margaret's values to regenerate the Wilcoxes:

(...) what sort of victory this constitutes for the vision's values, it is hard to say. Henry's spirit is not expanded, as Margaret earlier hoped (...) it is merely broken. And it is broken, we must realise, by *the logic of the Wilcoxes' own attitudes*, not by the efficacy of Margaret's. (Widdowson, 1977: 105)

What we are left with, this critic concludes, is "an emasculated Mr. Wilcox, a motherly Helen, a Margaret approaching the numinous spirituality of Ruth Wilcox, and 'the child', unformed, unknown to the reader, to be taken on trust as the ultimate and rightful 'heir' of England" (Widdowson, 1977: 107).

²⁷ This is clearly articulated at the beginning of the novel by Helen:

She had *liked* giving in to Mr Wilcox, or Evie, or Charles; she had *liked* being told that her notions of life were sheltered or academic; that Equality was nonsense, Votes for Women were nonsense, Socialism nonsense, Art and Literature, except when conducive to strengthening the character, nonsense. One by one the Schlegel fetishes had been overthrown, and, though professing to defend them, she had rejoiced. When Mr Wilcox said that one sound man of business did more good to the world than a dozen of your social reformers, she had swallowed the curious assertion without a gasp, and had lent back luxuriously among the cushions of his motor-car. When Charles said, 'Why be so polite to servants? They don't understand it,' she had not given the Schlegel retort of 'If they don't understand it, I do.' No; she had vowed to be less polite to servants in the future. 'I am swathed in cant,' she thought, 'and it is good for me to be stripped of it.' (HE: 37-38, italics in original)

The problems with this vision are more than evident. As Peter Widdowson noted, as “a product of that Indian summer of Victorian liberal-humanist culture which immediately preceded the First World War” (Widdowson, 1977: 7), *Howards End* inevitably contains “both an ardent affirmation of liberal-humanist values and an intuition of their vulnerability – perhaps their inefficacy – in the process of contemporary social change” (Widdowson, 1977: 7). The novel thus operates on two levels: an intentional and structural one (which gives us the author’s vision); and an unintentional and ideological one (which gives us the novel’s vision). Whereas the former points to a ‘resolved situation’, the latter ‘prophesises’ the impending crisis of liberal-humanist values which would become, with the war, impossible to ignore (Widdowson, 1977: 12):

Forster (the artist) describes a situation (the need to ‘connect’) and resolves it in terms of a particular set of values; *the novel itself* (the tale) suggests now, to us, the unresolved tension between situation and values. *Howards End* reveals, in other words, that its connections may be suspect. (Widdowson, 1977: 12)

One of the faultlines of the novel is the discrepancy between realism and vision. As a ‘condition-of-England’ novel (cf. Furbank, 1977: 172)²⁸, *Howards End* purports to represent England as it is (hence the deployment of realism); and yet, at the same time, the novel is concerned with projecting a vision of what England *ought* to be. The end result is partial, selective, and often ambiguous. As Widdowson notes, Forster’s vision of England is largely ‘an idealisation’ and a literary creation – it is, in fact, the pastoral England of the Georgian poets (Widdowson, 1977: 87). As such, it is built on a number of exclusions: it excludes the ‘very poor’, who cannot be found in the gentlemanly places in which the action takes place (Widdowson, 1977: 90); but, above all, it omits the forces actually opposing liberalism: “Many of the insistent realities of Edwardian life – suburban spread, Socialism, female suffrage, Anglo-German hostility, urban living, speed, change – hang in the air, but they are not allowed to obtrude” (Widdowson, 1977: 93). As a consequence, there is a wide gap between what Forster wants England to be and what it really *is*. Because the vision cannot realistically stand, Forster has to resort to other modes of representation (such as the symbolic and the mystic) to compensate for the failures of realism (Widdowson, 1977: 97, 98). The same can be said of his relapses into “vague and poetical rhetoric” (Widdowson, 1977: 105).

²⁸ Widdowson discusses the similarities and differences between *Howards End* and *The Condition of England* (1909), the work of C. F. G. Masterman, another liberal who shared Forster’s sense of crisis, as well as his liberal-humanist set of values (Widdowson, 1977: 21).

The novel's reliance on a *vision* results in a contrived plot, in which a string of coincidences is needed to sustain the intended 'connections' (cf. Widdowson, 1977: 99-102). It also results in the development of a highly personal and feeble symbolism (Widdowson, 1977: 108). In other words, both plot and symbols are manipulated to conform to 'the pre-conceived ends' (Widdowson, 1977: 102).

This charge had been previously made by D. S. Savage, whose argument Widdowson, in many ways, is expanding. Savage considered that the novel reveals "the central predicament and equivocation inherent in the compromising liberal mentality" (Savage, 1950: 63). It does so, however, in a 'falsified' manner: though the Wilcoxes are represented "honestly and objectively enough", the same cannot be said of the Schlegels or of Leonard Bast (Savage, 1950: 63). Because the Schlegels fail to appeal to a higher spiritual order, and hence lack vitality, they cannot be representative of the 'inner life'. We must take them as "simply what they are 'realistically' represented to be – two specimens of the leisured bourgeois parasite upon culture" (Savage, 1950: 65). Forster's solution (Margaret's marriage) is therefore more a betrayal than a compromise (Savage, 1950: 64), and the novel ultimately comes off, this critic concludes, as "a statement of the real relations between cultured, sensitive and democratic liberalism and the capitalist structure of Edwardian society which permits and guarantees its harmless, ineffectual and even charming existence" (Savage, 1950: 65).

The epitome of this 'charming existence' is, of course, a life in the country. Forster's turn to pastoralism as a vision for England was not altogether original. As Alun Howkins has demonstrated, between the late 1870s and the early 1900s, Englishness fell under the influence of a "back to the country" movement, which was spurred by the "growing belief in an industrial, urban and racial crisis" (Howkins, 1986: 67). The effects of urban degeneration (which Margaret looks for in Leonard Bast – HE, 122) could only be reversed by a return to rural life, increasingly identified with the 'South country'. Howkins stresses how English society was, in this period, undergoing important changes. Through lack of investment and the ascendancy of German heavy industry, the industrial North had been gradually losing its economic supremacy. The south was being increasingly perceived as the seat of economic power: boosted by Empire, London was becoming the indisputable centre of finance, the Civil Service and the professions (Howkins, 1986: 64-65). On the other hand, a century of steady migrations to the cities had left the countryside in poor condition, and called for urgent action. Howkins shows how this perception was spread in all political quarters: "Between 1910 and 1914 Liberal, Labour and Conservative parties all produced

statements and plans for the rural areas” (Howkins, 1986: 68). And there was ‘a unity’ in these ‘programmes’:

This was that for all groups, in different ways, the land, “peasant proprietorship,” even country life itself, were coming to represent order, stability and naturalness. In contrast to the towns, and London in particular, the country and country people were seen as the essence of England, uncontaminated by racial degeneration and the false values of cosmopolitan urban life. (Howkins, 1986: 69)

Central to this rural-based Englishness were “the ideas of continuity, of community or harmony, and above all a special kind of classlessness” (Howkins, 1986: 75). Adds Howkins: “From at least the 1880s the ‘agricultural interest’ had come to mean less the old aristocracy on the right of the Tory party and more a community of those who shared the plight of agriculture in the Great Depression” (Howkins, 1986: 75-76). This kind of Englishness rapidly spread ‘outwards and downwards’ (Howkins, 1986: 77). Ruralism became a feature as much of middle-class publications like *Country Life* as of socialist ones, like *The Clarion* (Howkins, 1986: 78). During the Great War, this version of Englishness was further endorsed: the war propaganda explored the ‘rural idea’ for its images of class respect and deference:

But the South Country gave them more than a vision of Englishness, it gave them a model of society – an organic and natural society of ranks, and of inequality in an economic and social sense, but one based on trust, obligation and even love – the relationship between the ‘good Squire’ and the ‘honest peasant’. It was a model which admirably suited the relationship between the young infantry Subaltern and the sixty or so men under his command. (Howkins, 1986: 80)

The enthusiasm about rural Englishness translated into finding residence – permanent or not – in the countryside, so the ‘real’ experience could be lived: “By the end of the war the notion of the country as a site of holidays and leisure was becoming widespread. Not just the trip to Hampstead Heath or down the Thames to Maidenhead by steamer, but a growing ideal of discovering rural England as it ‘really was,’ unspoilt and natural” (Howkins, 1986: 83). Guidebooks were available for excursions by bicycle, train, and – to those who could afford it – car (Howkins, 1986: 83).

Put in this context, Forster’s celebration of rural England is less the specific project of a liberal politics than a matter of wide consensus, which straddled all sections of British society. Moreover, it is also a modern trend. In choosing to settle in Howards End,

Margaret's social perspective cannot be simply dismissed as that "of a hermit in the Dark Ages" (Delany, 1995: 77). Made possible by her investments and a good marriage, her retreat to the country is, at most, a retreat to a *simulacrum* of the past (which contains an idea of a certain 'life style') rather than to the past. In reality, it is a downright capitulation 'in style' (cf. Delany, 1995: 74) to the present. Despite her dislike of the 'sense of flux' that has taken hold of London, and despite her yearning for permanence (HE, 115; 116; 184; 256-257), Margaret's ability to deal with modern life is frequently noted in the novel. At Christmas, even though she decries the 'vulgarity' and the lack of the 'unseen' around her, she adopts a practical stance; as the narrator points out, "Margaret was no morbid idealist. She did not wish this spate of business and self-advertisement checked" (HE: 91). Furthermore, her shopping skills are greatly appreciated by Mrs Wilcox (who, on the contrary, confesses, 'I'm not a good shopper' – HE, 90). In the end, now living in Howards End, though she regrets that 'London is creeping' (HE, 329), Margaret simply embraces 'the weakness of logic': "Because a thing is going strong now, it need not go strong forever" (HE, 329). Her tacit embrace of capitalism (she has married a prosperous 'capitalist' – HE, 137) is thus reinforced, even if the rural idyll prevents her from acknowledging it.

This 'connection' between capitalism and the countryside has been established by Ellen Meiksins Wood, whose thesis that Britain is "peculiarly capitalist" (Wood, 1991: 18) rather than a peculiar capitalism is based on the rejection of what she calls the 'bourgeois paradigm', an explicatory model which has taken for granted the association between capitalism and the urban bourgeoisie. As Wood puts it, this paradigm posits the bourgeoisie as "the bearer of knowledge, innovation and progress – and, ultimately, the bearer of capitalism and liberal democracy" (Wood, 1991: 3) and encourages a series of oppositions that have become common place: rural versus urban; aristocracy versus bourgeoisie; agriculture versus commerce and industry. For this author, however, the opposition between the country and the city was in England more apparent than real: capitalism was born in the country (Wood, 1991: 4) in the context of specific property relations (Wood, 1991: 9). This fact has been systematically absent from 'the condition of England' discussions. The idealisation of the country takes its cue precisely from the assumption that the country is somehow apart from the traumatic turmoil of modernity (in its capitalist form, though the distinction is seldom made). Rather than conceiving of the English countryside as a refuge from the corrupting workings of capitalism, Wood, on the contrary, points to its complicity in it (a 'connection' that has escaped Forster and the majority of his critics).

Even Paul Delany's insightful analysis, which links the Schlegels to the rentier class and the international expansion of British capital, has failed to make this connection. Turning his attention to the historical context of the novel, Delany stresses the relations between the decline of the industry, the expansion of Empire and the interests of the City (Delany, 1995: 72). He also attributes the survival of an idyllic countryside to the 'distinctive features of English society', i.e. "the dominance of the City over industry, the export of capital (...) and the emergence of an influential rentier class" (Delany, 1995: 73).²⁹ And yet, he continues to regard the country as eligible as a place of escape. He points out that Forster's 'pastoralism' "seeks to be an alternative to modernity, rather than a self-serving myth of finance capital" (Delany, 1995: 74), as part of "a code of personal conduct" (Delany, 1995: 76). Delany rejects Forster's escapist solution, but he still conceives it as a possibility. Even though the economic dependence of the cultivated classes has been 'unmasked' (Delany, 1995: 67), the country retains its halo of purity. In other words, it remains a place where it is still possible to find 'an alternative to modernity', even if this amounts to allowing a few to 'have the cake and eat it too' (Delany, 1995: 73).³⁰

At this point, Macherey's ideological approach to literature may prove illuminating. Peter Widdowson has taken issue with Forster's choice of a country house as a symbol of England: the house is too 'personal', 'indefinite and insubstantial' to be convincing (Widdowson, 1977: 109). It is possible, however, to argue (going beyond this critic's own ideological reading) that the house has deeper resonances than neither the 'author's vision' nor Widdowson's understanding of the 'novel's vision' concedes. Widdowson criticises the fact that in Forster's symbolism "private values are given public application" (Widdowson, 1977: 109). This is clearly the case of *Howards End*, a private country house which is made to stand for the public interest, 'England'. However, instead of dismissing it as a misrepresentation, one should recognise the truth of this statement. The interests of a minority passing as the interests of a nation, the private passing as public are operations that for a long time have been at the core of Englishness. Inadvertently, and perhaps even in spite of itself, *Howards End*, the

²⁹ Delany's mention of the 'distinctive features of English society' evokes the idea central to the Nairn-Anderson theses that Wood was trying to contest – i.e. that capitalism in England is 'peculiar'. The limitations of his analysis emphasises the importance of the rural link.

³⁰ Cf. Margaret's comment on Mr Wilcox's decision to give up *Howards End*, after Mrs Wilcox's death. They have met by chance on Chelsea Embankment:
 'No, we have all decided against *Howards End*. We like it in a way, but now we feel that it is neither one thing nor the other. One must have one thing or the other.' [to which Margaret replies:]
 'And some people are lucky enough *to have both*. You're doing yourself proud, Mr Wilcox. My congratulations.' (HE, 142, my italics)

cottage, thus brings to the fore the unacknowledged connections of Englishness with capitalism, as it embodies the rights of private property and of commercial transaction. It is not only for the Wilcoxes (as their continuous buying and selling of properties indicates) that houses are perceived as a commodity and an investment; this is understood (even by Margaret) as the natural order of things. *Howards End* may claim to stand for a spiritual type of legacy, but its irrefutable materiality ties it down to rather different interests (from which spiritual ‘values’ are made to depend, just as intellectual work depends on money). From early on, Margaret is recognised as the ‘spiritual heir’ of the house, first by its owner, Mrs Wilcox (HE: 107), and then by the house’s guardian, Miss Avery (HE: 266). And yet, the decision of the Wilcoxes – who dismiss her as an “outsider, who’d never appreciate it [the house]” (HE: 108) – is what appears to count. Margaret’s right to the house needs confirmation from the ‘outer world’ of laws and contracts (Mrs Wilcox’s scribbled note leaving the house to her is promptly ignored – HE: 105; 106) and this only takes place at the end of the novel, when Mr Wilcox informs his family that she will *legally* inherit *Howards End*.

In conclusion, Forster’s idea of Englishness – a ‘capacious liberalism’ which is willing to include into its cultivated and moneyed regions sections of the population which had hitherto been excluded, such as women and the ‘respectable’ poor – continues to be true to the limits set by the ‘resolved nation’, as its celebration of tradition and continuity seems to suggest. The notions of ‘values’ and ‘culture’ are also crucial to it. Even though Forster considered, as Widdowson has pointed out, that the real war in Europe was ‘between materialism and *culture*’ rather than Germany and England (a vision that confirms Forster’s endorsement of what Francis Mulhern has called *Kulturkritik*) and that ‘the true values are international’ (Widdowson, 1977: 73), it is in Englishness that these ‘values’, for all intents and purposes, have found a home (literally, a house). The tension between the fixed, stagnant ‘values’ embodied by the house and the world that lies outside its idyllic perimeter – one of perpetual flux and insecurity – is what the novel can neither resolve nor dismiss. In this sense, *Howards End* fails in its attempt (granting, with Savage, that there is one) to ‘falsify’ history. Its faultlines tell a different story and suggest a more troubled picture.

3.3. England's *terra incognita*: Orwell's fictional journeys

Orwell's vision of England was, perhaps no less than Forster's, the product of travelling. Yet, his travels were of a different kind.³¹ Even in Paris, where he took up writing as a 'down-and-out', he was not so much interested in national 'others' (which a cosmopolitan Paris brimming with expatriates and immigrants would have been able to offer), as in getting to know the 'world of social others' (Mulhern, 2000: 35). With the exception of *Burmese Days* (1934), which I shall consider in my next chapter, his thirties novels – *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) and, in a different way, *Coming up For Air* (1939) – represent Orwell's attempt to come to terms with an England which was at odds with the England he had been familiar with before taking up a job with the Imperial Police, in Burma.³² For most of his life, England had been synonymous with an upper-class culture and its institutions (such as the monarchy, Empire, the English public schools and the English countryside), and was not very different from the England that Forster had included and, to some extent, criticised in his novels. On his return from Burma, however, Orwell turned his attention to another England – that of tramps and vagabonds, poverty and unemployment – which he approached in the guise of a foreign land and which provided him with the material for his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). Here, in the heart of two of the biggest capitalist cities, the 'foreign country' is not so much a national entity (France, Paris or London's foreigners), but poverty and destitution. The same can be said of *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), Orwell's commissioned study of unemployment

³¹ Orwell's keenness on Englishness – his pen name is a combination of England's patron Saint and an English river – may seem at first sight an oddity. Orwell had a French background and his life was partly lived abroad: he was born in Bengal to a mother of French descent; he lived in colonial Burma and (for a few months) in Paris, where he published his first articles in French (Hitchens 2002: 7); he also fought in the Spanish Civil War and was a war correspondent in France and Germany at the end of the Second World War. According to his friend T. R. Fyvel, he rejected the name 'Blair' because it was 'a Scots name' and he wanted to be English (Fyvel, 1950).

³² Raymond Williams considered that Orwell's perception of England was shaped by the fact that, given his class position, he was cut off from 'ordinary England'. Consequently, his later attachment to it (as he saw it) was 'an act of conscious affiliation' (Williams: 1971, 17). He was thus endowed with what Williams calls "a kind of conscious double vision" (Williams: 1971, 18). His rejection of his class, nevertheless, did not mean an alternative, more complex, image of England, as Williams points out, "he could only drop out of the one England and make expeditions to the other" (Williams: 1971, 19). The England he got to know when he left Burma and wrote about in his first writings (*Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*), which contradicted the unified image he had been taught as a boy, was again merged, reconciled with that image in later wartime essays. Here, Williams contends, Orwell created "a new myth which until quite recently has remained effective", i.e. "the sense of an England of basic ordinariness and decency, a 'real England' (...) in which it can be seen almost as an accident (...) that the 'wrong members' of the family are in control" (Williams: 1971, 22). Williams also points out that Orwell's two major essays about England (i.e. 'The Lion and the Unicorn' and 'The English People') are written from the perspective of a foreign observer, of 'someone arriving in England' (Williams: 1971, 16), and someone, moreover, who was coming from the Empire. As he puts it, Orwell "came to look at England within a knowledge of its Empire" (Williams: 1971, 17).

in the North of England, to which he set out in the mood of a ‘traveller into unknown England’ (Dodd, 1986: 9). The ‘travel’ motif structures the book, with Orwell often observing from his train the landscape of slag-heaps and chimneys alternating with the countryside (RWP, 14, 15), or some human tableau that has caught his eye (such as a young woman unblocking a waste pipe – RWP, 15), or with him walking and ‘losing himself’ in the labyrinthine alleys and yards of an industrial town (RWP, 46). Moreover, the industrial North is perceived from the outside, as ugly and strange (RWP, 97), almost *foreign* – “when you go to the industrial North you are conscious, quite apart from the unfamiliar scenery, of entering a strange country” (RWP, 101). It is from a distance (and almost from a tourist perspective) that the author delivers most of his portraits of human squalor, such as the scrambling for waste coal among the unemployed: “an unemployed miner took me to see it one afternoon”; “we walked up to the top of the slag-heap” (RWP, 94); “that scene stays in my mind as one of my pictures of Lancashire” (RWP, 96). Furthermore, his travels abroad, in the East, are drawn upon for the purposes of comparison – “I have never seen comparable squalor except in the Far East” (RWP, 56).

Orwell’s decision to ‘go down’ in the social ‘ladder’ was not as original as it might appear. As Philip Dodd has demonstrated, the study of the working class had attained ‘epidemic proportions’ during the 1880-1920 period: “One of the major forms of that study was the ‘Into Unknown England’ writing of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, in which the older traditions of personal exploration blended ‘into the newer techniques of sociological analysis’” (Dodd, 1986: 8). According to this critic, “the social explorers and ‘settlers’ used the language of *terra incognita* to describe their journeys into working-class lives” (Dodd, 1986: 9). The guiding impulse of this tradition was “the construction of class as a cultural formation”, which entailed the recognition on the part of middle-class observers that “the working class was not simply without culture or morality, but in fact possessed a ‘culture’ of its own” (Dodd, 1986: 8). Basically, the culture of the working class was understood with regard to its major distinct feature – manual work – which justified and *fixed* (cf. Dodd, 1986: 9) an identity centred on ‘physicality’ and the ‘working-men’s bodies’. The ‘wonderful vigour and strength’ of the working class would become a matter of celebration in the British documentary film movement of the 1920s and 1930s, “that extension of the ‘Unknown England’ tradition” (Dodd, 1986: 8). Orwell was well aware of this tradition (and its literary conventions), on which he often drew. And yet, there was now an additional context – the economic depression, following the 1929 Great Crash – that

justified and encouraged this kind of writing. As Alok Rai has pointed out, the thirties were confronted with a sense of acute crisis which affected all sectors of society, including the ruling classes. It also impinged on middle-class intellectuals, forcing them out of a sheltered existence and towards more radical positions (cf. Rai, 1988: 23-24).

This was, in a nutshell, the backdrop against which *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* were written. The two novels chronicle the journey of their protagonists – Dorothy Hare and Gordon Comstock, of lower-middle-class extraction – to the outward limits of their class, where they have to come to terms with a different, harsher, reality. The result, in the first case, is a kind of ‘picaresque’³³ novel with a marked ‘episodic structure’ (Lee, 1969: 23), a ‘rambling, social-documentary structure’ (Eagleton, 1974: 18), which relates a series of incidents based on Orwell’s own experiences (most of which had already been recorded in non-fictional form). In the second case, it is a more conventional novel about the trajectory of a struggling thirty-year-old poet from rebellious immaturity to happy conformity. Both novels provide powerful descriptions of London during the depression years, illustrating the writer’s imaginative response to these times.

A Clergyman's Daughter tells the story of Dorothy Hare, the daughter of Reverend Hare, the insensitive, supercilious Rector of Knype Hill whose aloofness from everyday life (and endorsement of High Anglicanism) has alienated most of his parishioners (CD, 18). It is in this adverse context that Dorothy struggles day in day out to run her household and keep the parish going: she dutifully assists her father at home and in the church; permanently short of money (CD, 24), she has to do the shopping while dodging creditors (CD, 36); she attends to all practical issues, such as church repairs (CD, 31), fund-raising (CD, 33) and school pageants (CD, 58), besides visiting at parishioners’ cottages (CD, 48). The novel’s first chapter offers a detailed description of a day in Dorothy’s life, from the moment she wakes at half past five to some time after midnight, when she is still ‘mechanically’ working on the children’s pageant costumes (CD, 84). Though specific of that day, all acts and gestures are described as usual and typical – “the fire had gone out, as usual” (CD, 4), “his voice always sounded muffled and senile” (CD, 5); “as usual, there was only one other communicant” (CD, 7); “the Rector had followed his usual practice” (CD, 13); “the miserable question of the debts was once more shelved” (CD, 29). This feature extends to character presentation, which

³³ Robert Lee has been one of the few to regard this trait as positive. He suggested that the novel has the contours of an ironic ‘picaresque’: unlike the conventional *picaro*, Dorothy is “neither roguish nor clever”; rather, she is “innocent in the extreme – sexually frigid, socially ignorant, intellectually empty” (Lee, 1969: 27).

is ridden with clichés and generalisations: Ellen (the Hares' servant) "was one of those girls whom the Devil and all his angels cannot get out of bed before seven" (CD, 2); Progett, the sexton, "was one of those men who are for ever on the verge of swearing" (CD, 31); Warburton, the cosmopolitan intellectual and would-be artist has over Dorothy "the hold that the blasphemers and evil-livers always has over the pious" (CD, 41). This emphasis on the typical conveys Dorothy's confinement to a life of routine and 'extreme exhaustion' (CD, 1). Dorothy's existence of self-abnegation and sacrifice (one of her habits is to prick her arms "as a form of self-discipline" – CD, 8), together with Warburton's sexual harassment (CD, 41; 76-77; 80), is to be understood as the cause of her break down at the end of the chapter – the narrative device that will send her down on a series of adventures in the 'sub-world' of 1930s England, from hop-picking to residence at a refuge of prostitutes (chapter two); from homelessness, vagrancy and jail in London (chapter three) to teaching in a 'fourth-rate' private school (chapter four).

Dorothy's journey starts with her awaking "to a species of consciousness" (CD, 85) until she gradually becomes 'aware of herself' (CD, 86). The narrator explains Dorothy's strange situation and behaviour: she has run away and is now amnesiac (CD, 87), hence her failure to understand two newspaper posters publicising her disappearance (CD, 88). Dorothy herself soon realises that she is in London and, when her mind is 'fully awake', grasps the truth, "Of course! I've lost my memory!" (CD, 88) She is then accosted by a group of tramps – Nobby, Flo and Charlie – whom she joins in their journey to Kent, to work as a hop-picker (CD, 91). Equipped with a false name (curiously, her servant's name, Ellen) and a partial consciousness, she is now prepared to enter 'the strange, dirty subworld' (CD, 94). After a few days of walking, begging and sleeping in the rough, she reaches the hopfields and eventually begins to work. In long descriptive passages we become acquainted with the particulars and conditions of hop-picking. We learn that it is hard work, with long hours (sixty hours a week – CD, 117) on a "filthy diet" (CD, 120), and wages that are "just enough to keep body and soul together, and no more" (CD, 116). In a tone that aims at objectivity and fairness (often tinged with humour), the narrator attributes part of the difficulties to the nature of the work and to the weather, blaming the low wages on the price of hops rather than the farmers (CD, 118). When the hop season comes to an end, most people return to London, including Dorothy. London is a kind of hub, attracting people of different walks of life looking for a job or simply with no place to go, but there are few jobs available (CD, 145-146). Once there, Dorothy spends a night with a family of seven

who live in the East End, in a two-bedroom flat (CD, 141). Then, with difficulty (CD, 142), she manages to find a room but no job. When her money comes to an end, she inevitably returns to the streets. After ten days begging and sleeping in the streets, Dorothy is arrested. A rich relative comes to her rescue, but her problems are far from over. Unable to return to her father's house, she is given a job as a teacher in a fourth-rate private school – a cold, badly lit place, reminiscent of Victorian private schools (CD, 211), run by a stingy, unscrupulous headmistress (Mrs Creevy), who values money over education (CD, 208-209). Despite the school's poor conditions, Dorothy's achievement as a teacher is no small thing. She buys books for the girls (including Shakespeare's *Macbeth*), an atlas and plasticine (CD, 219), and devises new activities for the children, such as making a historical chart (CD, 222). Until the children's parents begin to interfere, Dorothy is happy in her job and satisfied with the results. And yet, after offending the parents' morality, for which she is scolded and humiliated, and fearing to lose her job (CD, 239), she scraps all innovations and goes back to the old methods – that is, to “practical school-teaching” (CD, 235), centred on handwriting, arithmetic (“especially money-sums” – CD, 236), bits of memorised, rudimentary French (no grammar) and the capitals of all the English counties passing off as geography (CD, 237). Mrs Creevy unashamedly declares, “It's the fees I'm after, not *developing the children's minds*” (CD, 235, italics in original); ultimately, therefore, it is the parents that matter (CD, 236). Resenting Dorothy's change, the children become ‘mutinous’ (CD, 246) and Dorothy ‘smacks’ a girl (CD, 251). In time, she becomes “ruthless with the children” (CD, 259) and her appearance begins to change: “at times it was quite definitely a schoolmarm's face”, even if “she had not become cynical as yet” (CD, 260). As the term comes to an end, though she fantasises that she has ‘won Mrs Creevy's confidence’ (who seems to reward her with the long-coveted marmalade) (CD, 261), Dorothy is callously sacked (CD, 262-263). She is preparing herself for “a time of job-hunting, of uncertainty and possibly of hunger” (CD, 265), when she is unexpectedly saved by Warburton (CD, 266-267). Dorothy learns that she has been ‘reinstated’ (CD, 272) and can thus return to Knype Hill.

On her journey back, travelling by train with Warburton, who has arranged a carriage for the two of them (CD, 271), Dorothy confides to him that she has lost her faith (CD, 273) and he eventually proposes to her (CD, 279). Despite the bleak future that Warburton foresees for her as an ‘old maid’, she declines his proposal. Her disgust at the idea of sexually relating to a man – “the harsh odour of maleness” (CD, 283) – is stronger than the dismal vision of her future as “just a derelict parson's daughter like the

ten thousand others in England” (CD, 282). With a newly-found sense of purpose, Dorothy prepares to embrace a life of emptiness and meaninglessness (CD, 275), which she proposes to fill with ‘useful’ *work* or, in Warburton’s ironical quote (the book’s epigraph), “the trivial round, the common task” (CD, 285).

Successive critics have found Dorothy unconvincing as a character – as Raymond Williams has put it, she seems to lack a ‘sustained’ identity (Williams, 1971, 44). Daphne Patai, in a perceptive gender analysis of the novel, has attributed this to the fact that (uniquely in Orwell’s fiction) she is a feminine protagonist. As she points out, Dorothy’s defining feature (which the title of the novel establishes) is being *a* daughter, which not only refers her identity to a given set of relations (patriarchal parental relations) but also makes her “a generic, or rather paradigmatic, being” (Patai, 1984: 96). Furthermore, rather than a character that develops in coherence with the fictional world, she is a puppet which Orwell can only “animate with his own consciousness” (Patai, 1984: 97). Dorothy is “Orwell’s least articulated protagonist” (Patai, 1984: 98): she is deprived not only of her memory but also of her sexuality and consciousness (Patai, 1984: 102). Unlike Orwell’s other protagonists (Flory, Gordon Comstock, George Bowling and Winston Smith), who tend to be self-centred, self-obsessed, verbose men whose consciousness dominates the novels (completely, in George Bowling’s case, a first-person narrator), Dorothy is incapable of making decisions about her life (hence the amnesia) or of reflecting on her experiences (Patai, 1984: 102-103). She lives “in a perpetual present”, in a condition of extreme passivity (Patai, 1984: 104). Most critics, however, have ignored this aspect (to which I shall later return). Regarded as a failure, the book has been largely read for its documentary material, which has encouraged the tendency to consider Dorothy a direct projection of Orwell: for John Rodden, “the sufferings of Dorothy Hare (...) were Orwell’s own” (Rodden: 2002, 177; cf. Ingle, 1993: 30).

Patai is right in stressing Dorothy’s defective consciousness. Not wishing to underestimate her convincing case (the novel, and Orwell’s work in general, effectively contains a strong gender bias), I nevertheless propose to link this characteristic, not so much to her sex (though that link is acceptable and sustainable) as to her strange, untypical journeys into the subworld of poverty and destitution. Indeed, in many occasions and in various ways, the subworld is identified with a state of unconsciousness: we are told that Dorothy’s encounter with Nobby and friends has interrupted her recovery – “for, of course, once she had thrown in her lot with Nobby and the others, all chance of reflection was gone” (CD, 94). Dorothy’s life as a tramp,

described as ‘nightmarish’, in which ‘days and nights merge themselves together’, is contiguous with her state of unconsciousness. She accepts everything; sleeping and being awake have become indistinct; hunger and exhaustion have made her feel as if she were a sleepwalker (CD, 98) or “in a dreamlike state” (CD, 106). Working as a hop-picker only aggravates the problem: “she had come to take her curious situation for granted” (CD, 121). As the narrator readily explains, “That was the natural effect of life in the hopfields; it narrowed the range of your consciousness to the passing minute” (CD, 121). Hard work is associated with happiness – but also with a kind of bestial stupidity:

It was a life that wore you out, used up every ounce of your energy, and kept you profoundly, *unquestionably happy*. In the literal sense of the word, it *stupefied* you. The long days in the fields, the coarse food and insufficient sleep, the smell of hops and wood smoke, lulled you into an almost *beast-like heaviness*. Your wits seemed to thicken, just as your skin did, in the rain and sunshine and perpetual fresh air. (CD, 121, my emphasis)

The gypsies represent the epitome of this kind of stupid, ‘happy-going’ bestiality. In what is, at best, a patronising description with heavy racial overtones, the narrator notes that “they were not a bad sort of people”, but goes on to add, “yet, they were sly, with the impenetrable slyness of savages. In their oafish, oriental faces there was a look as of some wild but sluggish animal – a look of dense stupidity existing side by side with untameable cunning” (CD, 111). Their ‘cunning’ notwithstanding, it is the gypsies’ *stupidity* that is stressed: “they were all abysmally ignorant; they informed you with pride that not one of them could read a single word” (CD, 112).³⁴

Critics have noted the recurrence of animal metaphors throughout Orwell’s work (e.g. Lee, 1969: xv; 8; 24; 51). In *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, it is hard to miss them: Miss Mayfill is compared to a ‘caterpillar’ (CD, 10); Mrs Semprill, the scandalmonger, has ‘a bird-like step’ (CD, 43) and is called ‘a foul-mouthed cat’ (CD, 46); one of the schoolchildren is ‘an ox-faced boy of eleven’ (CD, 59); another parishioner, Miss Foote, is ‘rabbit-faced’ (CD, 75); Nobby, the tramp, is compared to an ‘orang-outang’ (CD, 89) and attributed a ‘simian face’ (CD, 97); the old woman who calls the police and has Dorothy arrested for begging has “a face like a horse” (CD, 186); Dorothy’s rich cousin, Tom Hare, has the appearance “of a well-meaning but exceptionally brainless prawn”

³⁴ Describing a community of people in Wigan living in dirty caravans, Orwell points out: “One must remember that these people are not gypsies; *they are decent English people* who have all, except the children, born there, had homes of their own in their day; besides, their caravans are greatly inferior to those of gypsies and they have not the great advantage of being on the move” (RWP, 58, my emphasis).

(CD, 191); Mrs Creevy is compared to a toad (CD, 199) and her relationship with the schoolchildren is likened to that of a 'hawk' keeping an eye on scared 'partridge chicks' (CD, 205); one of the children's parents stands out for being "a buffalo-like man" (CD, 230, 232); and Miss Beaver, a schoolmistress that becomes Dorothy's friend, has "the gait of a guinea-hen" (CD, 258). The examples abound; they sometimes signal a character's flaw, but, more often than not, their effect is to stress the lack of empathy of the narrator towards some of the characters (mostly types), a feature which can take on other, cruder forms (such as when Flo's crying face – her "silly fat face" – is compared to "a bladder of lard contorted with self-pity" – CD, 104).³⁵ Animal images are especially deployed in the description of groups – the people at the Knype Hill Conservative Club are 'chubby goldfish' (CD, 12); the tramps piling themselves for warmth in a bench at Trafalgar Square are perceived as "a monstrous shapeless clot, men and women clinging indiscriminately together, *like a bunch of toads at spawning time*" (CD, 174, italics added). The narrator remarks on 'the stench' (CD, 174) and the 'animal heat' (CD, 175) and compares them to "sucking pigs struggling for their mother's teats" (CD, 177).

The links between animality, stupidity, ignorance, unconsciousness *and* what Dorothy's father calls the 'lower classes' (CD, 17) are more than evident. Stupidity recurs in the description of the poor of Knype Hill: Progett is "too dim of intellect to have any definite religious beliefs" (CD, 31), and in her poor women parishioners Dorothy keeps finding either "that vague, blank disbelief so common in illiterate people, against which all argument is powerless" (CD, 49) or its direct opposite – a disproportionate, unreasonable belief in Heaven, as evinced by Mr and Mrs Pither (CD, 52-53). Not surprisingly, Warburton takes it for granted that Dorothy never really believed in God, because she was "far too intelligent for that" (CD, 274). Stupidity is often also a sign of deficient humanity, or 'sub-humanity': Mavis Williams, 'a congenital idiot' (CD, 224), is presented as 'stupid', having "a look of almost sub-human blankness" (CD, 223), and Warburton will later dismiss Mrs Semprill as 'sub-human' (CD, 253).

Dorothy's social plunge carries all these associations. Waking up after her mental collapse, she begins to see 'as an animal sees', 'almost without consciousness' (CD, 85). Even after recovering her memory, because she is again drawing near to the 'sub-world' (CD, 148), Dorothy succumbs to "a strange lethargic state" (CD, 150). After ten days living as a beggar and a tramp, she reaches at once the bottom of the subworld and of her unconsciousness: the "dazed, witless feeling" of her hop-picking days returns

³⁵ Flo is also the name of Flory's dog, in Orwell's first novel, *Burmese Days*.

(CD, 186); sleeplessness and life in the open air, the narrator explains, “blurs your perception” and it is “as though everything were a little out of focus, a little unreal (...) the world, inner and outer, grows dimmer till it reaches almost the vagueness of a dream” (CD, 186). It is therefore not a surprise that Dorothy does not mind being arrested – “everything was dreamlike now” (CD, 186), and the first thing that she does in prison is sleep “for ten hours without stirring” (CD, 187). She is shaken off this state of almost complete unconsciousness when she begins to teach in Ringwood House. She has retained her pseudonym and continues to live under wretched conditions (feeling chronically cold and hungry). And yet, work and *intellectual* activity now provide her with a sense of purpose, and she comes up with a ‘mission’: significantly, “trying to awaken the *dulled* minds of these children” (CD, 226, my emphasis).

As Patai has argued, Dorothy’s reduced consciousness is also connected with her sex and sexuality. They are at the root of the state of semi-consciousness in which we find her at the beginning of the novel, when she is spinsterly submissive to her father, whom she constantly invokes or quotes (e.g. CD, 56; 64; 65). Later in the novel, the news that she can return to Knype Hill, for her father is ready to receive her, leaves her “in a semi-dazed condition” (CD, 267). Her submission extends (though not completely) to her seducer and would-be suitor. When Warburton violently attempts to seduce her, it is her frigidity, as Robert Lee has noted, rather than his sexual advances, that the novel takes to task – “the fault is clearly Dorothy’s” (Lee, 1969: 36). Later, Dorothy accepts Warburton’s guidance not only to take her home, but also to elicit her own self-knowledge and conjure up the image of her future, which she promptly believes and accepts, “as though hypnotised” (CD, 282). We are given to understand that she could accept Warburton’s proposal and escape her fate as a spinster. By rejecting him, she is actually rejecting *all* men. There is an attempt, on the part of the narrator to spell out the causes of her ‘abnormal’ condition (CD, 82) – the ‘dreadful scenes’ between her parents that she witnessed when she was a child; the engravings of nymphs pursued by satyrs, which for Dorothy have become a crude symbol of ‘*all that*’ (CD, 82). When Warburg forcibly holds her, following his marriage proposal, Dorothy cannot but think, with revulsion, of “Furry thighs of satyrs” (CD, 283). All this, of course, as Lee concludes, “smacks of cocktail-party Freudianism” (Lee, 1969: 37).

Dorothy’s frigidity, however, plays an important role in the novel and is crucial to its denouement. To start with, it is what dictates the kind of existence that she is to lead and, ultimately, her fate. The fact that she is well aware of its causes – one of the few things that Dorothy is completely conscious of (CD, 82-83) – is a sign that nothing can

be done about it. As ‘a clergyman’s daughter’, she is the archetypical ‘old maid’, whose religious fervour and self-mortification leave no doubt about her repressed sexuality. Therefore, despite the apparent changes that she has undergone, her *nature* and her *future* converge in the novel’s end, which, as Patai has noted, only affirms “the inevitability of Dorothy’s fate as a clergyman’s daughter” (Patai, 1984: 109). Indeed, the future that awaits Dorothy – “the destiny that is common to all lonely and penniless women. ‘The Old Maids of Old England’, as somebody called them. She was twenty-eight – just old enough to enter their ranks” (CD, 291) – had been predicted at the beginning of the novel: “not definitely a spinsterish face as yet, but it certainly would be so in a few years’ time” (CD, 4).

And yet, Dorothy’s sexual repression, as Eagleton has pointed out, has another important function: it is the only thing that stands between her and ‘a life of experience’, of ‘worldly, free-thinking emancipation’ (Eagleton, 1974: 19). At Ringwood House, although she has realised (with the recovery of her memory – CD, 137) and accepted that she has lost her faith, she resumes the habit of going to church, not only as “a respite from Mrs Creevy’s prying eye and nagging voice”, but also because she is able to find there “something of decency, of spiritual comeliness that is not easily found in the world outside” (CD, 249). It is ‘freedom’ that Dorothy ultimately dreads, and which she chooses to counter with ‘the ancient ways’:

It seemed to her that even though you no longer believed, it is better to go to church than not; *better to follow in the ancient ways, than to drift in rootless freedom*. She knew very well that she would never again be able to utter a prayer and mean it; but she knew also that for the rest of her life she must continue with the observances to which she had been bred. Just this much remained to her of the faith that had once, like the bones in a living frame, held all her life together. (CD, 249, my emphasis)

As Dorothy goes back to her old life, we are made to believe that she has changed. On seeing her, Warburg remarks: “You look older (...) well, more completely grown up. Tougher. (...) as though the Girl Guide had been exorcised from you for good and all” (CD, 272). As one would expect from this kind of *Bildungsroman*, ‘experience’ in the end has replaced ‘innocence’. Dorothy has recognised the meaninglessness of her earlier beliefs. A change has taken place inside her: “something had happened in her heart” (CD, 273). And yet, the truth is that she continues to cling to the usual practices – “doing what is customary, useful and acceptable” (CD, 295) – thus effectively learning

to be a hypocrite, as Warburton points out to her and she readily admits: “it’s better to be a hypocrite – *that* kind of hypocrite – than some things” (CD, 277, italics in original). Crucially, for that is what ultimately matters, Dorothy has not lost faith in *work*, which emerges as the true winner, and the only guarantee of the real. As Robert Lee has contended, Dorothy’s ‘life with meaning’ now contrasts with the ‘unreal values’ and the ‘unreal world’ of the Reverend Hare and of Mrs. Pither (Lee, 1969: 45). The real is thus equated with a sense of purpose, which is in turn equated with the value of work: hop-picking had seemed real (if only briefly, that is, until Dorothy regained her consciousness and hence her shame); and so had Dorothy’s teaching, when she had committed to it for the sake of the children.

The novel therefore hinges on a particular understanding of the real. And here a comparison with Lucy Honeychurch may be illuminating. Unlike Lucy, whose encounter with the real takes the form of love – it is at once an encounter with the other and an event which triggers off a vaster process that has the contours of a truth procedure – Dorothy’s encounter with the ‘real’ is conducted within the limits of self and semi-consciousness. Her sexual frigidity dictates the first aspect. Throughout her manifold experiences – some of which favourable to sexual encounters or true friendships, such as the relaxed evenings around the bonfires in the hop-picking camps, sleeping together with tramps, enduring the same difficulties and sharing the last coins – Dorothy remains politely aloof. Her only closer relationship, with Nobby, is based on the mutual understanding that there is to be no sexual intimacy (CD, 100), even if people suppose the contrary (CD, 130). Dorothy is seized by despair when Nobby is arrested (the episode is so disturbing that she recovers her memory – CD, 126-127), but she will not make any attempts (even when she can) to pursue that friendship – “that was the last she ever saw of him” (CD, 125).³⁶ As for the second aspect – that of unconsciousness – it is almost pervasive in the novel. As we have seen, with the exception of teaching, most of Dorothy’s experiences in the sub-world (among tramps and hop-pickers) take place under that state, while she is amnesiac, with the consequence that, as Eagleton has stressed, “the whole episode takes on the quality of a dream” (Eagleton, 1974: 23):

³⁶ It is, however, not the last *we* see of him. Nobby appears again in *Coming Up for Air*, as a ‘brother in arms’ of George Bowling, whom he describes as “a dark, slouching, gypsy-looking chap”; a ‘real’ Cockney, “but one of those Cockneys that make part of their living by hop-picking, bird-catching, poaching and fruit-stealing in Kent and Essex” (CUFA, 84).

There is, in other words, a genuine though submerged question in the novel about the status of her underworld adventures: is this the 'reality' which the small Suffolk town deceptively concealed, or is it an unreal interpolation, a salutary but eccentric fantasy? (Eagleton, 1974: 23)

The novel offers no definitive answer, and this serves a specific purpose. The 'reality' of the underworld is needed to counter 'bourgeois normality', but the latter is, in the end, reinstated as the 'real' so it can displace Warburton's hedonism (CD, 285) and his notions of a 'wider life'. Such an understanding of the 'real' serves a purpose exterior to itself. It does not appeal to truth or the creation of a subject (a status which Dorothy never fully attains). In contrast with Lucy Honeychurch, it can be argued that *nothing* has really happened in Dorothy's life. At most, things have *happened to her*, as Raymond Williams has noted. Together with the other protagonists of Orwell's fiction, she is an instance of what Williams calls the 'figure of the intermediary', 'the shock absorber of the bourgeoisie', a figure "who goes around and to whom things happen" (Williams, 1971: 47-48):

The figure has his experiences, in *A Clergyman's Daughter* and then in a different way in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. The figure is passive; things happen *to* Dorothy, or *to* Comstock. And this pattern releases one element of Orwell's experiences – the things that had 'happened' to him – but not or only partly why they had happened, not the intervening or 'invading' consciousness. Dorothy, certainly, is the most passive figure. (Williams, 1971: 47, italics in original)

Dorothy's amnesia could have been at the root of an event; it could have been, as it were, the launch pad for a new situation. However, this is far from being the case. It is not even that Dorothy never *reflects* critically upon her experiences, but that there is *nothing* to reflect upon, since *nothing* has actually been allowed to *happen*. The narrator presents Dorothy's loss of memory as something trivial and unremarkable: "the thing that had happened to her was common place enough – almost every week one reads in the newspapers of a similar case" (CD, 93). When Warburton shows empathy for what she must have been through, Dorothy hastens to dismiss her experiences, not so much because they are "too beastly for words", but because they do not ultimately matter: "Such things as these, she perceived, are of no real importance; they are mere irrelevant accidents, not essentially different from catching a cold in the head or having to wait two hours at a railway junction. They are disagreeable, but they do not matter" (CD, 272). On her return to Knype Hill, the narrator confirms (through Dorothy's perspective) this perception. Everyone acts as if nothing had happened – there are no

embarrassing questions, her father greets her “as though she had only been away for the week-end” (CD, 288) and does not believe that she lost her memory (CD, 289). Everything has stayed the same, “it was as though it had been only yesterday that she had gone away” (CD, 287); “not much that was of interest had happened in the town” (CD, 289); “she *was* the same girl” (CD, 292, italics in original). Dorothy tells the people of Knype Hill about her teaching (precisely that part of her recent past that she had felt to be “a sham and a swindle” – CD, 241), but she keeps silent on her other experiences: Trafalgar Square and begging are relegated to the unspoken confines of ‘the world outside’, of *terra incognita* (CD, 288).

To what extent can we therefore accept the novel’s (and Dorothy’s) self-explanatory version of the ‘facts’ and conclude, like Robert Lee, that Dorothy’s loss of faith is ‘one major change’ which ‘forces her search for a new life’ (Lee, 1969: 44) or, like Eagleton, that “Dorothy has changed, but only in consciousness” (Eagleton, 1974: 20)? How different is Dorothy’s late resolution from her early belief that the sense of futility is “the subtlest weapon of the Devil” (CD, 50)? Where is the difference between her final vision which allows “no pantheist cheer-up stuff” (CD, 293) and her early struggle against her own pantheist feelings, “no Nature-worship, please!”, of which her father strongly disapproved (CD, 56)? Or, finally, between her difficulty in praying in the first chapter – “it seemed to her that actually she *could* not pray (...) nothing but the dead shells of words” (CD, 10) – and her later attempt – ““Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief (...).’ It was useless, absolutely useless” (CD, 295)?

Dorothy’s semi-conscious state can be traced back to the day before she has her mental collapse, when she is working on the children’s costumes “with half her mind” (CD, 58). In other words, what is to be later defined as ‘real’ – the world of work and practical tasks – is what she had previously been experiencing as ‘unreal’. As Robert Lee has pointed out: “the primary cause of her amnesia, work, becomes at the end of the book the solution (...) the disease becomes the cure” (Lee, 1969: 37). For this critic, “The attitude is typically Orwellian: Better to struggle within a wrong society than attempt, *hopelessly*, to reform the society from without” (Lee, 1969: 40, italics in original), and he concludes that the novel, therefore, ‘posits acceptance’ (Lee, 1969: 46).

However, even acceptance (and the possibility of ‘struggling within’) remains incomplete, for Dorothy has not so much accepted reality as its empty shell. Having abjured religion (if only in her heart), she nevertheless continues to cling to its *rituals*, in an effort to hold her (old) life together – what the narrator calls “the Christian

cosmos”, “the Christian way of life” (CD, 286) – as suggested by the presence of the glue pot (CD, 295). If it is only “the things that happen in your heart” that matter (CD, 291), and nothing else, there is no point in leaving one’s house or town or, indeed, one’s *consciousness*. There are no journeys outwards to be made, no life-changing encounters to be risked. With Dorothy trapped in the newly-acquired consciousness of her *old* life (another measure of her stagnant and barren frigidity), the novel comes full circle, sending us to the opening scene and to Dorothy’s old habits: after setting the alarm clock to half past five, she writes out the ‘memo list’ for the following day (CD, 296; cf. CD, 1; 3); just as she used to do a few months before, she forces herself to go on with her work: “Come on, Dorothy! No slacking, please!” (CD, 295; cf. CD, 84)

Orwell’s next novel, *Keep the Aspidistra*, takes up many of these themes, but concentrates, with overwhelming intensity, on what Dorothy had described as “the mysterious power of money” (CD, 197). One of Warburton’s sayings, a twisted quote from the Corinthians which cynically celebrates the power of money (rather than charity) and which Dorothy remembers on that occasion, provides the book with its epigraph. Finally, the novel’s title is traceable to the Trafalgar Square scene, where Mr Tallboys sings ‘Keep the Aspidistra flying’ “to the tune of ‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” (CD, 162).

There are many things in common between the protagonists of the two novels, Gordon Comstock, and Dorothy Hare. But there are also important differences. As Robert Lee has noted, “Like Dorothy, Gordon experiences the sub-worlds of England in the 1930’s; unlike Dorothy, Gordon descends into these worlds willingly” (Lee, 1969: 49). The reasons for Gordon’s ‘descent’ are also very different. He is a struggling poet and his decision to wage war on money is explicitly related to that: he has left his promising job as a copywriter in a prosperous advertising company – significantly called ‘New Albion’ – to dedicate himself more fully to his ‘magnum opus’, *London Pleasures*, a long poem which draws on his experiences of lower-middle-class poverty to launch a critique on the modern world (KAF, 33). His ‘journey’ takes him to a position as a bookshop assistant, on low wages and with no prospects of promotion – in a word, ‘a blind-alley job’ (KAF, 59) – and, later, further down to ‘unrespectable’ life in the poverty-stricken district of Lambeth, where his battle against the ‘money-God’ is apparently won (KAF, 235). Here, Gordon hits rock bottom (or what in the novel stands for it) and is ready to be saved by his girlfriend, the patient and magnanimous Rosemary Waterlow, whose pregnancy finally brings him back “to decent, fully human life”

(KAF, 265), to a state where he is, as never before, “one of the ruck of men” (KAF, 267).

Despite its clear, straightforward plotline – much more so than in his previous novel – *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is best understood in relation to its pattern of recurrent motifs. The money motif is, no doubt, overriding. From the first page, Gordon bombards the reader with his endless whinging and ranting about the all-mighty power of money – how it prevents him from writing (KAF, 5; 8; 33), how it stands between him and pleasures like smoking (KAF, 1), going to the pub (KAF, 27), having a normal social life, or coming across things like “a padded armchair under your bum, and tea and cigarettes and the smell of women” (KAF, 68). Money is to blame for all his troubles: “Social failure, artistic failure, sexual failure – they are all the same. And lack of money is at the bottom of them all” (KAF, 85). Tied up with the money theme (which Gordon calls “the money business” – KAF, 125; 159) we find a regular cluster of motifs. A frequent reminder of his self-pity, there is Gordon’s self-consciousness over his age and physical appearance – “he was never quite unconscious of his small stature” (KAF, 3) and the recurring description of himself as ‘thirty and moth-eaten’ (KAF, 79; 115; 123; 273). There is also advertising (e.g. 3-4; 93; 257), which Gordon identifies as inimical to his poetry (e.g. KAF, 13); his sexual frustration, in the image of his empty room and “the womanless bed” (KAF, 37; 79), or in Rosemary’s refusal to sleep with him, which he wrongly attributes to his poverty (KAF, 14; 85; 114). Other regular presences are Gordon’s misogynist sweeping generalisations – like all women, Rosemary ‘doesn’t understand’ (KAF, 60; 85; 162), like them, she is in alliance with money against him (KAF, 63; 102; 103; 126; 216); his homophobia, which links ‘Nancitude’ or being a ‘pansy’ to the upper classes and to poetry (KAF, 12, 13; 35; 84); his resentful contempt for the ‘literary intelligentsia’, which he identifies with a public-school clique (KAF, 7; 84) and Roman Catholicism (KAF, 35); his literary aspirations – “‘of exceptional promise’, *The Times Lit. Supp.* had said” (KAF, 32; 61; 71) – and setbacks, represented by the failure of his book, *Mice* (KAF, 6; 11); his visions of modern life – “this filthy century” (KAF, 36) – which prompts an irrational yearning for war, and images of “enemy aeroplanes flying over London” (KAF, 16; 21; 22; 93); and, of course, his feud with the aspidistra, symbol of middle-class respectability (KAF, 29; 30), which has an overwhelming presence in the novel.

Keep the Aspidistra Flying has been described as being “very simply, a book about money” (Atkins, 1954: 60). But this is far too simplistic a description – one that takes for granted the novel’s superficial meaning and overrates the protagonist’s self-

explanatory words. Robert Lee has rightly argued that the book is “the story of a man’s education”, an “apprenticeship novel” (Lee, 1969: 50). And yet, his reading takes up and confirms the novel’s superficial (and reactionary) association of rebelliousness to childishness/adolescence (and recklessness – cf. KAF, 46), and of social compliance to adulthood (which the novel simplistically assumes to be synonymous with parenthood). Lee thus stresses the protagonist’s ‘adolescent’ behaviour (Lee, 1969: 52), his “childish petulance” (Lee, 1969: 55) and “puerile self” (Lee, 1969: 59). When Gordon squanders his ten pounds in one night, Lee concludes, “he is still a child” (Lee, 1969: 60). In other words, it is because he has not outgrown his misplaced rebellious notions – which he embraced ‘for fun’ when he was sixteen (KAF, 46) – that Gordon cannot act like an adult. A more important detail is being overlooked, namely, the fact that the apprenticeship in question concerns an artist, a poet who, at the end of his *Bildung* process, simply exchanges his art for a good job, succeeding (in Lee’s vocabulary) as a ‘man’, but in reality failing *as a poet*.

In fact, the novel hesitates to definitively portray Gordon’s artistic pursuit as either a genuine endeavour or a mere adolescent delusion. The truth is that Gordon *cannot* write. As with all the other failures in his life, he attributes this to lack of money (KAF, 14). But, as with all other failures, we know that this is wrong. ‘Sterility’ is his real problem (KAF, 7), and the pretext of money prevents the real reasons from being known.

Most critics have followed this path, by taking Gordon at his word and focusing on the money question. According to Lee, Gordon’s reckless spending of his ten-pound royalties proves three facts: that he is “under the affective power of money; that his attitudes are sham; that he shares the same lower-middle-class values he so fanatically condemns” (Lee, 1969: 58). But this is not completely right: though he is indeed ‘under the affective power of money’ and does share those ‘lower-middle-class values’ (such as the ‘Victorian’ idea that the man should pay for a woman, as Rosemary keeps reminding him – KAF, 131), Gordon’s attitudes are not completely ‘sham’. His attempt to become a poet is real enough and the war on money is part of that attempt. For one thing, it is in line with the prevailing literary tendencies of the thirties, which favoured the representation of depressing social realities, as his failed poem, the ironically-titled *London Pleasures*, illustrates. Gordon himself confirms this: “When he had chucked up everything and descended into the slime of poverty, the conception of this poem had been at least a part of his motive” (KAF, 33). In his most optimistic moments, he envisages his poem being received as “a welcome relief from the Sitwell school” (KAF, 72) – even if he saves his vitriol to some of the poets of that generation (he rejects

practically all modern poets): “Eliot, Pound, Auden, Campbell, Day Lewis, Spender. Very damp squibs, that lot” (KAF, 12).

But the war on money is also a characteristic of the artistic field – a field which had fully emerged at the turn of the century out of the importance accorded to ‘symbolic’ or ‘cultural capital’ and simultaneous repudiation of ‘the economic world’ (cf. Bourdieu, 1993a; 1993b). Gordon’s literary patron and friend, Philip Ravelston, typifies this kind of capital: even when he dresses below his class, he remains ‘aristocratically shabby’ (KAF, 175). It is cultural capital that Gordon lacks, a fact that he resents, as can be seen when he disparages on the culture/money relationship (a passage which brings to mind Margaret Schlegel’s ideas on the subject and, incidentally, Forster’s own literary life):

But it was the snooty ‘cultured’ kind of books that he hated the worst. Books of criticism and belles-lettres. The kind of thing that those moneyed young beasts from Cambridge write almost in their sleep – and that Gordon himself might have written if he had a little more money. Money and culture! In a country like England you can no more be cultured without money than you can join the Cavalry Club. (...) For after all, what is there behind it, except money? Money for the right kind of education, money for influential friends, money for leisure and peace of mind, money for trips to Italy. Money writes books, money sells them. (KAF, 7-8)

In this and similar passages, Gordon resorts to a kind of proletarian resentment (which is, in fact, lower-middle-class) to justify his failure. When a submission to a highbrow magazine is rejected, he explodes in a rant against “those sleek refined young animals who suck in money and culture with their mother’s milk”, and bitterly concludes: “Why not say outright, ‘(...) We only take poems from chaps we were at Cambridge with. You proletarians keep your distance’?” (KAF, 84)

Money is identified as the root of the problem – and (like work, in Dorothy’s case) its solution. Money prevents the ‘wrong’ kind of poems to be accepted by the ‘right’ kind of magazines; on the other hand, without it a poet cannot write, as Gordon (somehow paradoxically) notes: “calling yourself a writer and never producing anything because you’re always too washed out to write” (KAF, 102). In conversation with Ravelston, Gordon refers to his work as ‘dead’ – “there’s no life in them. Everything I write is like that. Lifeless, gutless” (KAF, 92). But he then goes on to blame the modern world: “My poems are dead because I’m dead. You’re dead. We’re all dead. Dead people in a dead world” (KAF, 92).

It is evident that, for Gordon (and the novel seems to endorse this perspective), money is ultimately a life-bringer (perhaps *the* life-bringer). After a fifty-dollar windfall from

an American magazine, Gordon feels “revivified, reborn” (KAF, 171), to the point of quipping with his taxi-driver that it is his ‘re-birthday’ (KAF, 174). He is euphoric over his small fortune and repeatedly remarks: “these things are so much easier when you’ve got a little money to spend” (KAF, 173), “money greased the wheels” (KAF, 175; 179). Later, in Lambeth, Rosemary returns to this idea, “it was not only from money but from life itself that he was turning away” (KAF, 239), which the novel’s ending confirms: to live outside the money-world is to be “out of the stream of life”, “to abjure money is to abjure life” (KAF, 266).

Comstock’s notion that he (and, by extension, his work) is ‘dead’ is in keeping with his dismal vision of modern life (which he connects to advertising) as a life of ennui (KAF, 21), i.e. a life where nothing happens. London is “a city of the dead” (KAF, 99) and, as such, deserves to be ‘bombed’ (KAF, 21). This is also the defining feature of Gordon’s family, “a peculiarly dull, shabby, dead-alive, ineffectual family”, who “lacked vitality to an extent that was surprising” (KAF, 40). The Comstocks typify the utmost incompatibility with modern life:

It was impossible to imagine any of them making any sort of mark in the world, or creating anything, or destroying anything, or being happy, or vividly unhappy, or fully alive, or even earning a decent income. (...) They were one of those depressing families so common among the middle-middle classes, in which *nothing ever happens*. (KAF, 41, italics in original)

Gordon is the last of the Comstocks and seems to come in their stead: he is becoming “more akin to them” (KAF, 62). Reproduction is one of the problems, as Gordon points out, “they had lost all impulse to reproduce themselves. Really vital people, whether they have money or whether they haven’t, multiply almost as automatically as animals” (KAF, 41). Of the remaining Comstocks, none had ever “got married or given birth to a child”, which makes the narrator reaffirm: “Year in, year out, *nothing ever happened* in the Comstock family” (KAF, 66).

Reproduction and family therefore appear to be the greatest problem of modern civilisation – it certainly turns out to be the solution to Gordon’s problems. Julia is the epitome of that ‘eventlessness’ – repeatedly described as a ‘goose-like girl’ (KAF, 44; 137; 208; 243),³⁷ because she is neither ‘pretty nor clever’ (KAF, 44), she was already

³⁷ Animal metaphors and similes continue to be frequent in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, usually associated with Gordon’s point of view: two of his customers are described as “a lower-class-woman, looking like a dragged duck” who is “dim-witted” (KAF, 10) and “a plump little sparrow of a woman, red-cheeked, middle-middle class” (KAF, 9); another customer, a young ‘Nancy’ man, is likened to a ‘squirrel’ (KAF, 13) – an epithet also applied to Rosemary (KAF, 118); Julia is likened to a goose (KAF, 44; 137; 208;

“at one-and-twenty, a dutiful, resigned drudge who worked twelve hours a day and never had a decent frock” (KAF, 47). As a confirmed spinster (she is “a natural spinster-soul” – KAF, 44), to whom *nothing* ever happens (she has always worked in the same tea shop), her existence is reduced to making sacrifices so that his brother can achieve what she cannot. Her role in life is thus merely to *watch*: “she had watched the family go down and down, moneyless and childless, into grey obscurity” (KAF, 243). Julia represents the money code and is therefore the measure of Gordon’s failure: “in her wordless feminine way she knew that the sin against money is the ultimate sin” (KAF, 63). But she also represents another important strand in Gordon’s war – the war against ‘femininity’. For Gordon, the ‘money-business’ has a gender: it is irrevocably feminine, and the aspidistra is its symbol.

In the novel, the evergreen, leafy plant stands for the middle-class respectability that has come to dominate England, of which it proposes to become the symbol: “The aspidistra, flower of England! It ought to be on our coat of arms instead of the lion and the unicorn” (KAF, 47). But it also stands for femininity. Indeed, the money-ridden (modern) England that Gordon so much despises is viewed as essentially feminine – in the sense that Forster had depicted in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (England being represented by stuffy, feminine Sawston), rather than *Howards End* (where a different kind of femininity is allowed to emerge). Orwell’s literary use of the aspidistra goes back to *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, in which we find Dorothy giving advice to women about “ailing aspidistras” (CD, 49) in her parish rounds. In his attempt to persuade Dorothy to marry him, Warburton also deploys this image: “Women who don’t marry wither up – they wither up like aspidistras in back-parlour windows” (CD, 282). This association is further pursued in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* – Aunt Angela, “the Ever-virgin”, spends her lonely days ‘polishing the dark-leaved aspidistras’ (KAF, 64) – but it is now also connected to the money theme, to the idea, in short, that women remain spinsters because they reject men who have no money. Although it is Gordon who most of the times expresses this idea (often to its discredit), it is interesting to note that

243); Roland Butta, the man in the ads, has “the face of a self-satisfied rat” (cf. KAF, 4) and is “a docile little porker” (KAF, 14); a tramp and his wife walk “beetle-like” and London tramps in general are likened to “unclean beetles” (KAF, 16); another customer, an ‘ugly girl’ has “a gait as clumsy as a bear’s” (KAF, 17); the rooms of Gordon’s landlady are referred to as “lair” (KAF, 24; 83); one of the guests is “a dark, meagre, lizard-like creature of uncertain age and race” (KAF, 28); lower-middle-class office workers are “little bowler-hatted worms” (KAF, 56); Mr Erskine is slow-witted and therefore associated with ‘cattle-breeding’ (KAF, 56); Paul Doring, who gives literary tea-parties, is “a mangy lion” and his followers are “hen-witted middle-aged women” (KAF, 69); in a pub, Flaxman is accompanied by “two fish-faced pals” (KAF, 81); a beggar who addresses Ravelston at the door of the expensive restaurant has a “fish-white” face (KAF, 109); the police constable that helps Gordon in jail has a chest that reminds him of “the chest of a cart-horse” (KAF, 199-200). The source of prejudice that they illustrate appears to be inexhaustible.

Ravelston is in agreement: “this sounded to him more reasonable than what Gordon had been saying before” (KAF, 102-103). Like Gordon, who regards pretty girls as “cold nymph-creatures” (KAF, 78), Ravelston associates his own girlfriend, the rich and snobbish Hermione Slater, to a ‘mermaid’ (KAF, 103) and a ‘siren’ (KAF, 109), always drawing him away from his good ‘socialist’ practices (such as letting himself being ‘sponged’ by beggars and friends). The full symbolic connotations of the aspidistra are spelled out by Gordon:

‘(...) The only thing a woman ever wants is money; money for a house of her own and two babies and Drage furniture and an aspidistra. The only sin they can imagine is not wanting to grab money. No woman ever judges a man by anything except his income. (...) And if you haven’t got money, you aren’t nice. You’re dishonoured, somehow. You’ve sinned. Sinned against the aspidistra.’ (KAF, 103)

The passage inevitably suggests associations with prostitution, in a novel in which prostitutes or references to them abound (e.g. KAF, 78). Finding himself temporarily rich, Gordon gets drunk and, after insulting Rosemary, ends up by hiring a prostitute. To his surprise (but hardly ours), he finds an aspidistra in her room (KAF, 196). On another occasion, after ranting about women who ‘hang round a man’s neck like a mermaid’ (KAF, 126), prompting Rosemary’s good-natured comment, “Oh, you and your aspidistras!” (KAF, 127), Gordon points out: “On the contrary, *your* aspidistras. You’re the sex that cultivates them” (KAF, 127).

Gordon’s most misogynistic lines can be easily dismissed as the words of a resentful, frustrated young man, i.e. as being in character and ultimately nonsense. The ‘sex war’ is even introduced as a joke between him and Rosemary (KAF, 127). And yet, it certainly has a serious side to it. Towards the end of the novel, Gordon’s misogynistic sweeping generalisations are confirmed, when Rosemary finally asks him to find a ‘good’ job. The narrator (changing his focus, in a rare moment, from Gordon to Rosemary) substantiates Gordon’s old convictions:

She looked at him helplessly. After all, it was no use. There was this money-business standing in the way – these meaningless scruples *which she had never understood* but which she had accepted merely because they were his, she felt all the impotence, the resentment *of a woman* who sees an abstract idea triumphing over common sense. (KAF, 217, emphasis added)

This connection between women and ‘common sense’ is further stressed in a brief exchange between Rosemary and Ravelston. To Ravelston’s defence of Gordon –

“Capitalism’s corrupt and we ought to keep outside it” – Rosemary replies, “Oh, I dare say it’s all right as a theory!” (KAF, 219), and when the editor of *Antichrist* invokes principles, she exclaims: “Oh, in principle! We can’t afford principles, people like us. *That’s* what Gordon doesn’t seem to understand” (KAF, 220). As Gordon had always suspected, women do *not* understand, and he is therefore right in assuming that Rosemary and Julia are “in feminine league against him” (KAF, 238). From this perspective, the opinion of the two women would not be so different from that of Mrs Beaver, Ravelston’s charwoman, who sees in Gordon “another of these good-for-nothing young ‘writing gentlemen’” (KAF, 222). Theory, principles, abstractions are irrelevant to women; babies, money, common sense, decency is their only concern.

Gordon’s return to middle-class ‘decency’ thus seems to vindicate Rosemary and the ‘feminine league’, but it does so *by confirming Gordon’s long-standing prejudices*. Rosemary is determined to keep her baby, even if Gordon does not marry her, and to raise it on her own, even if he does but clings to his ‘under-world’ life (KAF, 255). But Gordon insists, “You want to see me earning a decent income again. In a good job, with four pounds a week and an aspidistra in the window. Wouldn’t you now? Own up.” Rosemary ‘owns up’ (KAF, 256). In the end, it is Gordon, against Rosemary’s wish, who wants an aspidistra (KAF, 276), but the plant remains a symbol of femininity – and of married life.³⁸

And yet, it is difficult not to concur with Daphne Patai that the novel’s end is “only a slight variation on what E. M. Forster refers to as ‘the idiotic use of marriage as a finale’” (Patai, 1984: 117). Apart from the baby, which has ‘forced’ Gordon to ‘yield’ to the ‘feminised’ world of middle-class respectability, what has effectively happened in Gordon’s life? Clearly neither love nor poetry.

Regarding the first, one cannot but feel that Gordon and Rosemary’s marriage has been caused more by a sense of defeat (and, on Gordon’s part, of ‘relief’ – KAF, 265) than love. Indeed, love seems to be the (asexual) prerogative of women and Rosemary represents it to perfection. She is generous, loyal and devoted to Gordon, and often voices her feelings for him. Gordon, on the contrary, is dominated by his ‘sexual starvation’ (Ravelston’s term – KAF, 105) – he sees her as a “spinster of nearly thirty” (KAF, 119), a ‘maiden’ who lives in a protracted childhood (KAF, 121; 122). Rosemary assumes that role and, as expected, resists his advances – “But I can’t help it” (KAF,

³⁸ Flaxman has gone back to his wife “in aspidistral bliss” (KAF, 233). Gordon’s aspidistra in Lambeth, which appears to be dying when he arrives (KAF, 232), and which one day seems to be dead (KAF, 245), is found to be alive in spring, foreshadowing Rosemary’s pregnancy and Gordon’s approaching marriage (KAF, 248-249).

122); “It’s different for a woman” (KAF, 123). Gordon conceives of their love-making as her ‘yielding to him’ (KAF, 132) and does not hesitate to bully her to tears to have his way (KAF, 132). Their journey into the country emphasises this aspect in a scene dripping with literary clichés, which are supposed to eroticise the natural landscape: the beech-trees are “curiously phallic” (KAF, 139); “the little knobs on the bark were like the nipples of breasts” (KAF, 141); “the warm light poured over them as though a membrane across the sky had broken” (KAF, 155). Everything suggests (the perspective continues to be Gordon’s) that Rosemary will yield to his desire and be deflowered (KAF, 155-156). The scene ends in failure, however, as birth control (and money) get in the way.

Throughout the novel, Gordon’s insensitivity towards Rosemary and lack of emotional involvement is blatant: he is only able to ‘caress her clumsily’ (KAF, 132) or, in a vague way, ‘to offer some kind of caress’ (KAF, 251). Rosemary’s tears and concern for him – “plaguing him with these irrelevant emotions” (KAF, 216) – bore him, and his only desire is to get away “from scenes and emotional demands” (KAF, 243). Gordon wants Rosemary to ‘have’ him ‘as a lover’ rather than ‘a husband’ (KAF, 242). And yet, when she finally acquiesces (in his terms, that is, without birth control) and visits him in his room in Lambeth, he still thinks that she is doing it out of ‘pure magnanimity’ (KAF, 247). Their love-making, evocative more of capitulation than victory (even in Gordon’s case), is a depressing scene, which the narrator summarily dismisses: “So it was done at last, without much pleasure, on Mother Meakin’s dingy bed” (KAF, 247).³⁹ Once again, Rosemary’s love – “I don’t care whether you marry me or not. I love you” (KAF, 247) – is not translatable into desire. While Gordon looks depressed and aloof – “he scarcely noticed her” – Rosemary leaves the room, feeling “dismayed, disappointed and very cold” (KAF, 247). Gordon’s road to self-absorbed decay is resumed: he does not answer any letters from friends and relatives – “they and their affection were only an encumbrance” – and longs to “cut his links with all of them, even with Rosemary” (KAF, 250). The two only meet again when Rosemary visits him (this time in the library where he works) to tell him that she is pregnant (KAF, 251). His reaction is conventional: considering that “it was a disaster pure and simple”, he suggests marriage (KAF, 252). The baby, however, has brought about a change in his attitude towards

³⁹ As Daphne Patai has noted, “Orwell was especially inept at handling love scenes” (Patai, 1984: 116). Cf. George Bowling’s ‘first time’ with Elsie Waters (a surname that evokes Rosemary’s – Waterlow). Described as “really deeply feminine, very gentle, very submissive, the kind that would always do what a man told her” (CUFA, 106-107), Elsie acts as expected: she lies on the grass, without stirring, looking “kind of soft, kind of yielding, as though her body was a kind of malleable stuff that you could do what you liked with. She was mine and I could have her, this minute if I wanted to” (CUFA, 108-109).

Rosemary: “His eyes met hers. They had a strange moment of sympathy such as they had never had before. For a moment he did feel that in some mysterious way they were one flesh” (KAF, 253; cf. 277). Gordon celebrates Rosemary’s pregnancy in terms of his own continuity – the baby is viewed as “a guarded seed” (KAF, 252); “it was a bit of himself – it *was* himself” (KAF, 261). The narrator assents and half-ironically concludes: “Well, once again things were happening in the Comstock family” (KAF, 277). And yet, apart from the fact that the Comstock lineage has been resumed, nothing else seems to be happening. Even the “baby-business” is ultimately dismissed, in Gordon’s usual fashion, as ‘banal’: “It was a pretty banal predicament, after all. Private vices, public virtues – the dilemma is as old as the world” (KAF, 258).

Gordon’s engagement with art develops along similar lines. It is tempting to adopt the novel’s surface meaning and dismiss his poetry as the sheer folly of an immature man who has failed to recognise his true talent – copywriting, not poetry (KAF, 58). The fact that his job at the New Albion is being ‘kept’ for him (KAF, 60) – a detail all the more unrealistic when put in its historical context, the jobless 1930s – reinforces this idea of half-serious experimentation. Nevertheless, Gordon’s ‘apprenticeship’ as a poet raises important questions. After all, it represents two long, taxing years of Gordon’s life. Early in the novel, he confesses that his ‘real motive’ in giving up his job at the New Albion had been, not ‘the desire to ‘write’” but “to get out of the money world” (KAF, 53). However, his acts and thoughts suggest that he is not only trying to escape money, but also *culture* – which is, for him, synonymous with ‘highbrow’ culture.

Gordon’s journey into poverty is also a journey into gradual (and, as it turns out, irreversible) artistic sterility. During the first seven months, he writes “practically nothing”, which leads him to conclude that “the first effect of poverty is that it kills thought” (KAF, 53) – an idea already present in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*. And yet, Gordon insists on ‘sinking’ further. When he reaches the ‘under ground’ of Lambeth, “that great sluttish underworld where failure and success have no meaning” (KAF, 227), to live in “the proverbial poet’s garret” (KAF, 231), he seems to have reached his aim: “Down here you had no contact with money *or with culture*. No highbrow customers to whom you had to act the highbrow” (KAF, 228, my emphasis). Ravelston’s reaction of disgust (“even Ravelston had turned against him” – AKF, 234) is symptomatic of how far he has moved away from (‘highbrow’) culture.

At first, we are told, Gordon keeps up the ‘pretence’ that he is “a struggling poet – the conventional poet-in-garret”, even though he suspects that he will never write ‘a line of poetry’ again, “never, at least, while he remained in this vile place, this blind-alley job

and this defeated mood” (KAF, 236). But he soon recognises that “he himself did not believe in his poems any longer” (KAF, 244). Although he now carries the unfinished manuscript of *London Pleasures* with him,

He had no feeling for it any longer as a poem. The whole concept of poetry was meaningless to him now. It was only that if *London Pleasures* were ever finished it would be something snatched from fate, a thing created *outside* the money-world. But he knew, far more clearly than before, that it never would be finished. How was it possible that any creative impulse should remain to him, in the life he was living now? As time went on, even the desire to finish *London Pleasures* vanished. He still carried the manuscript about in his pocket; but it was only a gesture, a symbol of his private war. He had finished for ever with that futile dream of being a ‘writer’. (KAF, 244)

After the sexual encounter with Rosemary, Gordon ‘drops even the pretence of working’ (KAF, 249). He spends his days doing his job at the library and reading ‘twopenny weekly papers’ (KAF, 249), which he describes as ‘escape literature’ – “the kind of book that suited him nowadays” (KAF, 228).

The novel’s turning-point fails to convince: Gordon’s allegedly difficult dilemma – “But it was so hard, so hard! Back to the New Albion, or leave Rosemary in the lurch” (KAF, 257) – is rapidly solved. In only a couple of lines, he has shifted from complete repudiation of the advertising world – “To be mixed up in *that!* To be in it and of it – part and parcel of it! God, God, God!” (KAF, 263) – to a confession of fully-fledged acceptance: “His mind was made up – had been made up for a long time past. When this problem appeared it had brought its solution with it; all his hesitation had been a kind of make-believe” (KAF, 263). Gordon goes on to describe his feeling of ‘relief’: “in some corner of his mind he had always known that this would happen” (KAF, 265); “he was aware that he was only fulfilling his destiny” (KAF, 265). He therefore recognises that even without a baby, “the end would have been the same (...) for it was what, in his *secret heart*, he had desired” (KAF, 265, my emphasis).

Once again (as with Dorothy), there seems to be a wide gap between the ‘inner life’ – a life of secret integrity and ‘decency’ – and the outward, public life, which is ultimately irrelevant. This dual life is what Gordon’s eulogy of “common men” (KAF, 267) ultimately amounts to. Identified with the lower middle class, the common people are praised for their decency and fertility: “they lived by the money-code, sure enough, and yet they contrived to keep their decency. (...) Besides, they were *alive*. (...) They begot children, which is what the saints and soul-savers never by any chance do” (KAF, 268).

Poetry has no place in this new-found world of respectability, and Gordon's own creation – the “two years’ foetus which would never be born” – is chucked down a drain, under the approving ‘peeping eye’ of an aspidistra (KAF, 268-269). Reproduction displaces and replaces creation. Gordon's dismissal of poetry and his final embrace of popular literature – which he had earlier described as mechanically, mass-produced, “published by special low-class firms” (KAF, 225) – is another instance of this kind of replacement.

At one point in the novel, when he is jobless, living on Ravelston's charity and under the pressure to ‘give in’, Gordon tells Rosemary that leaving the New Albion “had been the sole significant action of his life”, even if he can no longer remember his motives (KAF, 216-217). In many respects, this is true, it *was* a significant action – Gordon's ‘war on money’ had started when he was sixteen, “but secretly, of course” (KAF, 48). Giving up a ‘good’ job had represented the public assertion of a private conviction. Now, it is the baby and his decision to marry Rosemary that allows him to publicly acknowledge what he has been privately feeling, namely, his yearning to “be back in the world of men” (KAF, 267).

The victory of the aspidistra (cf. KAF, 269) seems to be overwhelming, with the novel closing with the extensive catalogue of the household objects (the trappings of middle class life) that Gordon and Rosemary have come to possess (mostly on credit), and which seem to foretell a life of domestic bliss.⁴⁰ But there are reasons to believe that this will not be the case. For Gordon, as Rosemary is well aware of, marriage is a trap. It can only be embraced in the (cynical) knowledge that there are no other (decent) alternatives. As Gordon puts it, in a quote that recalls Dorothy: “Better that, perhaps, than horrible freedom?” (KAF, 115) Gordon's embrace of married life is in this way closely connected to Dorothy's embrace of spinsterhood. The vision of life that each of these acts embodies is, in the end, essentially the same – gestural, empty.

Gordon's notions about marriage are certainly those of George Bowling, the forty-five-year-old protagonist of Orwell's next novel, *Coming Up for Air*. Married to Hilda with two children, Bowling is an insurance salesman (his company is significantly called ‘The *Flying Salamander*’ – CUFA, 5) who feels that he is at once trapped in a marriage that he describes as a ‘flop’ (CUFA, 140) with kids that he half-jokingly describes as “a ball and fetter” (CUFA, 144), trapped in a job that ‘got’ him (CUFA, 88; 134; 135), trapped in middle-class suburban Ellesmere Road, where all houses look alike (CUFA,

⁴⁰ Williams also noticed the novel's attention to objects, “the reabsorption of Comstock into a world of manipulable objects is accomplished with a kind of perverse triumph” (Williams, 1971: 48).

3, 9) in an estate that he compares to “a kind of red brick prison” (CUFA, 240); trapped in vulgarity (CUFA, 10, 26); trapped, through a mortgage (CUFA, 11-12), in what Gordon would have called ‘the money-world’ – “we’re bought, and what’s more we’re bought with our own money” (CUFA, 13); trapped, in short, in modernity, which he can only grasp in relation to endless lists of objects – “portable radios, life-insurance policies, false teeth, aspirins, French letters and concrete garden rollers” (CUFA, 11); “gas bills, school fees, boiled cabbage and the office on Monday” (CUFA, 246; cf. CUFA, 24).

George Bowling was prefigured in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* by George Flaxman, a travelling representative in his late thirties (KAF, 25), who had been staying in the same lodging-house as Gordon. With Flaxman, Bowling shares the “typical fat man’s good humour” (KAF, 25; cf. CUFA, 4), as well as his inclination for adultery (CUFA, 143). Like Flaxman, who hides from his wife a company bonus to travel to Paris in search of ‘fun’ – “it had happened several times before” (KAF, 26) – Bowling announces at the beginning of the novel that he has ‘seventeen quid’ which he has won in the horse races, and which his wife knows nothing about (CUFA, 5).

The destination of Bowling’s secret journey, however, is not Paris (though he considers “a week-end with a woman” – CUFA, 6), but Lower Binfield, his hometown, which he has not seen for over twenty years, and where he hopes to escape modern life, by ‘coming up for air’ (CUFA, 177). As critics have pointed out, Bowling’s journey is a journey in time as well as space (Lee, 1969: 91) – it is a journey into his childhood and a pre-war England (around the year 1900 – CUFA, 31)⁴¹ which is motivated by his rejection of modern life and is thus steeped in nostalgia. Bowling openly recognises that he is ‘sentimental’ about the ‘before the war’ – “people then had something that we haven’t got now” (CUFA, 109). He understands this to be “a feeling of security”, “a feeling of continuity” (CUFA, 110), which he associates with images of stability and ‘authenticity’ – of Mother as the ‘God-fearing shopkeeper’s wife’ (CUFA, 111) who “would cook Yorkshire pudding and apple dumplings on enormous coal ranges” (CUFA, 112); of Father as a thrifty, hard-working man (CUFA, 111); but especially of the quietness of fishing, which for Bowling encapsulates the best of a civilisation that is dying – all the “things that don’t belong to the modern world” (CUFA, 76).

There are echoes of Gordon Comstock’s diatribes against the modern world: the aspiring poet viewed modern food and medicine as “synthetic garbage” (KAF, 4); now

⁴¹ This refers, in other words, to Edwardian England, which includes the England of Forster’s novels (cf. O’Brien, 1965: 33). For Woodcock, it corresponds to the period between 1830 and 1914 (Woodcock, 1984: 190).

we see Bowling biting a sausage that he discovers, to his disgust, to be filled with fish (CUFA, 23). Gordon also anticipated Bowling's repudiation of suburban housing, such as the faked 'Tudor houses' (KAF, 142-143). For the insurance salesman, as for Gordon, London is "a city of sleepwalkers" (CUFA, 25) and he thinks that "a lot of people you see walking about are dead" (CUFA, 168). Finally, Gordon's visions of menacing aeroplanes dropping bombs over London have now materialised. There are actual bombing planes flying over Bowling's head (CUFA, 16; 201) and, towards the end of the novel, a bomb is actually dropped, causing some casualties.

Bowling's journey to Lower Binfield is therefore experienced as 'a flight' – it is furtive and 'forbidden ground' (CUFA, 182) – and, as expected, it is disappointing. The modern world has caught up with it and what follows is a record of the changes that have taken place. Bowling no longer knows the streets (CUFA, 191) or the people, who now come from other parts of the country and who stir in them "that feeling of a kind of enemy invasion" (CUFA, 192). Instead of authenticity, he now notes (and deplores) "the picturesqueness, the sham countrified stuff" (CUFA, 223). The town is now teeming with "arty-looking houses" and "sham-Tudor colonies" (CUFA, 225), which represent everything he rejects: "whatever we were in the old days, we weren't picturesque" (CUFA, 223). Finally, the epitomes of his idealised boyhood, the two fishing pools, have been destroyed – one has given way to 'the Upper Binfield Model Yacht Club' (CUFA, 225), the other has become a 'rubbish-dump' (CUFA, 228). Disappointed, Bowling is led to conclude that the 'scenes' of his boyhood are lost: "They don't exist. Coming up for air! But there isn't any air. The dustbin that we're in reaches up to the stratosphere" (CUFA, 230). In the end, he declares that he has 'learnt the lesson', namely: "Fat man of forty-five can't go fishing. That kind of thing doesn't happen any longer, it's just a dream" (CUFA, 237). But, above all, he has learned that "the old life's finished" (CUFA, 237), war is going to come, a belief that is not at all unreasonable (this is 1938 – CUFA, 147), and the world that follows will be completely different. His vision of the future – of the 'after-war' – is violent and bleak (CUFA, 160; 174; 166), anticipating Orwell's last novel (cf. Rai, 1988: 121).

Bowling has no doubts that "*It's all going to happen*" and that there is no escape (CUFA, 238). For Robert Lee, "it is the first novel in which the problems his [Orwell's] characters face seem to have no solutions" (Lee, 1969, 102). This critic attributes this to the fact that the threat is now of a larger dimension: it pertains to a different kind of society, in face of which the values that Orwell had earlier proposed prove useless (Lee, 1969, 101). This, Lee considers, is Orwell's 'most profound insight', namely, that "in

the twentieth century much – indeed all – depends upon the nature of society” (Lee, 1969, 103). And yet, Lee’s conclusion grants too much to the novel’s superficial, self-explanatory set of meanings, which now, as before, is centred on the protagonist (now in a more absolute way, given the first-person narration). Another and rather different reading is possible. As Lee has also noted, contrary to his previous fiction, which recorded (and transmuted) Orwell’s experiences, in *Coming up for Air*, “the actual experience is now missing; Orwell, in effect, lives in his work the experience of his imagination” (Lee, 1969: 90). As this critic explains:

Coming up for Air also is the first of Orwell’s books in which the solution to the protagonist’s problems has been essentially inwardly sought; social forms no longer seem worth even exploration – if survival in the modern world is to be found, it will come within the self. (Lee, 1969: 102)

This motif – of the quest within the self – is, indeed, structural to the novel, but it is also part of the problem that it addresses (and that it fails to solve). The world of ‘security’ and ‘stability’ that Bowling nostalgically yearns for is, first and foremost, a world lived in an undisturbed eternal present – “They thought it was eternity” (CUFA, 112). More than ‘religious beliefs’, what mattered to the protagonist’s parents was the ‘way of life’ (cf. Dorothy’s solution) and the belief that it would go on (CUFA, 111). Despite problems, “you carried on much the same as usual. The old English order of life couldn’t change” (CUFA, 112). In such a world, change is perceived as an act of violence – it can only arrive in the form of war and bombs (or, on a more modest scale, of murder) – which was the case. Bowling confirms that the thing that put an end to the ‘old life’ was war: “the day I joined the army the old life was finished” (CUFA, 116). Regardless of its effects, some of them good (CUFA, 126), he considers that the war brought into being a world of uncertainty: “you couldn’t go on regarding society as something eternal and unquestionable, like a pyramid. You knew it was just a balls-up” (CUFA, 127). After the war, Bowling became an insurance office, which for him represents the end of his ‘history’. With the exception of his marriage, two years later, nothing ever happened to him again: “from that day forward there was nothing in my life that you could properly describe as an event” (CUFA, 135). But even his marriage can hardly be described as that. Reflecting on the reasons why he married Hilda, he can only conclude, “These things happen to us” (CUFA, 140). The expression extends to other episodes in his life – “It’s the way things happen” (CUFA, 81); “that’s how things

happen” (CUFA, 82) – and seems to encapsulate Bowling’s general attitude to life – one of compliance and passivity.

The truth is that, despite the superficial changes, which he blames on modern life and which stimulate his nostalgia, Bowling still lives, in many respects, in an eternal present. It is a present characterised by routine and eventlessness, which only exists within a certain ‘order’, as Bowling’s attitude to his marriage indicates. Though he confesses that he sometimes considers separation or divorce, the idea is never followed up, for Hilda is regarded as “part of the order of things” (CUFA, 144). Not surprisingly, it is also a present that Bowling experiences as unreal – to him, modern life seemed “less real than Sunday morning in Lower Binfield thirty-eight years ago” (CUFA, 31). As in 1914, the war is conceived as the only thing that can bring change. This is how Bowling understands the call for war against Germany, made by a speaker of the Left Book Club. His anti-war argument is that the young speaker is looking for some ‘action’ to liven up his tedious life – “over in Europe, the big stuff’s happening” (CUFA, 153-160) – and thinks it is “going to be a glorious business” (CUFA, 160). But Bowling knows better: he has lived one war and assures him that there is nothing ‘glorious’ about it. However, Bowling’s explanation could apply to his own behaviour. When a bomb falls in Lower Binfield, he cannot help being excited: “there’s something grand about the bursting of a big projectile” (CUFA, 233). His enthusiasm is felt in terms of a ‘waking up’ experience:

But the peculiar thing is the feeling it gives you of being suddenly shoved up against reality. It’s like being woken up by someone shying a bucket of water over you. You’re suddenly dragged out of your dreams by a clang of bursting metal, and it’s terrible, and it’s *real*. (CUFA, 233, my emphasis)

Although he had previously presented himself as a pacifist, this scene suggests that war is something that Bowling (like Gordon) might welcome for being the (only) occurrence that can wake people up and bring them into contact with the ‘real’. His journey to Lower Binfield (to his childhood and to ‘old England’) can therefore be understood as a quest for the *real*, which nevertheless eludes him: it is not ‘reality’ that he finds in Lower Binfield, but a place of ghosts (CUFA, 197). Soon, however, he discovers that this also applies to himself: “Christ! I thought, I was wrong to think that I was seeing ghosts. I’m the ghost myself. I’m dead, and they’re alive” (CUFA, 208).

Bowling’s insight is truer and deeper than he suspects, for it expresses his inability to come to terms with reality. Back to his wife and home or, as Lee has put it, to the

inescapable “pressures of the ‘present tense’” (Lee, 1969, 100), he is confronted with the fact that Hilda has found out his lie. And yet, he cannot bring himself to tell her the truth. The two realities – Ellesmere Road and Lower Binfield – seem to him incompatible, and he now doubts whether his visit has actually taken place:

The whole thing seemed to be fading out of my mind. Why had I gone to Lower Binfield? *Had* I gone there? In this atmosphere it just seemed meaningless. Nothing’s real in Ellesmere Road except gas bills, school fees, boiled cabbage and the office on Monday” (CUFA, 246).

In the end, it is as though Bowling’s journey has indeed taken place merely within his consciousness. To placate his wife, he contemplates doing what Reverend Hare believes his daughter to have done, i.e. “to pull the old gag about losing my memory” (CUFA, 247). We are left with the impression that he will choose the ‘third possibility’ (the first is telling Hilda the truth), namely “to let her go on thinking it was a woman, and take my medicine” (CUFA, 247). Like Dorothy, Bowling chooses secrecy over truth, while clinging to the self-delusive idea that he is still resisting, as the book’s ironical epigraph suggests: “He’s dead, but he won’t lie down”.

3.4. Orwell’s ‘Others’: women and left-wingers

In his study of Englishness, Philip Dodd also pointed out the role played by masculinity: “‘vigorous, manly and English’ was the popular collocation” (Dodd, 1986: 6). The construction of a masculine Englishness, which can be traced back to the last decades of the nineteenth century, took on two complementary forms: inside the nation, in the development of an all-encompassing ‘grammar’ that sought to define masculine *English* attributes in opposition to and exclusion of feminine *foreign* ones; but also at an international level, in the colonial arena, where, as Dodd points out, “the dominant English licensed to other groups and to other nationalities those female qualities which it did not acknowledge itself to possess” (Dodd: 1986: 6). Furthermore, Howkins added, the Englishness which emerged during this period (roughly, 1870-1920) was also defined against a recent past which was perceived as ‘un-English’ – i.e. “as dominated by metropolitanism, and (...) a set of values which were unnatural to the English people” (Howkins, 1986: 69). This was in keeping with the idea that “recent history had seen the abandonment by the elite of national allegiance” (Howkins, 1986: 70), which

often materialised as a charge against the creation of “an international trading order which sacrificed those ‘at home’ in the interests of profit” (Howkins, 1986: 70).

In Orwell’s own construction of Englishness, the unconscious, hence *authentic*, patriotic feelings discerned in the “common people” are unmistakably yoked with an essential masculinity: “Nearly every Englishman of working-class origin considers it *effeminate* to pronounce a foreign word correctly”, writes Orwell in “The Lion and the Unicorn” (Orwell: 2000e, 147). Yet, rather than condemning what could be regarded as a symptom of parochial insularity, or even national chauvinism, he lauds the common man’s spontaneous manifestation of virile nationalism, as opposed to a more cosmopolitan, tolerant view which is ascribed to Left intellectuals, and promptly dismissed as ‘effeminate’. It is all-too evident that Englishness rests not on intellectual talents – intellectuals are only too willing to “get someone else do your fighting for you” – but on ‘masculine’, warlike qualities such as “physical courage”, “toughness”, and the capacity to “endure” (Orwell: 2000e, 183-184).

As far as ‘otherness’ is concerned, the normal ‘collocation’ that we find in Orwell’s novels is, then, feminine, Left, and ‘un-English’. *A Clergyman’s Daughter* provides an important example of this semantic chain. The novel is usually read for its descriptions of poverty and destitution *in general* in the 1930s England, along with Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London*. However, it can also be read for its descriptions of poverty and vagrancy *as lived by a woman*. Dorothy’s gender is certainly central to the novel: When she first emerges from her black out, her first question is “Am I a man or a woman?” (CD, 86), a doubt that she simplistically resolves by touching her breasts: “she was a woman therefore” (CD, 87). The question appears to be, at best, unrealistic (that gender should be *the first* concern of someone emerging from a state of unconsciousness seems to me implausible), but it brings Dorothy’s femininity to the fore, and there can be no doubt that some of her ordeals, such as domestic housework and sexual harassment, are specific to her gender. There are also references to the special hardships that affect women in poverty, such as the association with prostitution, the greater difficulty in finding a job, or a more pronounced solitude, as compared to men. The epigraph of the book – “the trivial round, the common task” (CD, iii) – is especially evocative of the tedious and daily domestic drudgery of women. Furthermore, the narrator is not completely insensitive to these matters: he pays considerable attention to the London “tribe of women who are penniless and homeless” (see CD: 184-185) and spells out many of the problems that affect women: “There are women in such places [i.e. private schools], and especially derelict gentlewomen in ill-

paid jobs, who go for years upon end in almost utter solitude” (CD: 256); “to a woman a scandal is a serious matter” (CD: 253); “For anyone so situated, and particularly for a woman, it is all but impossible to make friends” (CD: 247). Finally, Mrs Creevy’s prayer, which the girls have to repeat every day – “make us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, industrious, punctual and lady-like” (CD, 206) – points to the role that gender plays in Ringwood House’s education scam.

And yet, in many senses, the novel depicts the distinctions imposed by gender as natural. In the hop-picking camps, the division of work along the lines of gender is taken for granted and unproblematically assumed by Dorothy (CD, 111). Furthermore, despite living as a tramp, she cooks Nobby’s breakfast (CD, 109) and washes his clothes (CD, 122), whereas he does the shopping (CD, 115). Dorothy’s submissive passivity, as I argued above, is also offered as a realistic detail (i.e. as proper of her gender and spinsterly condition) and serves a plot that not only incorporates gender prejudice, but confirms it as fate. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming up for Air* follow this scheme of representation. As Daphne Patai has argued – and her study is an invaluable reference on this subject – all three novels are built on a series of misogynistic preconceptions which are conveyed (and reinforced) by formal means, such as the use of stereotypes (most feminine characters are ‘types’ – Patai, 1984: 111)⁴² and, I would add, of certain animal metaphors and similes. With the exception of Rosemary, “Orwell’s only really positive female” (Patai, 1984: 110), most women are accorded negative portraits. This is the case of Hilda Bowling. As a young, single girl, she is endowed with some of the features of the stereotypical spinster – she is compared to a *hare* (CUFA, 7; 137), incidentally, Dorothy’s surname, and perceived to have “a helpless, childish air” (CUFA, 137). With marriage, this gives way to another type – that of the stupid ‘nagging wife’ (cf. Patai, 1984: 185; 194), whose only concern (like Julia Comstock) is money, an attitude from which the protagonist (like Gordon Comstock) is keen to distance himself: “I’m not like that. I’ve got more the prole’s attitude towards money. Life’s here to be lived” (CUFA, 142). This attitude of differentiation structures Bowling’s vision of life, as well as the novel, which is told, as Patai rightly notes, in a “chummy male tone” (Patai, 1984: 161) that urges the

⁴² Orwell’s reliance on stereotypes reflects other prejudices, which aim at other groups, namely Irish, Jews and Scots: an Irish woman is described for “her base Dublin accent” (CD, 101); a ‘lewd’ Jew is waiting for an opportunity to take sexual advantage of Dorothy’s desperate situation (CD, 148). In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Gordon deplors ‘the Scotchification of England’ (KAF, 39).

complicity of the reader (Patai, 1984: 163), and of “a male implied reader” in particular (Patai, 1984: 196).⁴³

Bowling’s retrospective construction of genuine, essential life is built on a self-conscious, over-elaborated sense of ‘maleness’, which manifests itself in the systematic ruling out of women and ‘femininity’. More than a historical turning point, the war signifies, in the protagonist’s consciousness, the experience which released the men of his generation, and himself, from a domestic, ‘*feminine*’ world. The exclusivity of male experience thus permeates the protagonist’s elated memories of the past, which are largely concerned with the special joys of ‘being a boy’:

“I knew that I wasn’t a kid any longer, I was a boy at last. *And it’s a wonderful thing to be a boy*, to go roaming where grown-ups can’t catch you, and to chase rats and kill birds and shy stones and cheek carters and shout dirty words. It’s a kind of strong, rank feeling, a feeling of knowing everything and fearing nothing, and it’s all bound up with breaking rules and killing things. The white dusty roads, the hot sweaty feeling of one’s clothes, the smell of fennel and wild peppermint, the dirty words, the sour stink of the rubbish dump, the taste of fizzy lemonade and the gas that made one belch, the stamping on the young birds, the feel of the fish straining on the line – it was all part of it. *Thank God I’m a man, because no woman ever has that feeling.* (CUFA, 66, emphasis added)

Roaming, skipping school, chasing and killing animals in the forest, shying stones, shouting dirty words, belching, fishing: more than inaccessible to grown-ups, boyhoodness is above all an alien territory to women. Its pleasures, as Patai stresses, have a specific function: to forge “a male identity in opposition to women” (Patai, 1984: 173). And vitality is clearly the touchstone against which masculinity – or the lack of it – is gauged. Women are described as “colourless” (CUFA, 138), “depressed”, “lifeless” (CUFA, 141), “faded”, “a sad case” (CUFA, 144), and, on the whole, with the strange disposition to sit “like lumps of pudding” (CUFA, 147, 154).⁴⁴ When, after twenty-four

⁴³ As John Rodden pointed out, most of the critics and readers who participated in the ‘making of Orwell’s reputation’ were *men*. Drawing attention to the complexities involved in the question of the writer as “inspirational gender model”, Rodden observes: “male critics have been peculiarly silent as to the significance of Orwell’s reputation among male intellectuals and his *special masculine appeal*” (Rodden: 2002, 212, emphasis in original). He nevertheless regrets that feminists should have, more often than not, fallen under the sway of these received constructions, to the point of “[blurring] the distinction between ‘the Orwell myth’ and Orwell’s own work” (Rodden: 2002, 215). In fact, as I hope my analysis makes plain, there is no need to turn to psychobiography to find evidence of Orwell’s misogyny and gender prejudice: his novels offer such evidence in a more consistent, clearer manner.

⁴⁴ Most critics are caught up in Orwell’s ideological traps. The acceptance that women are symbols of working class decency (e.g. Ingle 1984: 18), for instance, carries with it the idea that ‘working class decency’ is an antidote to the intellectualism of left-wing ‘pansy’ poets. Woodcock regards Orwell’s descriptions of female proletarian fertility as a token of Orwell’s endorsement of vitality (Woodcock, 1984: 206) and his hostility towards birth control and abortion as in keeping with his endorsement of

years, Bowling runs into his first girl, Elsie, he is 'fascinated' to find out that she has turned into a 'fat hag' (CUFA, 217). This gives him another reason for enjoying being a man: "No man ever goes to pieces quite so completely as that. I'm fat, I grant you. I'm the wrong shape, if you like. But at least I'm *a* shape. Elsie wasn't even particularly fat, she was merely shapeless." (CUFA, 217)

As Patai suggests, Bowling's temporary escape is, above all, an escape away from his depressing, 'feminine' present-time to a glorious 'masculine' past – "Being away from home – that was the great thing" (CUFA, 231). The idealised past is complete in the nostalgic image of 'mother rolling dough' – "like a priestess celebrating a sacred ritual" (CUFA, 49), an image that confirms the protagonist's vision of the past as an 'old order': "when you saw her cooking you knew that she was in a world where she belonged, among things she really understood" (CUFA, 49). As Patai notes, father in the shop, mother in the kitchen (Patai, 1984: 164) is presented as the natural order, in Bowling's words: "It was more like some kind of natural process" (CUFA, 50). His journey to Lower Binfield, however, confirms that this order has been irreparably damaged – his father's Corn and Seed Store has significantly become 'Wendy's Teashop' (CUFA, 198). There is 'no coming up for air' in this world, only in Bowling's imagination. Only there can the old phallic order be perpetuated – as the novel's three symbols of the novel – according to Robert Lee, the fish (which symbolises a past full of vitality – Lee, 1969, 93), the Frankfurter (which represents the tasteless, synthetic present) and the bomb (representing the future – Lee, 1969, 95) – suggest. This 'androcentric vision' (Patai, 1984: 115) was already strong in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, where Gordon's return to normal, decent life is made at the expense of Rosemary's independence – while he goes back to his 'good' job, she goes home to become a mother, thus reinstating the 'normal' order of things (Patai, 1984: 118). As I have argued above, Gordon Comstock's war against the money-world is deeply entangled with his prejudice against women (cf. Patai, 1984: 120). Women are associated with the 'money code' and it is this association that ultimately enables him to return to 'normal', common life. As Patai has pointed out, what takes place is a 'rescue operation' "performed by misogyny in a sexually polarized society" (Patai, 1984: 119),

family (Woodcock, 1984: 206). The first claim, however, clashes with some of the representations of (middle-class) women in Orwell's novels, such as Hilda Bowling, and neglects the pervasive gender bias of Orwell's fiction, which has structural *and ideological* implications. In any case, it is hard to imagine any woman appreciating Orwell's 'laudatory' descriptions – be it the "monstrous woman, solid as a Norman pillar" (NEF, 144) with "powerful mare-like buttocks" and a "solid, contourless body, like a block of granite" (NEF, 228); the "monstrous breasts" (CD, 125) of the mother of one of the hop-pickers, in *A Clergyman's Daughter*; or the "four monstrous women with breasts the size of melons" (KAF, 95) that Gordon notices in a working-class pub.

which justifies (or even compensates for) the failure to come to terms with society's political challenges.⁴⁵ Orwell's homophobia has a similar function – all political opponents (and these may vary) are dismissed as effeminate or homosexual.⁴⁶

Indeed, although offered as 'apolitical', Orwell's novels contain a very distinct politics, which can be found with surprising regularity and consistency in the gaps of their treatment of sexuality and gender. As Terry Eagleton has argued, the adversaries of the protagonists of Orwell's thirties novels are all politically closer to the Left. Warburton, responsible for Dorothy's flight from her daily life, as well as her compliant return is, in Terry Eagleton's expression, "the emancipated aesthete" (Eagleton, 1974: 19). The novel describes him as a self-proclaimed painter (CD, 37, 38) and Socialist (CD, 38-39). Through him, art and politics are undermined by their association with loose sexuality – he is a shameless womaniser and a liar (e.g. CD, 74) who reads pornography (CD, 40) and tries to seduce Dorothy. In the end, it is no surprise that Dorothy (conveniently sexually frigid) should reject his advances and remain tied up to a religious vision of the world, as at the beginning of the novel, "hardly knowing the difference between Liberal and Conservative or Socialist and Communist" (CD, 34). Although presented in a far more charitable way, Ravelston, the rich, guilt-ridden left-winger is also Gordon's 'ideological opponent' (Eagleton, 1974: 25). He has been trying to convert Gordon to Socialism (in a way that brings to mind Warburton's attempts at 'converting' Dorothy – CD, 73) – but to no avail (KAF, 95). He provides a salutary counterbalance to Gordon, but his political positions are often called into question by his portrayal as hesitant, weak and 'soft' (e.g. with his protégés, who sponge on him; or when he reluctantly assents to hire a prostitute, only to please Gordon). It is his girlfriend, Hermione Slater,

⁴⁵ This link between women and modernity has been explored in significantly different ways. Tom Steele, for instance, commented on the important role that lower-middle class and working class women played in the process of incorporating the working classes into the modern national culture: "In many respects, they acted as key intermediaries between the ideological demands of the modernising state and the by now crystallising working-class culture" (Steele, 1997: 36). From a feminist perspective, Mica Nava has also stressed the participation of women in modernity, which she by and large equates with 'modern urban consuming culture' (Nava, 1996: 41). These arguments, nevertheless, reinforce a gender-divided view of society (thus excluding other modernist projects, such as radical and socialist feminism), leading either to the celebration of consumption as liberating of women (as in Nava's case) or to the images of resented masculinity that we find in Gordon Comstock and George Bowling. The latter, as Daphne Patai contends, make women the scapegoats of the wrongs of the modern world (cf. Patai, 1984: 119) – especially, of capitalism, a condition which even enfranchised and politicised men cannot control or decide upon, since it is outside the ambit of politics proper.

⁴⁶ Orwell's homophobia is deeply connected with his politics – and has often been taken in with them. According to Zwerdling, the left-wing intelligentsia's apparent (and actual) queerness was one of the reasons why he felt disconnected from them to the point of seeking a corrective in "earthy and commonsensical, vulgar but 'straight'" working class-values (Zwerdling 1974: 39). Homosexuality is rejected as either a mannerism or a perversion of the *upper classes*, for which institutions such as the English public school are believed to be responsible. By contrast, the manly/ womanly familial relations which Orwell associates with the working class are upheld as natural.

who draws out Ravelston's contradictions. By declaring herself a Socialist – “we're all Socialists nowadays” (KAF, 108) – she voices opinions that Ravelston most probably upholds but lacks the courage to own up, namely that the lower classes smell (KAF, 103). Finally, George Bowling's challenger is the anti-fascist speaker of the Left Book Club (CUFA, 153-154), whom he opposes with his down-to-earth pacifist arguments (CUFA, 159). Unlike Dorothy and Gordon, Bowling has some notions of politics, though in a rather detached way. His misgivings about the future do not concern so much Hitler (he derides a young man in the audience who is moved to tears at the mention of the German Jews – CUFA, 160), but “the new kind of men from eastern Europe” (CUFA, 168). Bowling's position is dubious. On the one hand, he firmly distrusts politics (that is, *left* politics, which he associates with ‘Progress’ – CUFA, 161) and feels attracted to the conservative ideas of his friend, Porteous, the highbrow school master, who believes that ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ (CUFA, 165). Porteous stands, in his mind, for ‘Culture’ – he lives outside the modern world, which Bowling appreciates – “it soothes you, somehow” (CUFA, 164). On the other hand, Bowling also regards ‘Culture’ (which he identifies with poetry) as out of touch with reality and too ‘decent’ to be of any ‘use’ when war and the ‘after-war’ come (CUFA, 157).

Their function is similar in all three novels. As Eagleton points out, the choice of Ravelston to represent the Left (rather than a working-class socialist) enables the introduction of the “typically Orwellian conflict between the amorphous complexities of sordid ‘experience’ on the one hand and the abstract rigidities of ‘ideology’ on the other” (Eagleton, 1974: 25) – a dilemma that Dorothy solves (or not) by rejecting both the ‘totalizing’ Christian faith *and* a life lived fully outside it, which the threat of Warburton's indecency does prevent her from considering. As Eagleton concludes:

And so the gently satirized attitude she had when the novel began the brisk, spinsterish, self-sacrificial attention to minute tasks – is ultimately affirmed, as superior to a radical criticism of contemporary life which could only be, like Warburton's, that of the ‘Nancy’ poets: decadent, self-indulgent, eccentric and in a sense indecent. (Eagleton, 1974: 20)

3.5. Heritage Film and the Forster adaptations

As Philip Dodd wrote at the close of his essay, it was during the period he analyses that “the conviction that English culture was to be found in the past was stabilised” (Dodd, 1986: 22). Henceforth, there would only be a ‘settled present’:

Everyone had a place in the national culture, and had contributed to the past which had become a settled present. The people of these islands with their diverse cultural identities were invited to take their place, and become spectators of a culture already complete and represented for them by its trustees. (Dodd, 1986: 22)

The image is particularly suggestive when it comes to discussing the question of Englishness in film, a topic which came to the fore in the eighties, in what has become known as the ‘heritage film’ debate.⁴⁷ The adaptations of Forster’s novels to the screen in the eighties and early nineties – *A Passage to India* (dir. David Lean, 1984); *A Room with a View* (dir. James Ivory, 1986), *Maurice* (dir. James Ivory, 1987) *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (dir. Charles Sturridge, 1991) and *Howards End* (dir. James Ivory, 1992) – found themselves at the centre of this debate. ‘Heritage film’, a term which has been traced back to 1986 (Higson, 1995: 26), defines generically a number of ‘quality costume dramas’ set in pre-war England (the favoured period being the 1880s-1930s – Higson, 2006: 91), which share a characteristic aesthetic, often linked with ‘pictorialism’⁴⁸, centred on images of past grandeur, featuring country houses, attractive landscapes of the rural South and other commonly recognisable images of ‘Englishness’ (Cf. Hill, 199: 80-83). According to Andrew Higson, who has popularised the concept, heritage films have been produced in Britain since at least the 1910s, but they took on a

⁴⁷ The term ‘heritage film’ has been much contested. One of its most trenchant critics has been Sheldon Hall, who has dismissed it as a ‘critical construct’ (Hall, 2001: 191), i.e. a genre which has been created by critics, rather than identified (Hall, 2001: 195), and which signals not just a group of films, but also (perhaps, especially) ‘a particular attitude’ to these films and their audience (Hall, 2001: 191). Hall charges the selection of films as inconsistent (Hall, 2001: 194) – it excludes, for instance, the films of the sixties (Hall, 2001: 193). The works themselves are ‘diversely anomalous’ and ‘highly variable’ (Hall, 2001: 193). On another level, ‘heritage film’ is also considered “overly narrow and monolithic” (Hall, 2001: 194-195), producing analyses that disregard particular texts to concentrate on ‘broad generalisations’ (Hall, 2001: 197). Hall’s dissatisfaction with this concept stems from what he believes to be an in-built ‘antipathy towards Thatcherism’ (Hall: 2001: 195) and, consequently, an in-built ‘hostility’ towards these films and their audience (Hall: 2001: 195), typically portrayed as “uncritical, indiscriminating, a passive and complacent consumer of images” (Hall, 2001: 196). Other critics (like Claire Monk) have shifted the focus of analysis to the enjoyment experienced by viewers – especially women and gays – discerning a blind spot in (anti-) ‘heritage’ criticism on issues of gender and sexuality. Some of the charges brought against Higson (namely by Sheldon Hall) are, in my view, groundless and no less politically motivated. Higson’s thesis does not rest only on ‘broad generalisations, as his in-depth analysis of *Comin’ Throu’ the Rye* demonstrates (see chapter three, Higson, 1995). Despite charged on this point (Hill, 1999; Hall: 2001), he has rejected the notion that these films “resonate unequivocally with Thatcherite politics” (Higson, 2006: 93). He also gives no signs of being ‘hostile’ to this genre, but rather finds them ‘fascinating’ (Higson, 2006: 93). Though it might have been subsequently emphasised, ambivalence already had a well-defined place in Higson’s 1993 argument (and is later reinforced, Higson: 2003: 149). Finally, Higson has also discussed his reservations about treating these films in terms of ‘genre’ (Higson, 1995: 26-27).

⁴⁸ According to Higson, “Pictorialism was a specific photographic practice, an aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century, which had as its central aim the promotion of photography as a fine art”, with an accent on “posed and studied compositions” and on an “archaic look” (Higson, 1995: 51).

new dimension in the British film revival of the 1980s (Higson, 1995: 26).⁴⁹ Branded for their ‘quality’ and ‘authenticity’ – which boasts a ‘quality’ cast, ‘quality’ acting (in the tradition of English acting – Higson, 1995: 27), fidelity to the original literary source and fidelity to historical detail – these films achieved unprecedented box-office success in the domestic as well as international markets, where its ‘Englishness’ functioned in terms of ‘product differentiation’, mostly in relation to classical Hollywood cinema (Higson, 1995: 28).

In a key essay first published in 1993, Higson linked these films’ commercial success to their deployment of a version of the past which passes itself off as national, to produce the image of a national pastoral under upper-class tutelage that is in the main congenial to the conservative ideology of Thatcherism. These films’ appeal to the public is linked to their nostalgia-mediated images of tranquillity and continuity, which act as a compensation (Higson, 2006: 107) or a ‘social emollient’ (Hill, 1999, 75) for the more taxing realities of the present, some of which caused by Thatcherite market-oriented policies.⁵⁰ A final strand of this argument links these films to the present: as “images of Britain and Britishness (in fact, Englishness) became commodities for consumption in the international image market” (Higson, 2006: 91), the heritage films of the eighties (part of the heritage industry) were therefore also implicated in the post-industrial economic restructuring which Thatcher was putting in place (Higson, 2006: 95).⁵¹

Higson recognises the presence in these films of elements of social critique, calling into question many aspects of traditionalist, conservative – and Conservative – England. However, what dominates is a particular aesthetic that ultimately works against the

⁴⁹ The term ‘heritage film’ was originally associated with the period after 1980s, and a relatively narrow corpus, including titles like *Chariots of Fire* (1981); *Another Country* (1984); *A Handful of Dust* (1987), and, of course, the Forster adaptations. It was also applied to ‘prestige television serials of the 1980s, such as *Brideshead Revisited* (1981) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (1983). It has now been greatly expanded (cf. Higson, 1995; 2003). According to Sheldon Hall’s categorisation, it now includes: (1) “adaptations from works of classic literature”; (2) adaptations from “modern literary works and theatrical properties, or written directly for the screen”; (3) films often identified with the ‘Raj revival’; (4) “historical dramas: reconstructions and representations of real events and figures from documented history”; (5) Shakespeare adaptations (Hall: 2001, 192). To these, this critic adds what Claire Monk has referred to as ‘post-heritage’ films, such as Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1992) (Hall, 2001: 193).

⁵⁰ The vision of a great national past that heritage films convey is also perceived as compensation for the decline of Britain as a world economic power, as well as the emergence of a more unstable sense of British identity. The last aspect is often linked with the consolidation of Britain as a multicultural and multiracial nation, but the economic restructuring, from an industrial to a post-industrial society, which was to address the problem of Britain’s international decline, played no small role. This restructuring entailed a rise in unemployment and job insecurity, the liberalisation of the market, the expansion of private enterprise, and the dwindling influence of the state as a market-regulator and service-provider. It benefited the expansion and consolidation of the heritage industry and, often in conjunction, of the tourism and leisure industries, in which cinema is included (Higson, 2006: 93, 95; Hill, 1999: 73-74).

⁵¹ Higson, nevertheless, traces this “process of commodifying our relationship with the past on an industrial scale for a mass market” to the conservation lobby of the late nineteenth century (Higson: 1995: 41).

elements of critique: “the past is displayed as visually spectacular pastiche, inviting a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques so often suggested narratively by these films” (Higson, 2006: 91). In other words, heritage films are overly concerned with putting up a spectacle of a (splendorous) past – one that is identified with an ‘imperialist and upper-class Britain’ (Higson, 2006: 93) and which is particularly suitable to a nostalgic gaze characteristically devoid of ‘any critical historical perspective’ (Higson, 2006: 96). Higson draws on Fredric Jameson to connect this use of the past to post-modernism, whereby the past is reduced to “an image, a spectacle, something to be gazed at”, which is more likely to appeal for its surface quality, its style, than for its historical contexts and connections (Higson, 2006: 95). A similar process is at work in heritage films, where the ‘visual perfectionism’ and ‘fetishisation of period details’ render history as a ‘spectacle’, ‘something over and done with’ (Higson, 2006: 96). The costumes, the *mise-en-scène*, the long shots of visually stunning landscapes prove compelling to the audience, and their enjoyment is in the end greater than the adherence to any critical stance – even when the plot invites one, by portraying some form of class, racial, gender or sexual prejudice, which is often the case.⁵² Higson concludes on this point:

In what is both a bid for historical realism (and visual pleasure) and a function of the nostalgic mode (seeking an imaginary historical plenitude), the past is delivered as a museum of sounds and images, an iconographic display. The iconography brings with it a particular moral formation and set of values, which the films effortlessly dramatise at ‘significant’ historical moments. (Higson, 2006: 97)

There is a structural ambivalence, a permanent tension between “visual splendour and narrative meaning” (Higson, 2006: 93), but the requirements of heritage ultimately take precedence over those of narrative, as these films’ priority is not storytelling, but “the cinema of attractions” (Higson, 2006: 99). Heritage films tend to be weak on action and strong on character and period features; their focus is on the aesthetic, even if at the expense of ‘emotional affect’ (Higson, 2006: 100). In short, while the narrative may contain elements of social critique, it is the visual experience which ultimately counts.

⁵² The problem is not, of course, as critical voices have argued, that props and costumes have a natural appeal to viewers and are therefore intrinsic to the cinematic experience – such have been the claims of Sheldon Hall, who has argued that “the ‘thinginess’ of filmic representations is the very essence of cinema” (Hall, 2001: 196). The problem, as Higson puts it, is that these props and ‘things’ are cut off from ‘a materialist historical context’; they are, in other words, fetishised to convey a certain impression and effect – an image of the national past and national identity (perceived as one and the same) as aristocratic and male-centred, and of the nation as “reduced to the soft pastoral landscape of southern England, untainted by the modernity of urbanisation or industrialisation” (Higson, 2006: 96).

Hence the importance of the image of the past that heritage films produce and reproduce (as pastiche) – that of “a traditional conservative pastoral Englishness” which not only is post-modernist, but also *anti-modern* (Higson, 2006: 95).⁵³

Partly in response to his critics, partly under the influence of reception studies, Higson has come to revise his argument (Higson, 2006: 108), accepting that there can be more than one reading (namely from women) and distancing himself from what he calls “the leftist cultural critique”, which connected these films to Thatcherism, by way of a political use of nostalgia, and which had been central to his earlier analysis (Higson, 2003: 48; 76; 85). More recently, Paul Dave has also re-visited this argument to focus on its controversial political gist – not so much to defend or reject it, as to introduce some modifications. Instead of dismissing the term for its political overtones,⁵⁴ Dave proposes to “take a wider view of the leftist cultural critique” (Dave, 2006: 29). Hence, rather than linking these films directly to Thatcherism – following the line of reasoning which attributes ‘national decline’ to “a regressive patrician ruling class” (Dave, 2006: 30) – Dave relates them to “a particular *special effect* of the English class system”, i.e. “the screening off of the unpleasantnesses associated with capitalism” (Dave, 2006: 32). In this critic’s view, the nostalgia that these films activate “does not have to be confined to the endorsement of a political dream of empire and social hierarchy” (Dave, 2006: 32), it can also point to alternative ‘dreams’. As he puts it, “the heritage film can offer the sensation of a ‘breathing space’ to those with political dreams very different to the neo-conservative ones” (Dave, 2006: 32):

(...) if these films provide a ‘vision of a more inclusive, democratic, even multicultural England’ then this attractive nourishing of difference in costume might well lean on the suspension of the coercive power of neo-liberal capitalism whose ability to reach ‘into every corner of our lives, public and private’ was becoming oppressively insistent in this area. The power to effect this suspension appears to be borrowed from the

⁵³ This idea is reinforced by these films’ association with a prestige culture. They deliberately posit themselves as ‘quality’ films (a notion used in their promotional campaigns) in a variety of ways: by insisting on their connection with English literary culture and ‘the canons of good taste’; by creating a distance from Hollywood mainstream films and popular culture (Higson, 2006: 93-94); by frequently including other objects of art and art forms (such as music, classical paintings and sculpture) (Higson, 2006: 99); and by displaying aristocratic English types played by actors known for their “prestigious theatre work”, in buildings and landscapes associated with the National Trust and English Heritage, which bring with them (for the sake of ‘realism’) a plethora of props – clothes, décor, furniture and ornaments – which denote a certain kind of ‘tastefulness’ (Higson, 1995: 27).

⁵⁴ There is no doubt that the initial impetus of the debate over ‘heritage’ was firmly political – as Paul Dave points out, in the eighties the term (from which Sheldon Hall asserts a ‘critical distance’ – Hall, 2001: 197) had become “an overloaded sign” (Dave, 2006: 30). Sheldon Hall insists that, if it is to be retained (which he often doubts), the term ought to be ‘purged of its pejorative connotations and its attachment to the Thatcherite phase of cultural history’ and extended to other periods and other countries, so it can have “wider utility and less partisan implications” (Hall, 2001: 197).

tranquillising effect induced by the spectacle of the English upper classes of the past. (Dave, 2006: 32)

On the other hand, the now alluring spectacle of ‘difference in costume’ may also be regarded as itself congenial to the kind of hyper-liberalisation of habits and social behaviour (albeit kept at the level of ‘lifestyle’) which has come to characterise the present stage of capitalism, in which identity and difference become important market tools (as key marketing terms such as ‘product differentiation’ and ‘target market’ indicate). Dave therefore concludes that, under Blairism (which was keen to add a modernising impetus to the neo-liberal legacy of Thatcherism), “‘heritage’ Englishness was to be recast as an updated, stylish accompaniment to, rather than evasion of, neo-liberal capitalism” (Dave, 2006: 33).

Some of these aspects necessarily converge in Forster’s adaptations, which occupy a central place in this cycle of films: Forster has been “the most frequently adapted author” (Higson, 2006: 92; cf. Hill, 1999: 78) and his novels have constituted an important source of inspiration, especially to Ismael Merchant, James Ivory and Ruth Praver Jhabvala, the lead team in the production of this genre. Furthermore, by providing the heritage cinema industry with “narratives aspiring to progressive, liberal sentiments” which clash with these film’s “indulgence in the spectacle of socially conservative Englishness” (Dave, 2006: 31), Forster has been crucial to the ‘heritage film’ argument.

In so far as they stand not only as fully autonomous works, but also as competent adaptations which have been praised for their ‘fidelity’ to the novels, Forster’s films have largely been considered a success (even David Lean’s looser adaptation of *A Passage to India* has not prevented critics from hailing it as a masterpiece, as I hope to demonstrate in my next chapter). The issues of ‘fidelity’ and ‘authenticity’ have been central here: they pertain not only to how close the adaptations have kept to the originals, but also to ‘historical verisimilitude’. The general effect – one of ‘inauthentic simulation’ that characterises the postmodern culture of the eighties and beyond (Hill, 1999: 83) – is often obtained through technical rather than narrative means, such as: the attention to period detail; the inclusion of literary-evoking scenes (as in characters writing a letter or reading from a book, often in voiceover – Higson, 2006: 98); the often literal reproduction of dialogue from the novel (Higson, 2006: 98-99); and the ‘flamboyantly-designed intertitles’ in *A Room with a View* (Higson, 2006: 99-100; cf. Hill, 1999: 78) or the stylised lettering of the title, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. As

John Hill has noted, in the end, ‘fidelity’ does not necessarily mean fidelity to the texts, but “to the popular idea of ‘great literature’ or literary worthiness” (Hill, 1999: 78).

The ‘heritage film’ argument, as we have seen, is predicated on the idea that there is an inner tension between the liberal narrative and an aesthetic or mode of presentation that lends itself to conservative readings. It tends to stress, in other words, the *differences* between the novels and the films. Many factors are involved in this tension. For Higson, the aesthetic of the films undermines Forster’s “liberal-humanist refashioning of Englishness” (Higson, 2006: 101): the ‘pleasures of pictorialism’ ultimately “block the radical intentions of the narrative” (Higson, 2006: 101). This is patent in *Maurice*, where the Halls, which in the novel are a symbol of pretence and oppression, are ‘rendered desirable’ (Higson, 2006: 101; cf. Hill, 1999: 86-87). The same has been said of *A Room with a View*, where the novel’s critique of Cecil’s aesthetic vision, which conceives of Lucy as an object of art, ‘something to look at’, is ultimately defeated by the film’s own aesthetic, which offers *everything*, not just Lucy (Helena Bonham Carter), to be looked at and admired (Higson, 2006: 102). This containment effect is often produced by way of the actors, whose charismatic performances render certain characters, and what they represent, in a more positive light: Hugh Grant playing Clive Durham (in the novel portrayed as more conventional, lacking the camp mannerisms that Grant brings to it) and Maggie Smith playing the prim Victorian Miss Bartlett are cases in point (Higson, 2006: 102). Another important factor is the films’ nostalgia, which ultimately displaces some of the elements of social satire intended in the novels (cf. Higson, 2006: 103). In *Howards End*, Forster’s discontent with the encroachment of suburbia on the country is captured in the narrator’s evident dislike of the motor-car: introducing the bathing scene in *A Room with a View*, the narrator observes, “the world of motor-cars and Rural Deans receded illimitably” (RWV, 149); and *Howards End* is strewn with references to “the stench of motor-cars” (HE: 29) and “the throbbing, stinking car” (HE: 36). As Stallybrass put it, the car is here “the supreme symbol of the detested ‘new civilization’” (Stallybrass, 1992: 10), which is made to contrast with the beauty and harmony of the country house. In the film, however, as John Hill noted, the Edwardian car – now perceived as an antique – has itself become a symbol of beauty and tradition. For modern viewers, it also stands for an era when things went at a slower pace (Hill, 1999: 85-86). In the film, Ruth Wilcox (Vanessa Redgrave) can see no incompatibility between the car and rural England. Discussing Charles’s honeymoon in Naples with Margaret (Emma Thompson), she notes: ‘What he would enjoy most is a

motor tour through England. Charles takes after me, Miss Schlegel, he truly *loves* England’.

The films also fare worse than the novels in terms of their politics: for Hutchings, they tend to elide “issues of history, class and gender” (Hutchings, 1995: 214). In many respects, the novels’ social critique is indeed stronger than the films’. In Merchant and Ivory’s *A Room with a View*, the political material of the novel is given little or no attention. The conversation between Lucy and Miss Lavish on radicalism (RWV, 37) has been removed. And so have the references to Mr Emerson being a socialist (Mr Beebe goes only as far as calling him ‘something of a radical’). His lengthier and stronger anti-clerical remarks to Lucy in Santa Croce (RWV, 41) have also been toned down. In the end, as Hutchings points out, this character comes off as “some sort of uncouth buffoon” (Hutchings, 1995: 222).

Finally, critics have regretted the films’ capitulation to the romantic heterosexual plot, “abetted by the observation of textbook screenplay niceties” (Hutchings, 1995: 222), which is made at the expense of Forster’s more subtle, less conventional treatment of sexuality.⁵⁵ All films, including *Maurice*, have been described as ‘remarkably straight’ (Hutchings, 1995: 224). Merchant and Ivory’s most famous adaptations – *A Room with a View* and *Howards End* – feature the two heterosexual couples in their promotional material, respectively: Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson (Helena Bonham Carter and Julian Sands), as a married couple, kissing in a room with a view to Florence (hence revealing the film’s romantic happy ending); Leonard Bast (Samuel West) kissing the palm of Helen Schlegel’s hand (Helena Bonham Carter) with *Howards End* in the background, a picture often favoured over that of the main couple, the older and more composed Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox (Emma Thompson and Anthony Hopkins).

A Room with a View was especially marketed and received as a love story. The novel’s plot is rendered competently, but it fails to convey a sense of passion, even in the more romantic moments. As Hutchings has pointed out, Lucy’s kiss at Fiesole lacks “any sudden turn or realisation”; there are no violets and Lucy’s ‘visual shock’ at coming upon George is sacrificed to “Ivory’s taste for panoramas” (Hutchings, 1995: 223). This is also a result of the film’s interpretive choices, which foregrounds the sexual restraint of the Edwardian age. It is Miss Bartlett (played by Maggie Smith, and the film’s

⁵⁵ Martin and Piggford have linked these films to “the construction of a romantic ‘Forster film’ that can mute the political and sexual tensions of Forster’s texts” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 27, n5). They conclude, “the ‘E. M. Forster’ constructed through these filmic representations can, therefore, be not only distinct from, but actually at odds with, the (queerer) ‘E. M. Forster’ encountered by readers of his texts” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 27, n5).

epitome of sexual repression) that the camera follows, as she hurries down the hill towards a Lucy dressed in white, past the Italian driver (who has directed Lucy to George), to prevent what is about to happen. During the ride to Fiesole, we had seen Mr Eager (Patrick Godfrey) in a rage against the girlfriend of the Italian driver, whom he forces to leave the carriage because he is offended by their fondling: 'I'm not having this! I'm not having this!' His sexual puritanism – which in the novel serves essentially to establish his bigotry and malice – is therefore highlighted. Mr Eager stands for repressive Edwardian sexuality, which is to be understood as the reason why Lucy fails to come to terms with her love for George. On their journey back, Lucy sits between Miss Bartlett and Mr Eager (in the novel, she sits opposite him – RWV, 91) and, at the pension, when George finally arrives, Lucy walks to the corridor to meet him (in the novel, she merely considers doing so), but is immediately intercepted by Miss Bartlett, who closes the door on her, thus precluding another meeting.

The problem is not so much the film's adherence to a heterosexual script (in fact, its most daring scene is homoerotic),⁵⁶ as its endorsement of a romantic idea of love which, as I have argued above, is reductive, if not completely at odds with the novel. As Hutchings has noted, the murder scene at the piazza also fails to convince: "shock isn't really something that can be accommodated within the film's limpid aesthetic, it seems a species of bad taste" (Hutchings, 1995: 223). In the scene that follows, when Lucy and George talk by the river Arno, the soft background music plays down the tension that in the novel results from the overlap of Lucy's 'garrulous' mood (in spite of the 'wings fluttering inside her') and George's unchivalrous sincerity (RWV, 64). More importantly, the music also displaces the sense that 'something tremendous' had happened. In the film, George adds, in a manner of clarification, 'something's happened *to me and to you*' (my emphasis), lest we have any doubts regarding the romantic nature of the scene. This concern for making explicit, in the actor's lines, many of the novel's 'oddities' (perhaps because the film is bound to literature, to the authority of 'words') is evident in other moments. Mr Emerson's eccentricities, for instance, are anticipated and justified at the beginning of the film: when he offers his rooms with a view to Lucy and Miss Bartlett, he adds: "my vision is within".

Even though it was the most successful of Forster's adaptations, Merchant and Ivory's *A Room with a View* fails to convey the eventual properties that the novel manages to produce. Because it is overly concerned with respecting the original text, the film is

⁵⁶ The foregrounding of the friendship between Miss Lavish and Miss Bartlett, with whom Miss Lavish gets lost in the film, rather than with Lucy (RWV, 38), can also be regarded as a hint at lesbianism.

unable to produce (out of the materials specific to its medium) its own set of revelations. Furthermore, the attention it gives to objects, costumes and images, in keeping with its commitment to spectacle, take over the creative process, to the point of displacing it. The film thus fails to put on the screen the brimming supplement of meanings (a natural outcome of the literary process) which in the novel manages to tear down the complacent order of appearances to challenge the 'uneventfulness' that it prescribes.⁵⁷

And yet, for all their limitations, the Forster films also produce their own supplement of meanings, which often reinforces, contradicts or adds to the original texts. In Merchant and Ivory's *Howards End*, certain ideological aspects of the novel, mitigated by its reliance on the unseen and on poetic modes of representation, are drawn out. The visual medium and the film's commitment to a realist code bring to the fore the materialistic aspects of Forster's realist vision. Accordingly, Mrs Wilcox's aristocratic nature (confirmed by the casting of Vanessa Redgrave) sheds most of its mystic aura, to take on a more mundane air. Her aristocracy is more likely to be understood in terms of class than of mystic, 'natural' qualities, as in the sequence in which she complains to Margaret and her progressive friends about the difficulty of finding a good cook. Her declared dislike of flats – 'I fail to understand how people can actually *choose* to live in them' (my emphasis) – stresses the fact that she may be out of touch with her times (let alone with ours). Contemporary viewers may find it difficult to relate to Mrs Wilcox, who looks nice but old-fashioned and aloof, if not downright snobbish. Her idea of England – which in the novel had fascinated Margaret – is bound to appear less 'natural' and convincing. When she first communicates her love of England to Margaret, 'Charles takes after me, Miss Schlegel, he truly loves England', she immediately adds: 'Not of course London. None of us love London'. The film distances itself from this view in the next scene, by following the two women in their Christmas shopping around London, which is put on the screen as an attractive, imperial city:

⁵⁷ And yet, the film compares favourably to the play adaptation of the novel by Stephen Tait and Kenneth Allott, which was first performed in Cambridge, in 1950. Because it is set indoors, the most important scenes of the novel (which take place outdoors – the piazza scene; George's first and second kisses; Cecil's first kiss; the pond scene) are told (and, in the process, interpreted) rather than shown. In consequence, the eventful element of the novel is completely lost. Things only happen within discourse, which annuls the novel's creative power. The result is a conventional story, packed with the worst kind of moralistic clichés – such as Lucy's remarkably composed declaration (not long after first meeting the Emersons), "I believe I like your son too. Though that may be due to what mother calls my veterinary instincts. I've always had a weakness for lame ducks" (Tait and Allott: 1951: 25), or George's completely out-of-character speech to Miss Bartlett, "Please let us be sensible. We're not living in Victorian times, Miss Bartlett – it's 1907. What have I done? What is this dreadful crime we have committed?" (Tait and Allott: 1951: 53) The play draws out the worst aspects that an exclusively romantic reading of the novel might activate. More than remaining indoors, it is as if no one has ever left Sawston! Examples abound.

Trafalgar Square, the City, big Department Stores suggest a lively, bustling city, which contrasts vividly with the pale, weak lady (who is actually dying).

Similarly, Mr Wilcox's treatment of houses as properties comes through more clearly, as we are led into some of the houses that the novel describes, or merely mentions. The film stresses the link between Henry Wilcox and Margaret's house-hunting. Indeed, it is during a visit to his empty house in London (which he is offering for the Schlegels to rent) that Henry proposes to Margaret. The scene, which shows him standing on the top of the staircase, with Margaret at the bottom, looking up towards him, not only establishes the kind of relationship that she is about to enter (one that assumes Henry's superiority) but, in more contemporary terms, strangely suggests her opportunity to climb up the 'property ladder'. After their wedding – a brief signing ceremony, which stresses the contractual side of their liaison – the couple are shown looking at the plans for a future house. The full implications of adopting a house as a symbol of England (which I have discussed above) can now be more easily visualised. If for Forster, despite its material existence, *Howards End* stood essentially as a symbol and an idealisation (it included the unseen and a yearning for the authentic), now, in the nineties and beyond, with the expansion of credit and a stronger property market, the country house is more likely to be regarded as an object which not only is there to be admired and gazed at, but also to be coveted and even *purchased*. In other words, the process that is at work in the heritage film – of “presenting as ‘national’ the heritage of one particular class as the heritage of all” (Hill, 1999: 78) – also operates the other way round – what stands for the ‘heritage of all’ (the national) can now be privately owned, and, due to expanding credit, by a larger section of the middle class.

It is, however, symptomatic that the character of Leonard Bast has remained as much a cause of embarrassment for the producers of the film, despite the efforts to make him psychologically more dense and credible (cf. Hill, 1999: 91). In fact, the visual medium actually materialises the ‘otherness’ of the Basts in relation to both Schlegels and Wilcoxes, not only through their clothes and the discomfort they show and cause when they are present, but also through their actual absence from most scenes. Leonard's poverty remains respectable (as in the novel); however, because (for viewers) it is confined to the past, it can be contemplated with an added distance. Indeed, the full realisation of his desperate situation is brought home to us neither through characterisation and character-empathy nor through the inclusion of documentary-like images, but rather through the intervention of the two Schlegel sisters, especially Helen. At Evie Wilcox's wedding, her anger (convincingly acted out by Helena Bonham

Carter) is as far as the film can go to present and expose the predicament of the Basts – not only, within the narrative, to the upper-class world of the Wilcoxes, but also, outside of it, to us, spectators. Leonard and Jacky are immediately posited as intruders, though it is clear that they are here not out of their own initiative. Brought by Helen to illustrate her case, they passively resign themselves to the condition of a problem that is being dealt with. As in the novel, the Basts have no voice, and no sense of antagonism is ever hinted at. ‘Class’ appears to be a matter of manners, as Jacky’s behaviour suggests: that she gorges herself with cake, drinks too much and makes a scandal is likely to be seen more as a result of her ‘bad manners’ (i.e. of her acting ‘in character’, as a member of the uneducated, ‘lower’ classes) than of her social condition and actual hunger. In the end, with Leonard dead and Jacky forgotten, the film (like the novel) does not dispute the view that the Basts do not belong in the beautiful and plentiful world of the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels. If Leonard’s progeny is received in the pastoral idyll (is, indeed, central to it), the progenitor’s world falls definitely out of view. The film’s closing scene shows Howards End regaining the harmony of the opening scene, which it had only momentarily lost.

Charles Sturridge’s *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, considered by some critics “the most faithful rendering of any Forster novel” (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 27, n5), similarly manages to stress aspects that were less apparent in the book. The characterisation of Harriet Herriton – conveyed by Judy Davis’ forceful performance – is a case in point. Harriet moves centre stage to embody the contrast that the novel draws between England and Italy. Her subdued and gloomy irritation in England (where she is visibly run by her mother) is magnified in Italy, where she becomes strong-willed and self-righteous to the point of madness. Always in dark clothes (or wearing a light blouse with stain-like violets which she has in duplicate) and with a make-up that makes her look unattractive, Harriet provides a striking contrast with the naturally nice, joyful Italians. This is confirmed in the scene of her arrival at the station of Monteriano, which shows a thin, pale Harriet, wearing black, and shaded by what appears to be a man’s umbrella, sitting at a distance from a fat Italian lady dressed in white, who addresses her, with no success. Harriet’s xenophobia is immediately established: she rejects any attempts at proximity with Italian people, refuses to share a carriage with this lady (she turns out to be the opera singer), is rude and bad-tempered towards her Italian landlady and inconsiderate towards the other pension guests. In the carriage, Harriet’s dismissal of the Italian landscape (which Philip is praising) is undermined by the fact that her eyesight has been impaired – something has got into her eye and, significantly, it is a

one-eyed Harriet that first sees (and fails to see) Italy. Throughout the film, Harriet's chauvinistic attitudes are comically displayed: she refuses to speak (or learn) a word of Italian; she is openly hostile to Italian people, their food, customs and religion (she hides the pension's picture of the Virgin Mary under her bed). In fact, the film relishes in placing Harriet among Italian people (as in the opera, when she 'shushes' and calls them 'babies'), among Italian children or, when she is spying on Philip, among Italian men in the *caff  *. It fully confirms Forster's pronouncement of Harriet at the opera as 'fretful and insular' (WAFT, 108). Italy is physically hard on Harriet: besides her eye injury, she suffers from the heat, is hit by a bouquet of flowers at the opera, and, in the end, is involved in a terrible road accident under stormy weather.

The opposition between England and Italy is successfully captured on other levels. The film's panorama shots alternate between the dry, brown fields of Italy and its vineyards and the green pastures of southern England. Italy is effectively portrayed as a land of people: unlike England, whose scenes are largely set indoors and in private spaces (the only public spaces being outside the church and on the train), the Italian scenes show rowdy, noisy groups of people – bands of children running in the streets, women praying aloud (as in Lilia's birth-giving, clearly a communal event), men drinking together or playing cards. In England, it is the Herriton women and a slightly bored Philip that we see playing cards. The gender distinction is more than obvious: unlike 'feminine' England, Italy is filled with men. At the opera, in the *caff  * Garibaldi, playing the *pallone*, or at Lilia's funeral, men dominate the public sphere (which, in turn, dominates the Italian scenes). The physicality of Italian men is emphasised, not only through their bodies, but also their manners and language. For the sake, no doubt, of authenticity, all dialogues between Italians are carried out in Italian (an aspect which also stresses their 'otherness'). The film also brings out more vividly the relationship between Lilia and Gino – the sexual attraction, but also the age gap between the two characters (played by a boyish Giovanni Guidelli and a more mature Helen Mirren, with grey hairs sticking out) and their gradual estrangement. Lilia's unhappiness is presented (as in the novel) as a cultural blunder. We recognise it when, in the first days of their married life, between kisses and embraces, she confidently tells Gino, 'I'm going to have real English tea parties' (cf. WAFT, 52). The film points to her innocence: it is a white-clad Lilia covered with dust that returns to Gino after a failed attempt to run away, and she is also wearing white when we first see her pregnant and unhappy, attending mass and receiving the Holy Communion. Despite the quick pace of the first part of the film, in keeping with the novel's shift of attention, after Lilia's death, to the

triangle between Philip, Miss Abbott and Gino, this shift is never accomplished. The film stresses Miss Abbott's attraction to Gino – in a peeping-Tom scene, he is made the object of her gaze, causing her to faint, conventionally enough, in his arms. Nevertheless, it ignores the attraction between Philip (played by a moustachioed Rupert Graves who resembles E. M. Forster) and Gino. One of the film's greatest achievements is, no doubt, the fact that it makes Gino's baby an actual, physical presence. Throughout most of the novel, in keeping with Forster's intentions, the baby is little more than a cause. This is also Miss Abbott's perception, as the narrator points out: "the child's welfare was a sacred duty to her, not a matter of pride or even of sentiment" (WAFT, 85). She acknowledges this fact when she first sees the baby: "The real thing, lying asleep on a dirty rug, disconcerted her. It did not stand for a principle any longer" (WAFT, 117). By offering us Miss Abbot's unmediated visual experience, the film reinforces this point. Gino is holding the naked baby when he asks Philip what business he wishes with him, thus vividly capturing the novel's dilemma between love and a (now less convincing) 'good' up-bringing (WAFT, 133). The death of the baby is, consequently, likely to be felt with more intensity, even if the film scrupulously respects the novel's omission of explicit, gory images or details.

Another kind of supplement of meanings is produced when these films are taken together: there is a self-ironical, almost parodic, quality in the fact that these films are so close to each other, often in a self-conscious way – in Merchant and Ivory's *A Room with a View*, for instance, Miss Lavish and Miss Bartlett gossip about the romance in Monteriano between an English lady and an Italian man (i.e. the plot of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*). The casting of the same actors produces a particularly interesting set of meanings: as Hutchings has noted, "the cross-casting enables us to make other kinds of connections between these and other texts" (Hutchings, 1995: 220). Rupert Graves connects Alec Scudder to Freddy and Philip Herriton (thus associating the last two to homosexuality); Judy Davis brings together Harriet and Adela (reinforcing their sexual repression and spinsterhood); more predictably, Helena Bonham Carter, a constant presence in these films (she also plays a minor role in *Maurice*), links Lucy Honeychurch to Caroline Abbott and Helen Schlegel, all heroines struggling against social conventions. Hutchings explains this practice in terms of "a desire for the typical – at the expense of attention to the details of Forster's characters" (Hutchings, 1995: 220). But there are also less predictable, but no less suggestive, connections: James Wilby connects Maurice to Charles Wilcox (respectively, the sensitive, socialist-leaning homosexual and the homicidal, possibly homophobic, capitalist); and Anthony Hopkins,

known for his role as Hannibal Lecter, is cast as Henry Wilcox, “the avatar of colonial imperialism” (Hutchings, 1995: 221). The casting of Daniel Day-Lewis as Cecil Vyse allows connections with this actor’s role in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1985), “a paradigm of an alternate, non-nostalgic British cinema” (Hutchings, 1995: 221), which also carries homosexual undertones. Finally, the ‘out’ status of Simon Callow, cast as Mr Beebe, also adds to the film – “his presence obviously draws out the implicit homoeroticism of the pond scene” (Hutchings, 1995: 224).

The ‘heritage film’ argument has undoubtedly contributed to a better understanding of Forster’s film adaptations. However, its tendency to emphasise the differences between the novels and the films (i.e. between a liberal narrative and the film’s aesthetic of containment) has meant that certain similarities and continuities tend to be overlooked. Nostalgia has been one such continuity. The overriding tension between images of past stability, on the one hand, and contemporary perceptions of national and personal disintegration, on the other, was already a feature of Forster’s novels.⁵⁸ More importantly, as Hutchings pointed out, the films are not only nostalgic for Edwardian England (or a version of it), they also embody nostalgia “for an idea of art and culture threatened by the codes of mass and avant-garde culture” (Hutchings: 1995: 213). Forster was well aware of this ‘threat’; even though he reached out his hand towards the social marginalised (such as Leonard Bast), he felt anxious about their misunderstanding/ misappropriation of ‘culture’, as well as their impact on it. Insofar as that they are, generically, ‘films-for-people-who-hate-cinema’ (cit. Higson, 2003: 71) – the films therefore represent the corollary of a process that Forster’s novels were already registering and exploring (cf. Martin Whitby’s misgivings about cinema – AS, 42). Their reliance on a *literal* fidelity to the ‘source’ (i.e. a literary, rather than philosophical fidelity) betrays an idea of culture that Forster so masterly satirised in characters like Miss Lavish, Mr Eager, Cecil Vyse and even Leonard Bast. Finally, the films also betray an idea of literature (understood as a source of cultural authority) which Forster’s fictional practice sought to contradict.

Another frequently neglected continuity is Forster’s visual constructions of otherness, upon which his representations of identity and Englishness are built. Higson has

⁵⁸ Forster had a confessed uncomfortable relationship with modernity. In a letter to his friend Dickinson, he wrote: “I have never had the energy or intelligence to understand contemporary civilization, have never done more than loaf through it and jump out of its way when it seemed likely to hurt me” (Furbank, 1978: 46). However, if in the early novels the recipient of his nostalgia was the nineteenth century, and the golden age of Victorian liberalism in particular, after the Great War, it became the Edwardian age (cf. Hill, 1999: SEE). As Philip Gardner has pointed out, in his long life, he was only capable of depicting in his fiction pre-war England (Gardner, 1973: 2), after which he had only been able to write “remembrance of things past” (Gardner, 1973: xvii).

sustained that Forster is not ‘a novelist of place, but rather of ideas and manners’ and that, more strikingly, though he is concerned with Englishness, “rarely is that identity framed as permanent and unchanging” (Higson, 2006: 101). However, this is not entirely true. As Hutchings has noted, Forster’s interest in place went to the lengths of inventing places – such as Monteriano and Chandrapore – “out of modified versions of actual places”, which ask to be recognised as *typical*. Hutchings rightly relates this practice to tourism, as well as to Forster’s emphasis on the visual (Hutchings, 1995: 215). Forster, this critic rightly stresses, was “intensely concerned with vision” (Hutchings, 1995: 215), which bound him to a realist literary project rather than a modernist one. This constitutes one of the paradoxes of his fiction: he attempts to deal with modernity while remaining committed to “the project of a realist narrative predicated upon a controlling vision – precisely the project called into question by modernity and in artistic modernism” (Hutchings, 1995: 216). Furthermore, despite being critical of some of the aspects of Englishness (clearly, of the conservative type represented by Mrs Wilcox), Forster’s own alternative project of Englishness (closer to Margaret’s vision) still amounts to a ‘capacious liberalism’, which he believed could accommodate social ‘others’ like women, gays and the lower classes (or part of them). This project contemplated the enfranchisement of the working class and women (which was at the time being fought by the Unions and the suffragettes and violently opposed to by the Liberal government),⁵⁹ but it still held on to a vision of rural organicism and class harmony. The main difference between Forster’s vision and the films’ is ultimately the difference between a pre-democratic liberalism – in which democracy still had to be realised – and a post-democratic liberalism, in which democracy has been realised (at least formally, within a liberal-democratic frame). Paul Dave has pointed out that the class distinction between the Emersons (educated lower-middle class) and the Honeychurchs (bourgeois upper-middle-class) is likely to escape contemporary viewers (Dave, 2006: 31-32), but this is also a consequence of the fact that they have merged into an educated middle class, from which contemporary audiences largely derive. The films can produce an effect of complacent liberal superiority: the characters’ predicaments are interpreted “in terms of a contemporary sensibility which is assumed to be more humane and liberal than that prevailing in the past” (Hill, 1999: 84). In other words, we now feel that we know better than Lucy (women’s sexual emancipation has

⁵⁹ Hobsbawm estimates that, despite the many Reform Acts, “in 1914 about half the working class was *de facto* disenfranchised” (Hobsbawm, 1994: 87). The suffragist movement was particularly strong between 1906 and 1914 (Cf. Hobsbawm, 1994: 212-213), with police notoriously resorting to the force-feeding of suffragist prisoners.

taken place) or Maurice (gays do not need to be ‘cured’) or even Lilia (we would never give tea-parties in Italy!). Consequently, in assuming that our times are more liberal than Forster’s, the films emphasise the most obvious aspects of Forster’s social critique – those that endorse and reinforce his liberal values – but fail to acknowledge the less apparent ones, namely, all the doubts that his work also expressed or hinted at concerning those same values.

Finally, another instance of this continuity consists in the treatment of capitalism. Although Forster was critical of the suburban upper-classes he knew so well and was himself part of, his attitude to the material comfort that this often-oppressive milieu also provided was far more ambiguous, as Margaret Schlegel’s words, ‘hurrah for riches’ suggest. Her cry implies ‘riches’ for all (an idea voiced by some of Forster’s friends, in Bloomsbury), as opposed to ‘for some’, and it is hardly consistent with the image of Forster as a critic of materialism (cf. Higson, 2006: 100; 107), an image that rests on the assumption that liberal-humanist values are opposed to marketplace values, which I have tried to call into question in this chapter.

Conclusion

Philip’s advice to Lilia, given at the outset of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, “the people are more marvellous than the land” (WAFT, 19), is the expression of a certain kind of relational identity and identification, that, as we have seen, approaches national difference in terms of fundamental ‘otherness’. The novel brings out the limitations of this kind of approach: on another occasion, Mrs Herriton voices a similar focus on ‘the people’, but only to damn rather than praise the Italians: “It may be full of beautiful pictures and churches, but we cannot judge a country by anything but its men” (WAFT, 73). The extreme expression of this logic is found in xenophobic Harriet, for whom the overlap between land, people and ‘otherness’ borders on total repugnance: “Foreigners are a filthy nation” (WAFT, 90). Whether it serves to extol a people’s virtues or deplore their faults, the rendering of inter-national relationships in these terms results in a limited relational space, which ranges from indifference, romanticism, paternalism to complete revulsion. The same process applies at the level of social class. Leonard Bast (himself the stand-in for those irrepresentable ‘Others’, the working classes) is, to take up Savage’s words, “a lay figure, an effigy made to walk and talk in such a way as to bolster up the liberal philosophy which inspires the book” (Savage, 1950: 66). Like the

Italians, he is subsidiary to the plot; like them too, he can ultimately be removed from the scene.

But neither nationalism nor a liberal philosophy can fully account for this kind of relationship. What distances the Herritons from the Italians, and the Wilcoxes (and, for that matter, the Schlegels) from the Basts is their economic position. Philip Herriton is not only the cultivated, liberal tourist – he is the moneyed tourist too. In Forster's Italian novels, money is what ultimately distinguishes (and links) tourists and locals. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Philip's two missions amount to economic transactions: to buy Gino off, so he does not marry Lilia; to buy the baby from him, so it will not be raised as 'a papist'. In *A Room with a View*, Miss Bartlett bribes the driver, who has been a witness to George and Lucy's kiss (RWV, 92). A bored Lucy heads to the Italian souvenir shops, prompting the narrator's ironical comment, "But though she spent nearly seven lire the gates of liberty seemed still unopened" (RWV, 61). Lady Borlase, the mother-in-law of that other tourist, Martin Whitby, "never planned her holiday. She took plenty of money to a likely place, and then saw what happened" (AS, 39). The tourist experience at the turn of the century is clearly a matter of economic transaction – one of the aims of Baedeker, as Buzard points out, was 'to protect tourists against extortion' (Buzard, 1993: 310). However, the opposite case, that is, the protection of the local population from tourism's exploitative impact, remains largely exterior to the novels (though not to some of the short stories, such as "The Eternal Moment", as Buzard points out). In Forster's novels money is basically posited as a neutral medium, even though it is ultimately associated (sometimes ironically) with the moral *values* of those who have it.

These two aspects – the conceptualisation of identity within a frame of oppositional 'otherness' and its integration in a given set of economic relations – converge and receive a more explicit treatment in Orwell's early fiction. Orwell's 'others' are a vast group that includes the respectable lower middle classes, the colonised, the left intellectuals, but also and most importantly, women. In many respects, Orwell is following in Forster's footsteps, but there are important differences. For one thing, the impulse towards 'connection' that had animated Forster's work seems to have weakened, and, when it is realised, it carries a different understanding. These differences can be more fully appreciated if we compare the following three scenes set on the Thames embankment, in London. Unable to find a job, and having spent her last coins, Dorothy Hare stops by the river, near Waterloo (CD, 150). In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, a depressed and pauperised Gordon Comstock also crosses Waterloo Bridge,

contemplating a future of destitution (KAF, 76). The two scenes bring to mind Margaret and Helen's night walk on Chelsea Embankment, but the contrast could not have been greater. The upper-class ladies are joined by Mr Wilcox in pleasant conversation (curiously, one of their topics is Leonard Bast, and will lead to the clerk's downfall – HE, 138-139). Mr Wilcox is concerned that they are unaccompanied by a man at night (HE, 137). Now, in Depression years, Dorothy is on her own, hungry, jobless and penniless (her last meal has been bread, margarine and tea – CD, 149), heading to Trafalgar Square, where she will spend a surreal sequence of cold, sleepless nights. The London of the Schlegels is clearly very different from that of Dorothy and Gordon Comstock. Now, in the thirties, there is no way in which the two worlds can be connected, not because of the absence of a philanthropist lady that can act as a bridge, but because that possibility is not even conceivable. Class barriers have never looked so high and definitive. Dorothy's and Gordon's stories are, to be sure, class-crossing stories, but they are also stories of confirmation: they ultimately confirm existing boundaries and established relations of 'otherness'. For Gordon, stepping 'out' of his class is a matter of 'sinking', of going 'under ground'; for Dorothy, the world of destitution and the world of Knype Hill could not have been further apart. In both cases, as we have seen, the move towards the 'other' implies a certain loss of consciousness (and, related to it, of rational capacities and intelligence).⁶⁰ Back in her town, towards the end of the novel, she has no difficulty in hiding her 'down-and-out' past from her neighbours and acquaintances:

The fact is that people who live in small country towns have only a very dim conception of anything that happens more than ten miles from their own front door. The world outside is *terra incognita*, inhabited, no doubt, by dragons and anthropophagi, but not particularly interesting. (CD, 288, italics in original)

These words fittingly recall Lucy's description of middle-class suburbia, which I have associated, above, with the fact that she is a 'tourist'. The 'tourist gaze' – the tourism of

⁶⁰ As we have seen, Dorothy lacks a full consciousness regarding her down-and-out experiences, which she cannot and then will not impart to anyone. Her unconsciousness/ semi-consciousness establishes the incompatibility between her life among tramps, beggars and hop-pickers and her old life – “she had no remembered past, no standards of comparison to make her ashamed of” (CD, 96). She accepts this life because she is “only dimly aware, if at all, that that other, unremembered life that lay behind her had been in some way different from this” (CD, 98). When she regains her memory, in the hopfields, she feels shame again (CD, 131) and regards her work differently: “she could hardly bring herself to go on with the stupid work of picking, and the discomforts and bad food were intolerable now that she had memories to compare them with” (CD, 134). This idea that people need a standard of comparison (rooted in the past) to evaluate their present experiences will be developed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which I will discuss in chapter five.

squalor that sometimes merges with social reportage and which Gordon often assumes (e.g. when he is arrested – KAF, 204-206) – is also detectable in Dorothy. It is from an external position that she observes the hop-pickers when she first arrives in the fields: “Dorothy envied them greatly. How happy they looked” (CD, 105). And even when she becomes one of them, dozing in the sun in a Sunday afternoon, the feeling of belonging that she appears to be experiencing is undermined by way of a much-used mechanism, an animal simile: “like cows. It was all you felt equal to, after a week of heavy work” (CD, 122).

Daphne Patai has rightly noted Orwell’s difficulty in attributing “a full consciousness like his own to people he assigns to the category of ‘other’ in his scheme of things” (Patai, 1984: 105), a category alternatively occupied by women, colonial subjects and working class people. Raymond Williams has also noted this trait and attributed it to a ‘social deformity’: “Cultivated men who describe the man in the street from outside. It is in and through this social deformity, inflicted on him by his class and education, that Orwell reaches for the idea of an extended or even common humanity” (Williams, 1971: 43). Though it had greater expression in Orwell’s work, this ‘social deformity’ was already present in Forster’s fiction: the image of Leonard arriving home – “like a rabbit that is going to bolt into its hole” (HE: 59) – is certainly in line with Orwell’s use of animal metaphors (curiously, bringing to mind Dorothy’s surname).

But it is Orwell’s treatment of women that stresses his strong allegiance to the codes of ‘otherness’ and its political uses. As I tried to show above, Orwell’s social critique is often undermined by his stereotypical conceptions of femininity. In his gallery of feminine types the figure of the spinster or the ‘old maid’ certainly occupies a prominent place. In this, too, he resembles Forster, to whom the description of Mr Beebe, in *A Room with a View*, may fittingly apply – “all his life he had loved to study maiden ladies” (RWV, 53). The automatic, and insincere, unselfishness of these women, and their self-effaced abnegation are recurrent motifs in Forster’s fiction: they encapsulate ‘feminine’ Sawston, and are the trademark of women like Miss Bartlett (RWV, 24, 33) and, no doubt, Miss Abbott (whose ‘wasted love’ for Gino will leave her stranded as a spinster) – women who have renounced love and whose social role then becomes to surveil and control other (usually younger) women. Lucy’s decision to be independent, which makes her mother compare her to Miss Bartlett (RWV, 214), is criticised for this reason: she is rejecting love and preparing to enlist the ‘armies of darkness’ (RWV, 194). But the picture that Forster offers is far more interesting. Miss Abbott fails to control Lilia, who, in a reversal of the usual pattern, is older than her

chaperone but refuses to give up her sexuality. Furthermore, despite constantly interfering in Lucy's relationship with the Emersons (RWV, 48; RWV, 89), Miss Bartlett, is not altogether indifferent to love – as the novel suggests, she could have stopped Lucy from meeting Mr Emerson one last time, but she chose not to. George believes, “she fought us on the surface, and yet she hoped” (RWV, 230).⁶¹

These are dimensions that Dorothy Hare and Orwell's other ‘old maids’ lack. Portrayed as childlike and usually pitied,⁶² his ‘old maids’ are never endowed with ideas of their own or granted interesting lives. Even Dorothy's decision to go back to her previous life – a scene that invites comparisons with Miss Abbott and Philip Herriton's last conversation on the train – is not fully her own. As Patai rightly notes, it has been guided by Mr Warburton, “who is granted the superior insight that Dorothy lacks” (Patai, 1984: 108). More importantly, Orwell's ‘old maids’ are denied the possibility of something happening in their lives – most of all, love. Like aspidistras, they are condemned to wither away in back parlours. Like the aspidistra (though this had been meant ironically), they have also become a symbol of England – a symbol of ‘quintessential’ *Englishness*,⁶³ which links them (by opposition) to the more vital, sexual (and male) *decency* of the ‘common people’.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Many of Forster's ‘old maids’ are granted interesting lives: Helen Schlegel is allowed to become a single mother; Miss Lavish may be snobbish, pretentious and even ridiculous (Miss Bartlett's description of her as ‘emancipated’ is tinged with the narrator's irony – RWV, 70), but she is a character in her own right. The characterisation of Adela Quested, another ‘old maid’, if not always sympathetic, similarly suggests personality and depth. On the other hand, it is also true that women living on their own or as ‘old maids’ often border on madness – Helen Schlegel's ‘unbalanced’ behaviour is associated with her maiden status at twenty-five (HE, 272), and Miss Avery, another old maid (HE, 260), though attributed an “unostentatious nobility” (HE, 267), a quality derived from her association with Mrs Wilcox, is also described as a touch cranky. For Forster, however, ‘madness’ is a condition full of possibilities and nuances, as the figure of Mrs Moore suggests.

⁶² Of Miss Minns, Tubby Bowling pronounces: “It's written all over her that her father was a clergyman and sat on her pretty heavily while he lived. They're a special by-product of the middle classes, these women who turn into withered hags before they even manage to escape from home. Poor old Miss Minns, for all her wrinkles, still looks exactly like a child” (CUFA, 144-145); Julia Comstock, Rosemary and Elizabeth are also portrayed as potential (or confirmed, as in Julia's case) spinsters.

⁶³ Among “the characteristic fragments of the English scene”, Orwell cites “the old maid biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning” (Orwell: 2000e, 139). In 1993 John Major drew on the collective repertoire of stock images of Englishness – many of them popularised by Orwell – to appeal to the British electorate. One of the figures evoked was, again, the “bicycling spinster” (Giles and Middleton, 1995: 5).

⁶⁴ The negative counterpoint to the sacrificial virtues of the old maid is her sexual puritanism. In “The Lion and the Unicorn”, Orwell characterises the common people, among other things, as “not puritanical” and “without definite religious belief”, even if they “have retained a deep tinge of Christian feeling” (Orwell: 2000e, 141). Dorothy's clinging to a vague “need of faith” is thus re-asserted (Orwell: 2000e, 292, 294). Orwell's Englishness is encapsulated in a set of values, with ‘decency’ occupying a central place. The term has become increasingly difficult to relate to, due to its quaintness. It is therefore interesting to read a critic closer to Orwell, John Atkins, to realise its full evocative power. Atkins pointed out how Orwell's key notion of ‘decency’ was intricately linked to England – “the special connotation of this English word is a complex of English living and English attitudes” (Atkins, 1954: 1). He goes on to explain this concept in liberal and Christian terms: “decency is based on respect for the other person, and respect derives from love – not sexual passion, of course, but the quieter passion, or conviction, that all

And this brings me back to *Howards End*. The book was on the whole well received, in Furbank's words, it "hit the note of the time" (Furbank, 1977: 188). As Philip Dodd has demonstrated, the hegemonic idea of Englishness which circulated around the turn of the century compounded the ideas of rural, upper-class and male (Dodd, 1986: 4-5). Forster instilled the first two elements with a sense of mysticism, and, by stressing the femininity of the Schlegels, displaced the last one. Unlike Orwell – who, as Daphne Patai noted, has Gordon Comstock express the joys of 'family' in the reductive terms of "male lineage only" (Patai, 1984: 115) – Forster conceives of *Howards End*, the symbol of England, as the bequest of a female line of inheritance, to be passed down (via Margaret) to a 'bastard' (a pun with *Bast*) and a 'hybrid', the male offspring of the 'lower' classes.

Forster's alternative to the conservative vision of Englishness is, nevertheless, only partial, as he clings to the image of an upper-class pastoral. But there is a more serious problem with his vision of Englishness, a problem that has eluded most critics. In his critique of *Howards End*, Peter Widdowson conceded that, unlike *A Passage to India*, the book still contained an attempt "to affirm a system of values against the destructive forces" (Widdowson, 1977: 60). But he then goes on to object to the fact that the novel "proposes an idea *about* life" (Widdowson, 1977: 94). Widdowson regards this as a blind-spot' in the liberal-humanist conception of 'value':

It is symptomatic of a fundamental blind-spot in the liberal-humanist consciousness that it assumes its own values, its own form of 'civilisation', are absolute and for all time and that culture is static having achieved its apotheosis in the liberal-humanist image" (Widdowson, 1977: 90)

Liberal values, however, are 'absolute' and 'static', not as a result of a blind-spot, but because they are embedded in a society that considers itself 'resolved'. *Howards End* takes up this stance, hence the tackling of the social question in terms of inclusion (and, therefore, of identity),⁶⁵ as well as the pervasive anxiety over the passing of time, and

men are brothers and that unless we keep this in mind we will slip into a belief that all men are enemies, with the inevitable results" (Atkins, 1954: 6). 'Decency' is also offered as a corrective to the excesses of an individualistic capitalist world (Atkins, 1954: 14).

⁶⁵ Identity has acquired an increasingly more important political role, even for the Left, and within cultural studies, which has taken up the re-definition of Englishness as one of its main projects. An example is Stuart Hall's project of ethnicity, which sought to build an alternative to racist Englishness: "We are beginning to think about how to represent a non-coercive and a more diverse conception of ethnicity, to set against the embattled, hegemonic conception of 'Englishness' which, under Thatcherism, stabilizes so much of the dominant political and cultural discourses, and which, because it is hegemonic, does not represent itself as an ethnicity at all." (S. Hall 1996b: 447). Hall's project for an 'ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity', in contrast, refused to define itself, as Englishness had done, "by marginalizing, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other identities" (S. Hall 1996b: 447). He also

‘rural decay’ in particular (HE: 29). That England should find herself symbolised by a house seems, in the end, more fitting than this critic is prepared to grant (cf. Widdowson, 1977: 108).

The affirmation of ‘a system of values’ is what *A Room with a View* does not try to do and what makes it, in my opinion, a superior novel. In this unpretentious comedy of manners, England has not yet been reduced to a symbol and Lucy’s ethical act cannot be properly understood in relation to a ‘value’. There is something else going on, which in the novel assumes the form of love. By contrast, love appears only briefly at the beginning of *Howards End*, in Helen Schlegel and Paul Wilcox’s failed romance, which is thought unsuitable and impractical and readily dismissed as a ‘blunder’. It is significant that, instead of an open field of violets or an open piazza where ‘tremendous things’ may happen, we now have a house which is immediately identified as a repository of ‘values’, and which is confirmed by tradition rather than truth.

Between the ‘Lucy novel’ and *Howards End* (roughly, 1904-1910) something changed in Forster. If his first novel was reluctant to give Gino’s baby over to a ‘proper’ education (even though it still harbours doubts that its father’s love will suffice), *Howards End* has no such reservations about Leonard’s son. In the first case, the baby dies; in the second, it is the baby’s father who dies, thus clearing the way for an upbringing that, though not exactly ‘proper’ (by Sawstonian standards), will certainly be solid and liberal. Forty years later, Forster would dismiss the novel:

(...) not a single character in it for whom I care... Perhaps the house in *Howards End*, for which I did once care, took the place of the people and now that I no longer care for it, their barrenness has become evident. I feel pride in the achievement, but cannot love it, and occasionally the swish of the skirts and the non-sexual embraces irritate... (cit. Furbank, 1977: 190)

It is interesting to note that, among Forster’s novels, *Howards End* is the only one that leaves out any tacit or direct references to homoeroticism. In this, too, the gap between what England was and what England, in his view, ought to be could hardly be missed. When he finished *Maurice* in 1914, Forster wrote that it could not be published “until my death or England’s” (cit. Furbank, 1977: 259). To a certain extent, *Maurice* offered the mirror image of Margaret’s England: the country house gives way to the green woods; the upper-class ethos is replaced by a more socialist one, embodied in Maurice

acknowledges that “the new cultural politics is operating on new and quite distinct ground – specifically, contestation over what it means to be ‘British’.” (S. Hall 1996b: 447). Hall’s project is, in many ways, a continuation of Forster’s ‘capacious liberalism’.

and Alec's relationship; and the compromises of heterosexual marriage (Clive's marriage) are exposed as hypocritical and replaced by the full embrace (albeit external to society) of homosexual passion. In other words, while *Howards End* was making a successful career (and building up Forster's reputation), Forster himself, away from the public eye, was fantasising over a rather different England, so different, indeed, as to appear irreconcilable with the one he had previously and more definitively illustrated.

There can be no doubt that there are connections and continuities between Forster's and Orwell's visions of Englishness. Crucial to Orwell's construction of Englishness, as we have seen, was the figure of the uprooted, effeminate and effete left-winger. This idea was already present (albeit not in such simplistic and antagonistic terms) in Forster's own version of Englishness. Francis Mulhern has teased out this link: "Eric Blair grew into the role of a lesser Wilcox, but then remade himself as a writer, George Orwell, who would enter the moral and symbolic world of those social others, and discover in it a judgement on the Schlegels of his own day (Mulhern, 2000: 35). The decadent, atheist, sexually loose Warburton is one such Schlegel. Interestingly, Warburg is also depicted as a tourist – during the time of Dorothy's predicaments, he had been abroad, travelling in France, Austria and Rome. In a letter to Dorothy, he justifies his long silence: "as you know, I avoid my fellow-countrymen most strenuously on these trips. They are disgusting enough even at home, but in foreign parts their behaviour makes me so ashamed of them that I generally try to pass myself off as an American" (CD, 252). There is little left here of the gentle irony with which Forster mocked his own tourists and this kind of 'tourist snobbery'. In fact, what began in Forster's work as a qualified critique of 'pseudo-culture', straddling (despite differences) all classes, and characterising the futile pursuit of the 'real' in terms of 'authenticity', would later become, with Orwell (though the Schlegels facilitated this change), the specific attribute of a cosmopolitan, literary and unreliable left intelligentsia, of which Warburton is, surely, an early representative.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Williams took issue with Orwell's perception of the (Left) intellectual middle-class as "shallow, negative, and out of touch with and against their own country" (Williams: 1971, 25), but the idea gained widespread currency (inclusive on the Left). Michael Walzer would use this description against Williams, to defend Orwell's 'embedded' (English) socialism, against Williams's 'deracinated' (internationalist, Marxist) socialism (Walzer, 2002: 119).

Chapter Four

‘Encounter’ as *Event*: Empire and Imperialism in E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* and George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*

Empire provided the setting – and the major topic – for Forster’s last novel, *A Passage to India*, and Orwell’s first, *Burmese Days*. The two authors tapped on their first-hand experiences in the Indian subcontinent – Forster, as a visitor (between 1912 and 1913), then as the secretary of the Maharaja of Dewas Senior, a native province of India (in 1921); Orwell as an officer of the Imperial Police in Burma (between 1922 and 1928). Inevitably, perhaps, considering their realist treatment of a social-historical theme, as well as the political context into which they were published, the two novels were primarily read in relation to their stated and implied attitudes to Empire. Forster’s book, in particular, became paradigmatic of the shift that was taking place during the first half of the twentieth century away from the high imperialism of the Victorian age (Queen Victoria was crowned Empress in 1876), towards a more uneasy and critical stance. Or, as far as the literature on Empire is concerned, from what Shamsul Islam has called the ‘Era of Confidence’, in which “the imperial idea was taken for granted”, with Kipling as its highest exponent (Islam, 1979: 13), to the ‘Era of Doubt and Melancholy’, which began around 1914, with the First World War, “when the confidence in the imperial idea was seriously shaken and the whole *raison d’être* of the Empire began to be questioned” (Islam, 1979: 13). The last phase overlaps with the acceleration of the decolonisation process – which culminated in 1947, with India’s independence – a process in which *A Passage to India* is believed to have played a role. In 1934, the novel was being described as “a book which no student of the Indian question can disregard” (Burra, 1989: 321) and Nirad Chaudhuri would later take it to task for misrepresenting the British Raj and ultimately contributing to the (shameful, in his view) withdrawal of the British from India.¹

Forster’s novel was also an intervention in literary history: acclaimed, immediately after its publication, as a major work of English literature, it definitively established Forster’s

¹ According to this critic, its influence was greater “in British imperial politics than in English literature”, which leads him to dismiss it as a political pamphlet, “a powerful weapon in the hands of the anti-imperialists” (Chaudhuri, 1968: 115).

literary reputation, which had taken off with *Howards End* (cf. Allen, 2000: 96),² thus elevating India to the status of a worthy literary subject.³ As Shamsul Islam pointed out, there was a vast body of literature inspired in the Raj, but, with the exception of Rudyard Kipling, it had little literary merit (Islam, 1979: 4-5). Drawing on a sizeable body of Anglo-Indian fiction,⁴ *A Passage to India* went on to become one of the few canonical literary works on an imperialist topic.⁵ Together with Kipling, Forster had managed to “give depth and respectability to literature of the Raj” (Islam, 1979: 5).

Burmese Days was to occupy a much smaller place in colonial and literary history: the work of an apprentice writer who would soon redefine himself as a ‘political writer’, it was a minor literary achievement, being stylistically dated and largely derivative of other Empire novels. In time, it was also dwarfed by Orwell’s two political books, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The discussion of the two novels has been largely centred on the appreciation of Forster and Orwell’s attitudes to Empire and imperialism. Especially in Forster’s case, this has been associated with the issue of representation. In early reviews, verisimilitude and the representation of Indians and Anglo-Indians were recurrent topics.⁶ As Benita Parry has

² Evidence of the novel’s high reputation is its early inclusion in the Penguin series (1937) and in the Everyman’s Library series (1942) (Allen 2000: 96).

³ India had been the topic of Anglo-Indian fiction, mainly with sensationalist proclivities and aimed at a feminine readership. In one of the first reviews, Rose Macaulay, an admirer of Forster’s work, took great pains to dispel the readers’ anxieties over the book’s apparently *unworthy* theme:

Those who fear that [Forster’s] peculiar gifts *may be wasted in a novel about India* can be reassured; (...) He can make *even these brown men live*; they are as alive as his London ladies, his young Italians, his seaside aunts; they are drawn with an equal and a more amazing insight and vision. (Macaulay, 1973: 197, emphasis added)

⁴ In *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (Singh, 1934), Bhupal Singh was one of the first to draw attention to the novel’s embeddedness in a longer tradition of Anglo-Indian fiction and, by extension, to its association with a set of conventions and clichés that appealed to a specific audience, largely of Anglo-Indian provenance.

⁵ Parry has rightly wondered: “The historical context cannot explain why British literature about India can claim only two canonical writers and one major novel” (Parry, 1998: 32). Teresa Hubel has equally remarked on how the Anglo-Indian novel has been marginalized from the canon of English literature, a trend she attributes to the anti-imperialist feeling prevalent at the time of canon building, which took place during the modernist era (Hubel, 1996: 6). As Hubel also notes, Indian fiction in English (Indo-Anglian literature) and modern British culture have been channeled into separate canons (Hubel, 1996: 6).

⁶ As many critics have noted, the overall picture is that of an Anglo-Indian press predominantly hostile to the novel. This is patent in an anonymous review published in the *Statesman* (Calcutta) in August 1924, which begins by describing the novel as “a work of outstanding ability” (Anonymous, 1973: 244), but then concludes: “If Chandrapore were a type of the Indian station, India would certainly be a lost dominion.” (Anonymous, 1973: 245) The reviewer also complains, “Mr. Forster is not kind to the official in India” (idem). After dwelling on the technical errors of Aziz’s trial, which he perceives as likely to produce an “ill-balanced effect on the informed reader,” he concludes: “One is led to speculate as to what Mr. Forster’s Indian experience may have been. Was he taken round the country by the gifted lady president of the Theosophical Society?” (Anonymous, 1973: 246) Peter Childs also agrees with this general estimation (Childs 2002: 49). Forster himself reported of receiving ‘abusive’ letters from Anglo-Indians (Natwar-Singh, 1964: xiii). Nihal Singh’s review, published in the *Modern Review* of Calcutta is

pointed out, this built up into a major line of criticism which constituted the novel as “a work of realism” to be “praised or execrated for its representation of the British in India” (Parry, 1998: 225), as can be seen, for example, in G. K. Das’ *E. M. Forster’s India* (1977). After the eighties, with the emergence of postcolonial studies, in the wake of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, criticism took a different turn.⁷ Representation remained a central issue, but, as Peter Childs has pointed out, it was now posited in terms of the construction of the Other, focusing on issues like “orientalism, Indian nationalism, gender and homosexuality” (Childs, 2002: 39). ‘Realist’ or ‘mimetic’ interpretations of the novel gave way to a more sophisticated approach which conceptualised the links between literature and empire as mediated by an imperialist *discourse* (understood, in Foucauldian terms, as a form of power). While Shamsul Islam could still think in terms of an ‘imperial idea’ and regard the literature of the Raj as producing “a body of myths or stereotyped images of India that rationalised the mystique of the Raj” (Islam, 1979: 5) – and which, after 1914, were difficult to sustain but continued to be peddled in a self-delusive romantic manner that resulted, at best, in ‘mixed feelings’ (Islam, 1979: 103) – Said, on the other hand, spoke of a more intricate set of relations. In *Culture and Imperialism*, he considered Forster’s novel “immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references and experiences” (Said, 1994: xii). His concern was less with an ‘idea’ as with a discourse that animated, but went beyond, ideas and myths: “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (Said, 1994: xiii). Said’s work thus paved the way to a multiplicity of readings, postcolonial, feminist, gay and queer, which took up representation, but

also fundamentally concerned with this issue, as his title, “Indians and Anglo-Indians: as portrayed to Britons”) suggests. Singh regards the negative representation of Hindus and Muslims as likely to confirm the prejudices of British readers, namely, “the notion that India is a congeries of clashing races and creeds, that the Indian standard of morality is low, that Indians cannot dispense with the British crutches, and the like” (Singh: 1973, 266). On the other hand, he trusts that such harm may be “counterbalanced by the good that may result through the exposé of Anglo-India by an Englishman” (Singh, 1973: 266).

⁷ It is, indeed, possible to make out distinct patterns in the reception of *A Passage to India* and *Burmese Days* before and after the ‘postcolonial moment’. As the editors of a collection of essays have put it:

Literature has been radically transformed since the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978 and is veering towards what is becoming better known as cultural studies. Said’s seminal work led to a heightened consciousness about the need to re-examine texts from colonial archives and the importance of situating ourselves in a post-colonial world still struggling to dispel traces of colonialism (Zaman et al., 1999: ix)

Postcolonialism has also translated, as its critics have pointed out, in a shift away from political economy critiques of colonialism and imperialism, which prioritised the study of colonial resistance and emancipation (cf. Brennan, 2004: 120-1) to colonial discourse analysis, which went on to foreground discursive understandings of the colonial encounter as resting on processes of negotiation, symbiosis and ambiguity, rather than conflict or antagonism (cf. Parry, 2004: 75-6).

removed it from the earlier associations with a realist code, turning to approaches like deconstruction to tease out in the text ‘other narratives’.

In keeping with the dominant critical trend of Orwellian studies, *Burmese Days* has chiefly attracted (psycho)biographical forms of criticism, mostly interested in establishing the nature of the author’s imperialism and its place in his overall political vision. Critics sympathetic with Orwell’s socialism have taken pains to justify his foray in Burma – “an anomaly”, for Atkins, in view of Orwell’s alleged dislike of authority (Atkins, 1954: 45) – and assumed his participation in the British Raj as a side issue, an “incident” or “accident” (Crick, 1992: 596), which matters only insofar as it helps to account for his political development.⁸

The issue of representation continues to be relevant, as postcolonial readings of the two novels have demonstrated. However, I propose in my analysis to move a step further, towards the possibility of addressing the question of representation beyond an identitarian framework, beyond, in other words, what Alain Badiou has called ‘the ethics of difference’ (Badiou, 2001: 20). Although I retain in my analysis most of the insights produced by postcolonial and feminist approaches, I will keep to the Badiouian concept of ‘event’ to read the colonial encounter not as an encounter with the ‘Other’ (or not only that), but rather as an event, and one that largely *fails* to take place. It is in this sense that I regard Forster’s central metaphor – not the caves, but *what happened* in the caves – as symptomatic of the liberal politics that the novel endorses, even though it is inspiring in many other ways. Although Orwell is less successful than Forster in weaving the intricate strands of liberal imperialism into a central powerful image, the story of John Flory contains many of the themes and concerns of *A Passage to India*, even if lacking Forster’s more complex vision and literary prowess. Finally, my reading of David Lean’s adaptation of *A Passage to India* follows the same scheme. I will concentrate on the extent that his choices, though remaining basically within the same ideological purview, have resulted in a different story – a possibility that I wish to link not so much to the use of a different medium (cinema) but to the specific cultural and political formation in which the film was produced.

⁸ In the 1992 edition of his much-acclaimed biography (the first edition had come out in 1980), Bernard Crick publicly recognised that his work had underestimated Orwell’s imperial experience in Burma (Crick, 1992: 596-7). The rectification of this ‘slip’ was made in Michael Sheldon’s biography (1991), but has also been prompted by the ‘postcolonial’ revisionism that emerged in the late eighties, nevertheless remained tied up with (psycho)biographical criticism. To read criticism on Orwell’s *Burmese Days* before the influence of postcolonialism was felt in literary studies is to pale at the silences concerning the novel’s theme (e.g. Oxley, 1967). An exception appears to have been Raymond Williams, who acknowledged the presence and formative role of the empire in Orwell’s early life (Williams, 1971: 2).

4.1. Forster's *Passage*

“As England’s manufacturing aspirations declined”, wrote Alun Howkins, “so its Imperial designs increased” (Howkins, 1986: 65). Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the shift of England’s economy to the South was greatly accelerated, with London becoming the commercial, political and cultural ‘heart’ of an Empire in which ‘the sun never set’. Forster’s characterisation of the Wilcoxes as London-based imperial entrepreneurs is in keeping with these historical developments. As Edward Said noted, the links with Empire in *Howards End* are ‘hard to miss’ (Said, 1994: 77): Empire is the main source of the Wilcoxes’ fortune (Henry Wilcox runs a rubber company) and the site of their future careers. When Charles hears of Helen’s engagement to Paul, he cries in disbelief: “He has to make his way out in Nigeria. He couldn’t think of marrying for years, and when he does it must be a woman who can stand the climate” (HE, 35). Paul does go to Nigeria (HE, 78), in this following in his father’s footsteps, who had been “trying to get rich in Cyprus” (HE, 249) when he met (and seduced) sixteen-year-old Jacky.

But if the reality of Empire (though not its effects, or not completely) could be removed from ‘home’ or allowed to remain relatively ‘disconnected’ from it in Forster’s pre-war novels, this was not the case in his last novel, set in a small outpost of the British in India. *A Passage to India* tells the story of two English ladies – Mrs Moore and Adela Quested – on their first visit to India. In their eagerness to know the ‘real’ India, they come across the Indian Doctor Aziz, who invites them to visit the major local attraction, the famous Marabar Caves. Here something takes place that disturbs the younger lady, Adela. Aziz is arrested on sexual assault charges and the case is brought to Court, thus laying bare all the latent tensions between the British rulers and the Indians that had hitherto only been hinted at or dramatised. To everyone’s surprise, Adela drops the charge in court, and the action unravels, with Mrs Moore dying at sea, Adela returning to England, Fielding marrying Mrs Moore’s daughter, and Aziz moving to a princely state, where he remakes his life, now to live in accordance with a newly-found nationalistic sentiment, which allows him to reconcile his own religion (Islam) with Hinduism, in a vision of India that definitely excludes the British.

As with his previous Italian works, *A Passage to India* reflects Forster’s own experiences in the Indian subcontinent. He had first travelled to India in 1912, on invitation of his Indian friend, Syed Ross Masood, and in the company of his

Cambridge friend, the liberal Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson. As Furbank wrote, he travelled in a different spirit from his companion, “less political, more tentative, more exploratory” (Furbank, 1977: 222), in other words, more as a tourist.

This aspect is reflected in the novel: it is as tourists that Adela and Mrs Moore approach India, as James Buzard has noted (Buzard, 1993: 314). Like many of Forster’s earlier tourists, they soon find themselves ‘jaded’ or disappointed: “They had made such a romantic voyage across the Mediterranean and through the sands of Egypt to the harbour of Bombay, to find only a gridiron of bungalows at the end of it” (PI, 46).

The touristic experience seems to be what frames the encounter between the British and the East – Fielding, the School Magistrate and one of the novel’s major characters, feels inclined to compare India to Italy (PI, 79; 278). Although neither Adela nor Mrs Moore carry a Baedeker, their expectations are clearly those of tourists, but not of the common, ‘vulgar’ tourist, as Adela makes clear: “I’m tired of seeing picturesque figures pass before me as a frieze”; “It was wonderful when we landed, but that superficial glamour soon goes” (PI, 49). What Adela wants to see is the ‘real’ India (PI, 46) – a desire immediately associated with Indians in Fielding’s passing remark – “Try seeing Indians” (PI, 48).

It is a glimpse of the ‘real’ India that an omniscient narrator, working in a realist mode, seems to produce in the novel’s opening paragraph, but the effect is anything but touristic:

Except for the Marabar Caves – and they are twenty miles off – the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There are no bathing steps on the river front, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream. The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest. Chandrapore was never large or beautiful (...). The zest for decoration stopped in the eighteenth century, nor was it ever democratic. In the bazaars there is no painting and scarcely any carving. The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. (PI, 31)

The images of lack, absence, scarcity, failure, emptiness, filth and physical degradation dominate the passage. Chandrapore, the narrator seems to warn, is not to be approached for its tourist attractions, since, *except for the Caves*, it has none. There are ‘no bathing steps’ (like in the beautiful city of Benares), no temples worthy of visit; the city is dirty

and monotonous; its inhabitants – the ‘real’ Indians – move like mud, undistinguished and indistinct.

As the novel presses forward, the trope of the tourist fails to satisfy. In fact, the English in India are no mere tourists – detached observers who look for temporary distraction and ‘cultivation’: they are women looking for a husband (like Adela Quested) or visiting relatives (like Mrs Moore). Otherwise, they are magistrates, police officers, teachers, missionaries, military and tradesmen, who are in India to do ‘their jobs’. The novel is, therefore, about more than ‘minor acts of trespassing’ (such as Mrs Moore’s visit to the Mosque), going ‘off the beaten track’, ‘thwarted anticipations’ and ‘well-meaning visitors’, as Buzard suggests (Buzard, 1993: 314). Ronny Heaslop is well aware of this difference: while his mother, whom he regards as “just a globe-trotter, a temporary escort, who could retire to England with what impressions she chose”, can be treated (and indulged) as a tourist, Adela “who meditated upon spending her life in the country” cannot: she is “a more serious matter” (PI, 52). Adela and Mrs Moore’s misrecognition of this reality – and the fact that they insist on behaving like tourists – is their biggest blunder, which deserves Ronny’s aggravated comment that “India isn’t a drawing-room” and that, by consequence, “we’re not pleasant in India, and we don’t intend to be pleasant” (PI, 69).⁹

The truth is that, behind the tourist experience – which the Anglo-Indian community is quick to provide and Adela is quick to deplore¹⁰ – there is Empire. This is what the expedition to the caves ultimately brings out into the open – Godbole’s comment to Fielding, “I hope the expedition was a successful one” (PI, 183), no doubt strikes a chord when read in this sense. Originally devised as an authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience, the picnic sets in motion a sequence of events – the ‘machinery’ that ‘will work to its end’, as a disturbed Mrs Moore will later put it (PI, 211) – that will lead up to the arrest of an Indian man on suspicion of sexually assaulting an English girl. In that sense, it constitutes, for the two tourists, an encounter with the ‘real’ – i.e. with the harsh realities of colonised India which lie beneath the platitudes of officialdom and social courtesy (or, more often than not, *discourtesy*). The same applies to the ‘suspect’,

⁹ Ronny’s line brings to mind one of Miss Lavish’s mottoes: “one doesn’t come to Italy for niceness (...) one comes for life” (RWV, 37).

¹⁰ Adela reacts to the ‘arrangements’ of the Turtons with impatience: “It’ll end in an elephant ride, it always does” (PI, 46). Her dismissal of the play that is being acted, “*Cousin Kate*, Imagine *Cousin Kate*!” (PI, 46), brings to mind Lucy, annoyed at finding ‘London’ in Italy, but it also points to Adela’s superior cultural tastes.

the educated Indian, Dr Aziz, who assures his friend Fielding that the picnic “is nothing to do with English or Indians; it is an expedition of friends” (PI, 170).¹¹

This is surely not how it will be treated. The city’s highest authority, Mr Turton is peremptory in understanding Aziz’s ‘crime’ as a matter of English/Indian relations: “I have never known anything but disaster result when English people and Indians attempt to be intimate socially. Intercourse, yes. Courtesy, by all means. Intimacy – never, never” (PI, 174). The case for the prosecution is thus built along racial lines. As the Police Superintendent, Mr McBryde, reminds Fielding, Aziz’s ‘crime’ does not follow a normal (i.e. purely rational) logic, but a racial one: “when an Indian goes bad, he goes not only very bad, but very queer (...) when you think of crime you think of English crime. The psychology here is different” (PI, 177). A primitive lust for blood and sex, preferentially aimed at ‘the fairer races’ (PI, 222), seems to be the crime’s sole motive, and Fielding is duly referred to the Mutiny records and the Bhagavad Gita (PI, 178).

Aziz, however, is not being completely truthful either. For him, too, the picnic had been far from a mere ‘expedition of friends’, and everything ‘to do with English and Indians’. He had fully and proudly assumed the role expected of him, namely, to be the Indian guide of ‘real’ India to distinguished English visitors. Having chosen the only touristic attraction of Chandrapore (which the narrator had earlier marked out as ‘extraordinary’), he had gone to great lengths to impress his guests. The result, inevitably, is inadequate and rings false. He finds himself bound to the role of entertaining two bored, overly polite ladies, whose notions of ‘India’ seem to clash with his, as Adela’s words, uttered at the beginning of the expedition, indicate:

‘I’d not have missed this for anything,’ said the girl, exaggerating her enthusiasm. ‘Look, the sun’s rising – this’ll be absolutely magnificent – come quickly – look. I wouldn’t have missed this for anything. We should never have seen it if we’d stuck to the Turtons and their eternal elephants.’
(PI, 149)

What follows is that the sun-rise fails to measure up to Adela’s and Mrs Moore’s expectations, leading them to draw comparisons with a superior Grasmere. Furthermore, the proverbial elephant, arranged by Aziz, is waiting for them at the station platform (PI, 150). Adela and Mrs Moore have rejected the touristic notions of India – the exotic elephants, the ‘frieze’ with typical Indian scenes and human ‘types’. At the ‘Bridge

¹¹ Aziz will retrospectively tell his friend Hamidullah, “My great mistake has been taking our rulers as a joke”, to which Hamidullah replies: “It is far the wisest way to take them, but not possible in the long run. Sooner or later a disaster such as yours occurs, and reveals their secret thoughts about our character” (PI, 266).

Party', they have also rejected the humiliating parading of the subaltern subjects of Empire, a sight that makes them sadly agree with Ronny (albeit for different reasons) that it is not 'picturesque' (PI, 59). And yet, their idea of India remains essentially a 'romantic' one, as the reference to Grasmere suggests. Aziz's 'idea' of India, on the other hand, turns out to be not so different from that of the Anglo-Indians, drawing just as much upon the staple Orientalist images that inform the novel's two main registers – tourism and Empire.

There is a clear overlap between, on the one hand, the imperialist discourse of 'knowing' India articulated by the Anglo-Indians – as evinced in Ronny's second-hand assertion, "No one can even begin to think of knowing this country until he has been in it twenty years" (PI, 50) – and, on the other, the narrator's touristic perception that there is not much to 'know'. In other words, the tourist desire to 'know' India is interwoven with the imperialist need to 'know' her for the practical purposes of ruling her. While Adela is watching the rural landscape from the train, reflecting that India is the countryside rather than the city, the narrator interrupts her sightseeing to draw the readers' attention to two overlapping operations – 'knowing' and 'conquering':

How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile. The important towns they build are only retreats, their quarrels the malaise of men who cannot find their way home. India knows of their trouble. She knows of the whole world's trouble, to its uttermost depth. She calls 'Come' through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and august. But come to what? She has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal. (PI, 148-149).

India attracts, and yet remains resilient to any attempt at encompassing and 'possessing' her. She is inherently difficult – walking tires Aziz because "there is something hostile in that soil" (PI, 40) – hence her many 'excrescences', the 'foreign' bodies that, being part of her, fail to be completely incorporated. One such body is the British Civil Station. Even though it has the same effect on viewers as the city itself – it "provokes no emotion. It charms not, neither does it repel" (PI, 32) – the Civil Station is, nevertheless, judged "a totally different place" (PI, 31), which "shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky" (PI, 32).

The concern with knowing India is central to the novel, and seems to point that it is a self-defeating task. India is a place of false impressions and confused perceptions – in the mosque, Mrs Moore is confused with a pillar (PI, 42); the wasp that she sees, unlike English wasps, cannot distinguish between outdoors and indoors, which causes it to

‘mistake the peg for a branch’ (PI, 55). Fielding remarks that “India’s a muddle” (PI, 86). Adela and Ronny cannot identify a bird, prompting the narrator’s comment (from what is clearly a Western/British point of view) that “nothing in India is identifiable” (PI, 101), just as they cannot identify the cause of their accident in the Nawab’s car, or the type of animal which Adela thinks provoked it (PI, 104; 105). Finally, during the elephant ride, on their way to the caves, Adela seems to confuse a tree with a snake, but we never know for sure (PI, 152).

Even Indians – with the exception of Professor Godbole, who does not seem to care for definitions – appear to be anxious about what is and what is not India. Aziz, the educated Indian, seems to countenance the Orientalist cliché of ‘inscrutable India’ (Islam, 1979: 7), when he tells Adela – “Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing” (PI, 156). He is particularly prone to (re)producing definitions of India when he is depressed: “That’s India all over... how like us” (PI, 115). England is undoubtedly the implicit term of comparison: ashamed of his house, the doctor tells Fielding, “Here’s the celebrated hospitality of the East. (...) Now I suppose you want to be off, having seen an oriental interior” (PI, 127). Likewise, one of his Moslem friends complains, “we can’t co-ordinate (...) we can’t keep engagements, we can’t catch trains” (PI, 125); whereas another concedes, “At a crisis, the English are really unequalled” (PI, 183).

The novel confirms some of these preconceptions: an Englishman (Fielding) will miss a train for the first time in his life (PI, 144), but this only happens because of an Indian (Godbole); Ronny’s interpretation of Aziz’s invitation to the caves – “he meant nothing by the invitation, I could tell by his voice; it’s just their way of being pleasant” (PI, 99) – is also true; and Fielding, after being chaffed by Aziz and his friends, cannot but vaguely feel, as the Club would have put it, that he has ‘made himself cheap as usual’ (PI, 126).

India seems to be a place of *natural* differences and, by consequence, of natural *barriers*: describing Aziz’s troubles over the preparation of the picnic, the narrator remarks, “he had challenged the spirit of the Indian earth, which tries to keep men in compartments” (PI, 141). In an earlier scene, the narrator had reinforced this idea, by classifying, with a detached, omniscient eye, Aziz’s friends as either Moslem or Hindu (PI, 118), thus positing India as a congeries of different races that dislike each other and that will fall out once the British have left (PI, 119). The English, on the other hand, appear to be the measure of normality and peace: when Dr Panna Lal, Aziz’s Hindu colleague, arrives to enquire about his health, he is “nervous of the den of fanatics” (PI, 120), whereas Fielding, on the same occasion, is received by all (including Panna Lal)

as “an Englishman at his best” (PI, 123). The gap between East and West, which separates the Indians from the English, may be bridgeable, but there is a sense in the novel that suggests that their respective identities are best kept apart. Mixtures are often depicted as ludicrous: on the Sunday bells, the narrator notes: “the East had returned to the East via the suburbs of England, and had become ridiculous during the detour” (PI, 116). The irony grants the narrator some distance, separating him from another, more extreme stance – that of the Anglo-Indians, illustrated by Ronny’s mocking remark, “What do you think of the Aryan Brother in a topi and spats?” (PI, 59)

Though not entirely averse to ‘mixtures’ (not in the Anglo-Indian way, in any case), the novel shows that ‘mixing’ usually means trouble, and is not always ‘elegant’ – the sole exception being Godbole, who displays ‘harmony’, “as if he had reconciled the products of East and West, mental as well as physical, and could never be discomposed” (PI, 89). After the unfortunate picnic, Fielding courageously challenges these barriers, by standing up for Aziz against his countrymen. When he expresses the wish to visit Aziz in prison, he is stopped by McBryde: “Why mix yourself up with pitch?” (PI, 179) However, even the more progressive College teacher is never oblivious of these barriers, into which he constantly relapses to make sense of his experiences: “At the moment when he was throwing in his lot with Indians, he realized the profundity of the gulf that divided him from them. They always do something disappointing” (PI, 181).

It is within these parameters that the attitudes of the English towards the Empire – even the critical ones – fall. Mrs Moore is shocked by her son’s imperialist ideas and unchristian practices. What disturbs her, however, is not the content of Ronny’s discourse (“I am out here to work, mind, to hold this wretched country by force” – PI, 69), but his manner, “the self-satisfied lilt” of his words (PI, 70), and she concludes: “One touch of regret – not the canny substitute but the true regret from the heart – would have made him a different man, and the British Empire a different institution” (PI, 70). Fielding’s attitude to Empire is more casual and nonchalant, but rests on similar premises. To Aziz and his friends, he declares, “I’m out here personally because I need a job. I cannot tell you why England is here or whether she ought to be here. It’s beyond me” (PI, 124), with the narrator observing, “There is only one answer to a conversation of this type: ‘England holds India for her good’. Yet Fielding was disinclined to give it” (PI, 124). Other characters, and the narrator himself, as we shall see, seem to be ‘disinclined’ to give this answer. The critique of imperialism that the novel mounts comes unstuck on this point – as on many others.

But the place to look for the novel's position on Empire is not in its (plentiful) direct statements and ruminations (by either narrator or characters) on this subject, but in its story, and in the events that gather around the figure of Adela Quested, in particular. Adela's 'bothers', as Mrs Moore tells her, "are mixed up with India" (PI, 112). Indeed, the decisions concerning her future are intricately connected with her quest for the 'real India'. From the moment she first appears in the novel to utter the famous words that will identify her – "I want to see the *real* India" (PI, 46) – Adela's most defining trait seems to be her outspoken honesty. For Mrs Moore, she is "the queer, cautious girl" (PI, 46), "very, very fair-minded" (PI, 55); the narrator refers to her as 'the logical girl' (PI, 52), who "always said exactly what was in her mind" (PI, 47), and stresses "her advanced outlook and the natural honesty of her mind" (PI, 200). She's also noted for her relative disregard of conventions: when Mr Turton announces that Ronny is 'dignified', she hesitates: "she had not decided whether she liked dignified men" (PI, 47). Further, Mrs Moore thinks her "much too individual" to become like the Anglo-Indians (PI, 68). Left alone with Aziz and Professor Godbole, Adela smokes a cigarette, to Ronny's disapproval (PI, 91). Her unconventionality is the bridge to Aziz: even though he is not attracted to her – he treats her and Mrs Moore "like men" (PI, 85), because one is old and the other is plain and "has practically no breasts" (PI, 131) – and despite being alarmed by her lack of subtlety in accepting his invitation to see his house – "the stupid girl had taken him at his word!" (PI, 91) – Aziz, nevertheless, thinks her "so nice and sincere" (PI, 131). The Anglo-Indians view her differently: her apparent 'honesty' draws no comments; her interest in India is dismissed by her fiancé as "comic" (PI, 48); and Mrs Turton dislikes her for being 'ungracious and cranky' and, like Fielding, 'not pukka' (PI, 49). On the other hand, Fielding also finds 'something theoretical' in the girl's reproach of their countrymen at the 'Bridge Party' (PI, 66). At Aziz's suggestion that he should marry Adela, Fielding dismisses her as 'a prig' (PI, 130), as "one of the more pathetic products of Western education", always behaving "as if she's at a lecture – trying ever so hard to understand India and life, and occasionally taking a note" (PI, 131). After the incident, when they have moved to opposite camps, Fielding cannot help wondering: "She was such a dry, sensible girl, and quite without malice: the last person in Chandrapore wrongfully to accuse an Indian" (PI, 187).

In many respects, Adela resembles Lucy in that she, too, is not too sure about life and longs for an 'adventure'. The object of that longing gradually crystallizes in the Marabar hills. In a presaging scene, at the 'Bridge Party', Fielding finds her alone, "looking through a nick in the cactus hedge at the distant Marabar Hills" (PI, 65). Later,

Adela again ‘contemplates the hills’, their remoteness having provoked in her ‘a vision of her married life’, in which she is engulfed by Anglo-India, “while the true India slid by unnoticed” (PI, 66). She fears that “she would see India always as a frieze, never as a spirit” (PI, 66). Marriage is again linked to the caves when she tells Ronny that they are not to be married (a decision she had first, inadvertently, announced at Fielding’s tea party – PI, 90). Ironically, she starts the conversation by pointing out that the subject of her talk is “nothing to do with the caves” (PI, 99), but after they have decided to be friends, the narrator comments, “her desire to see India had suddenly decreased. There had been a factitious element in it” (PI, 102).

And yet, it is clear that India, the caves and Adela’s marriage are intertwined. The following scene, the accident in the Nawab’s car that takes place on the road to the caves, confirms this: faced with the troubles and muddles of India, which stresses their common Englishness, Ronny and Adela are drawn to each other, closer than they had ever been (PI, 103). Adela takes back her words and they automatically become engaged (PI, 109). Later, she will describe the accident as “a pleasant memory”, which “had given her a good shake-up, and taught her Ronny’s true worth” (PI, 148). After hearing about their engagement, Mrs Moore feels that her mission has come to an end, and she, too, loses interest in India (PI, 109).

Consequently, when the day of the expedition to the Marabar caves arrives, none of the two ladies is particularly excited: as the narrator notes, “no one was enthusiastic, yet it took place” (PI, 140). Both Adela and Mrs Moore are seized by a feeling of boredom, and even apathy (PI, 145). Adela is now engaged to be married and views the prospect of a life in India with anxiety. India has ceased to be a touristic concern; as the narrator points out, “her wish had been granted, but too late” (PI, 146).

The expedition is worth a closer look, for it will become the focus of the novel. From the beginning, the whole episode seems to be out of joint: Aziz is feeling ‘insecure’ and ‘unreal’ (PI, 141); Fielding and Godbole are late and miss the train. An element of unreality descends upon the excursion – “Everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion” (PI, 152). Aziz is ‘lost’, without Professor Godbole to guide him, “he had no notion how to treat this particular aspect of India” (PI, 153); whereas Adela is engrossed in her ‘plans’ (PI, 148).¹² It is in this state of ‘unreality’ – which she will later describe to Fielding as of ‘half pressure’ (PI, 240) – that she enters the second cave with Aziz. Although it has become a matter of rife speculation, the

¹² Adela is worried that, by marrying Ronny, she will become an Anglo-Indian. She tells Aziz that she is looking for “Akbar’s ‘universal religion’ or the equivalent to keep me decent and sensible”, but the narrator insinuates that she is already changing (PI, 157).

scene is actually rendered in the novel with cinematic detail: alone with Aziz, Adela is suddenly seized by the question, “what about love?”, followed by the realisation that she and Ronny do not love each other (PI, 162). The discovery is upsetting: it “had come so suddenly that she felt like a mountaineer whose rope has broken. Not to love the man one’s going to marry! Not even to have asked oneself the question until now!” (PI, 163) She pulls herself together, and continues the climb, “her emotions well under control” (PI, 163). She then asks Aziz a first question, “Are you married, Dr Aziz?” (PI, 163) The doctor answers affirmatively, but misleads her to believe that his wife is still alive. Adela regrets that “neither she nor Ronny had physical charm” (PI, 163). A second question follows: she asks him whether he has ‘one wife or more than one’ (PI, 164). Aziz is annoyed, but answers, ‘One, one in my own particular case’ and disappears into a cave. Adela follows, unaware of her blunder: “she also went into a cave, thinking with half her mind ‘Sightseeing bores me’ and wondering with the other half about marriage” (PI, 164). At this moment, the point of view shifts to Aziz, who has come out of his cave to discover that Adela is lost (PI, 165). He hears the sound of a motor car and, after looking for her, realises that she has descended the slope and is near the car, speaking to a lady – “he was so relieved that he did not think her conduct odd” (PI, 165). Aziz sees her field-glasses (PI, 165), picks them up and goes back to the camp, to join Mrs Moore (PI, 166).

There can be no doubt from this account – which bears the authority of the omniscient narrator – that Aziz has done no harm to Adela. But the feeling that *something wrong* has taken place is as clear to us as it is to Fielding, who has meanwhile arrived in Miss Derek’s car – “‘What’s happened?’ asked Fielding, who felt at once that something had gone queer” (PI, 167). He is annoyed and puzzled to hear that Miss Derek and Adela have gone back to Chandrapore, but Aziz is only able to give him what the narrator calls an “incurably inaccurate” version of the events (PI, 168). As the expedition draws to a close and they ‘prepare to enter ordinary life’, Aziz is arrested on their arrival and the narrator observes: “the long-drawn strangeness of the morning snapped” (PI, 171). For the next thirty pages we lose sight of Adela, who has been hit by sun stroke and hurt by ‘hundreds of cactus spines’ (PI, 199), and Aziz will only reappear after his release (PI, 236). The point of view has shifted to Fielding, who, closer to the narrator’s point of view, cannot believe in the official version of the story (imparted by Turton) – “Miss Quested has been insulted in one of the Marabar Caves” (PI, 172) – or in Aziz’s part in it.

In many respects, Fielding's position merges with the narrator's: on the one hand, he believes that Aziz is innocent (PI, 181); on the other, he cannot contradict Adela either. After his first reaction, "she's mad" (PI, 173), he reconsiders and decides that there has been some kind of 'mistake' – or muddle: "I make no reflection on the good faith of the two ladies, but the charge they are bringing against Aziz rests upon some mistake, and five minutes will clear it up" (PI, 173). This position, which enables the characters *not* to take sides, is the one that the novel ultimately sustains. As the narrator notes, Fielding "regretted taking sides. To slink through India un-labelled was his aim" (PI, 183). Fielding realises that, in this case, "it is impossible to regard a tragedy from two points of view, and, whereas Turton had decided to avenge the girl, he hoped to save the man" (PI, 174). After the trial, however, seeing Adela alone and with no place to go, he comes to her assistance. Although he yearns "to be rejoicing with Aziz", he finds that he cannot 'desert her' (PI, 235). In fact, he is relapsing back to his previous position, of 'not taking sides', which ultimately amounts to the championing of the weak or 'downtrodden' (PI, 244).

'What happened in the caves' becomes the centre of the novel: the issue is discussed at length by Fielding with McBryde (PI, 177), Godbole (PI, 185) and Adela (PI, 239; 261); and, of course, in court (PI, 230). Fielding is at the centre of the discussion – and the terms in which it is conducted are mainly his own: he tells McBryde that Adela is "under some hideous illusion" (PI, 177) and Godbole that "it's the guide" (PI, 185). Later, he will summarise his logical analysis of the 'facts' to Adela:

'One of three things certainly happened in the Marabar,' he said, getting drawn in a discussion against his will. 'One of four things. Either Aziz is guilty, which is what your friends think; or you invented the charge out of malice, which is what my friends think; or you have had an hallucination. I'm very much inclined' – getting up and striding about – 'now that you tell me that you felt unwell before the expedition – it's an important piece of evidence – I believe that you yourself broke the strap of the field-glasses; you were alone in that cave the whole time.' (PI, 240)

His fourth possibility is that it might have been someone else, namely, the guide (PI, 242). At this point, Adela loses interest, and simply says, "Perhaps it was the guide" (PI, 242). Hamidullah overhears them and ironically remarks, "Of course some Indian is the culprit, we must never doubt that" (PI, 243-244). Indeed, these four possibilities translate into three political positions: Anglo-Indian imperialism (Aziz/the Indian did it); anti-colonial nationalism (Adela/the English did it *out of malice*); liberal imperialism (Adela, unwittingly, did it *to herself* or someone else – some other 'Other' that may well

be, as Hamidullah points out, another Indian – is to blame). The shortcomings of the last position – Fielding’s – are evident: it fails to address the coloniser/colonised antagonism, by replacing it with issues that are either exterior to the problem of imperialism (feminine hysteria/neurosis) or elusive (the ‘Other’), and which ultimately rebound to the first position (i.e. an Indian did it).

The crux of Fielding’s (and the novel’s) position is that, whatever it was and whoever ‘did it’, there can be no doubt that *something* happened, in this, again, overlapping with the first position. The difference lies in the embrace of a fundamental indeterminacy, as Fielding puts it: “she has certainly had *some* appalling experience” (PI, 185, my emphasis). This belief (because that is all it can be) is steeped in relativism – it is, indeed, essential to sustain the kind of cultural relativism that the novel endorses and sustains, and which it expresses formally, as Paul Armstrong has argued, by way of “narrative authority and point of view”, which this critic rightly connects to Forster’s defence of liberalism (Armstrong, 1992: 365). Indeed, of Forster’s novels, *A Passage to India* is the most dependable on point of view – the same object or event is ascribed a variety of meanings, according to the viewer. Adela’s act in court is illustrative of this aspect: whereas she wins the final admiration of Fielding, she receives the reprobation of the Anglo-Indians and (for opposite reasons) of the Indians. She fails to attract Hamidullah’s sympathy: ‘from his standpoint’ she is not being honest. Indeed, from India’s standpoint, “the girl’s sacrifice – so creditable according to Western notions – was rightly rejected, because, though it came from her heart, it did not include her heart” (PI, 245). The caves, too, are submitted to the same analysis, which consists in laying out (usually through Fielding) a panoply of different views. For Godbole, whatever happened, everyone did it, because good and evil are always the expression of the whole universe (PI, 186). For Mrs Moore:

All this fuss for a frightened girl! Nothing had happened, ‘and if it had,’ she found herself thinking with the cynicism of a withered priestess, ‘if it had, there are worse evils than love.’ The unspeakable attempt presented itself to her as love: in a cave, in a church – boum, it amounts to the same. (PI, 212-213).

What ultimately matters is the recognition of all the possibilities, a lesson that Aziz learns in the end, when he acknowledges that his mistake about Fielding’s marriage was “as bad a mistake as the cave itself” (PI, 312).

Frances Restuccia has pointed out that the indeterminacy over the crime precludes the identification (and duly condemnation) of the criminal: “No wonder Forster goes to the

trouble of ventriloquizing a strange set of opinions about a nonexistent event: the event has to seem to occur for its nonoccurrence to have such defusing efficacy” (Restuccia, 1989: 118). The point is that, in this scheme of things, it ultimately does not matter whether something has occurred or not, since it is the opinions that count, as Fielding’s reflection suggests: “he felt that we exist not in ourselves, but in terms of each other’s minds” (PI, 249).

Fielding’s standpoint is exactly what awaits the critic that works within and adheres to the novel’s framework. An example is Paul Armstrong, to whom *A Passage to India* “affirms both the discoverability of truth and the necessity of endless interpretation” (Armstrong, 1992: 374). For this critic, there can be no doubt that Adela is “unambiguously wrong” (Aziz is innocent), but what happened to her is indeterminate and therefore open to ‘endless interpretation’ (Armstrong, 1992: 374).

Armstrong’s analysis of Forster’s point of view and ‘politics of interpretation’ teases out the dilemma at the core of Forster’s liberalism. The question is, briefly, how to endorse cultural and epistemological relativism (“knowledge is necessarily perspectival” – Armstrong, 1992: 369) and claim the existence and (truth) of ‘particular’ values (“positive norms” – Armstrong, 1992: 381) at the same time? It is a problem, in short, of conciliating difference and dissent with ideals of justice and humanity (cf. Armstrong, 1992: 365-366), the latter of which are deemed necessary to “provide goals for social change” (Armstrong, 1992: 381). According to this critic, Forster’s solution lies in his ‘double turns’, which enable him to assert reality and norm while doubting their ‘definitiveness and univocity’ (Armstrong, 1992: 367) – a position that Armstrong compares to Richard Rorty’s ‘liberal irony’. For Rorty, the strength of the ‘liberal ironist’ lies in the fact that he combines “commitment with a sense of the contingency of their own commitment” (Armstrong, 1992: 367). Contingency rests on a belief in cultural relativism and on the suspicion that all consensus is ‘deceptive’; commitment, on the other hand, derives from “a defensible faith in ideals of justice and community” (Armstrong, 1992: 367). This translates into indeterminacy (‘deferral of meaning’) and, in practice, political pragmatism: “political action must be pragmatically contradictory and ironic about the ideals it pursues not because ‘balance’ is the most ‘realistic’ attitude but because ‘truth’ is always deferred” (Armstrong, 1992: 368).

This kind of epistemology (knowledge is always contingent and relative; truth always deferred) finds its limits in an ideal – “a respectful understanding of others which acknowledges their right to speak for themselves and which does not subordinate them to one’s own interests and purposes” (Armstrong, 1992: 368) – formed on the principles

of ‘recognition’ and ‘uncoercive exchange’ (Armstrong, 1992: 381). It is these principles that underpin the superior stances of the narrator and the reader, who (unlike the characters in the novel) can cross over what Armstrong calls “the mutual opacity of worlds” (Armstrong, 1992: 375).

The novel does contain all the ‘double turns’ that Armstrong describes (and many others); however, it also gives us reasons to suspect this kind of politics. For instance, the fact that Fielding/the narrator/the reader (and the standpoint they represent) should be allowed to see beyond ‘the opacity of worlds’ is a moot point,¹³ and so is the correspondence between this standpoint and *justice*, which this critic seems to take for granted, as his analysis of Fielding’s defence of Adela against Aziz’s claim for compensation demonstrates (Armstrong, 1992: 376). Armstrong’s self-confident rendition of Forster’s liberalism, in the end, is (via Rorty) his own. In fact, there is a stronger sense of disturbance in the novel’s final ‘deferral of truth’ – the ‘not here, not yet’ of the closing scene – and Mrs Moore’s own descent into sameness is pregnant with other (less comforting) meanings. The image of the caves itself – and the fact that it is placed at the centre of the novel – suggests that there is a void at the core of the novel’s liberal vision. What does this ‘void’ or absence represent? The unknown and unknowable ‘Other’? Or the never-coming, never-recognised event? Or both?

In a way, Mrs Moore is right – nothing happened. Attempted rape might have happened, rape has certainly not happened, as Adela’s account, given to the other English women, establishes:

‘I went into this detestable cave,’ she would say dryly, ‘and I remember scratching the wall with my fingernail, to start the usual echo, and then as I was saying there was this shadow, or sort of shadow, down the entrance tunnel, bottling me up. It seemed like an age, but I suppose the whole thing can’t have lasted thirty seconds really. I hit at him with the glasses, he pulled me round the cave by the strap, it broke, I escaped, that’s all. *He never actually touched me once.* It all seems such nonsense.’ (PI, 199, my emphasis)

When Adela comes home after her recovery, Mrs Moore’s rant about marriage – “And all this rubbish about love, love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is the least difference” (PI, 207) – prompts her first moment of doubt: “Ronny, he’s innocent; I made an awful mistake” (PI, 207). What Adela has grasped, if only unconsciously, is

¹³ Armstrong stresses the “untranscendable diversity of India” not as “an attempt to render it exotic and mysterious”, but as “a tendency toward internal diversity which can be found in many (*perhaps all*) cultures” (Armstrong, 1992: 377, my emphasis). No wonder that he quotes and takes for granted Richard Rorty’s statement that “everyone is ethnocentric” (Armstrong, 1992: 379).

that, just as love has not taken place between Ronny and her, (attempted) rape has also failed to happen. Indeed, whatever it was that took place in the cave, it was not so much an event as the corroboration of a previous ‘false’ event – Adela’s engagement. After her engagement to Ronny had been settled, Adela told Mrs Moore, “I don’t feel excited (...) I’m not conscious of vast changes” (PI, 112). The engagement had, clearly, not been an ‘event’, and it is no coincidence that it should have been associated with an accident. This will be spelled out by Ronny, when he (rather than Adela) finally calls the engagement off:

She had killed his love, *and it had never been very robust*; they would never have achieved betrothal but for the accident to the Nawab Bahadur’s car. She belonged to the callow academic period of his life which he had outgrown – Grasmere, serious talks and walks, that sort of thing. (PI, 256, my emphasis)

Unlike Lucy, whose event initiates a truth procedure that she will embrace and eventually honour, Adela, with her ‘honesty’, stumbles under the influence of an ‘half pressure’, which makes her distractedly ask her future mother-in-law: “if one isn’t absolute honest, what is the use of existing?” (PI, 112) In the cave, faced with the question of love, she chooses to cling to her non-event rather than acknowledge its falseness – hence her account to Fielding that her experience in the cave was ‘the sort of thing that makes some women think they’ve had an offer of marriage when none was made’ (PI, 240).

Whereas Adela’s ‘non-event’ is immediately taken up by the Anglo-Indian community and ‘filled up’ with meaning, Mrs Moore’s experience, which prefigures Adela’s, is completely ignored. In contrast to Adela, who was never touched (“He never actually touched me once”), Mrs Moore is actually touched by someone (probably a baby’s hand). This and the echo (described as “entirely devoid of distinction” – PI, 158-159) upset her beyond measure. Outside, she “looked for a villain, but none was there” (PI, 159). A deeper, existential meaning is, however, in her case, offered: Mrs Moore has a vision in which “poor little talkative Christianity (...) only amounted to ‘boum’”, which leaves her terrified and indifferent to everything around her (PI, 161). When he arrives at the camp, Fielding finds her “sulky and stupid” (PI, 167). The narrator also stresses her change: “since her faintness in the cave she was sunk in apathy and cynicism. The wonderful India of her opening weeks, with its cool nights and acceptable hints of infinity, had vanished” (PI, 168).

There is a strange discrepancy between the good old lady of the first part of the book (which will grow into a myth) and the bitter, self-pitying one of the last scenes. Mrs Moore's experience in the cave recalls, in reverse, her earlier experience in the mosque, where she had met Aziz for the first time. Aziz, who hitherto had believed that "all Englishwomen are haughty and venal" (PI, 36), is overjoyed to find in Mrs Moore an exception. After initial disappointment, when he realises that she is older than her voice suggested (PI, 42-43), he immediately takes to her. Their encounter is an encounter of sameness: he tells her that they are 'in the same box' (PI, 44) and proclaims her 'an Oriental' (PI, 45). By the same token, it is also an encounter with the 'Other' – in the form of India. Hearing about Mrs Moore's 'adventure' in the mosque, Adela comments: "isn't that like your mother? While we talk about seeing the real India, she goes and sees it, and *then forgets* she's seen it" (PI, 52, my emphasis). What is interesting here is that sameness and Otherness ultimately converge. Mrs Moore and Aziz are similar (hence she can be an 'Oriental'), but also different (for Adela, she is 'England', he is 'India').

Mrs Moore's experience in the cave follows the same scheme. In the stifling presence of the 'Other', in the crowded cave, she withdraws to herself until she becomes one with the world – i.e. immersed in sameness and indifference (in a way that is very similar to Godbole's, to whom she is often linked – PI, 287; cf. Trilling, 1970: 48). Henceforward, relationships no longer mean anything. Adela, who is earlier in the novel described as "exceedingly fond of Mrs Moore" (PI, 51), is disappointed that, during her recovery, the old lady has not come to see her: "her friendship with Mrs Moore was so deep and real that she felt sure it would last, whatever else happened" (PI, 203). But this is not the case: when Adela returns to Heaslop's bungalow, Mrs Moore neither welcomes nor comforts her – "Her Christian tenderness had gone, or had developed into a hardness, a just irritation against the human race" (PI, 204). For Ronny, she has revealed a side of herself that had always been there: "She was by no means the dear old lady outsiders supposed, and India had brought her into the open" (PI, 206).

Mrs Moore seems to encapsulate what many critics have regarded as the novel's major theme: the encounter with the 'Other'. Philippa Moody has stressed the importance of this theme in Forster's entire work. For this critic, Forster's subject is the 'exposure' of 'somnialescence of response' to 'the alien and unfamiliar which may prod its awake' (Moody, 1968: 1). Italy provides this kind of 'exposure', but, she adds, "it is India, as an experience, which produces Forster's greatest novel, and perhaps because it has the virtue of being *even more alien than Italy*" (Moody, 1968: 2, my emphasis). This

perspective is unabashedly Euro/Anglocentric (“because the experience of India is alien to most of us” – Moody, 1968: 1), and leads this critic to assert: “It is more important again to experience from a reading of the book the impact of India on the English, than to try and detect from its pages Forster’s attitude to British Imperialism” (Moody, 1968: 3). Her analysis therefore goes on, following Forster’s own logic, to concentrate on the problem of the ‘undeveloped heart’ of the English. According to Moody, the ‘solution for the inhibited Anglo-Saxon’ lies somewhere between the ‘unconvincingly idealised’ Italians and the ‘over-developed heart’ of the Indians, but is ultimately unrealisable and out of reach, as the closing words of *A Passage to India* indicate (Moody, 1968: 6-7).

This interpretation, written before the postcolonial re-examination of the novel, says a lot about the book’s reception and cultural embedding. There is no doubt that the concept of ‘encounter’ which it endorses – the ‘Other’ as absolute alien whose task it is to ‘prod the awake’ of the ‘somnolent’ self – has actuality in the novel (though not in such an unsophisticated way). As I have discussed above, Mrs Moore and Adela are effectively *bored* tourists (Adela being falsely enthusiastic, which amounts to the same) when they embark on the expedition to the caves. However, whether the ‘encounter’ actually ‘awakens’ any of them (and, if it does, to what effect) is a matter of debate. In any case, we are still caught up in Armstrong’s ‘opacities’, and the risk to succumb to an Orientalist frame of reference is more than evident.

Alain Badiou’s conception of ‘encounter’ proves invaluable at this point, for he posits an ‘encounter’ not in terms of ‘being’ (and, therefore, of identities, as Moody appears to do), but in terms of ‘event’ – an event whose paradigmatic manifestation is love. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano have drawn attention to this aspect of Badiou’s philosophy:

Prior to the encounter, the solipsistic One has no resources to escape its One-ness. The encounter, the absolute novelty of the event of love, from whence arises the Two, does not lead back to a new One, the love which would be denigrated as ‘fusion’ in the Freudian sense, or even in a banal, romantic, popular-cultural sense, but to *infinity*. One, Two, infinity (...). This ‘exponential curve’ to infinity derives from the fact that the Two of love, of the pure encounter is a *passage*. But to what? Badiou replies: to ‘the infinity of beings, and experience’. The Two of love introduces a new opening onto the sensible world, away from the endless circuits of language. Love permits ‘beauty, nuance, colour’. It also permits – in fact, it is the only event to do so – happiness. (Power and Toscano, 2003: xvi, emphasis in original)

The encounter as event is therefore not a matter of recognition (in the form of either embrace or rejection) of difference, for the simple reason that difference is always and already in the world, it is always and already *there* in any situation, as Badiou puts it:

Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences. Even the apparently reflexive experience of myself is by no means the intuition of a unity but a labyrinth of differentiations. (Badiou, 2001: 25-26)

What matters in the encounter as event, then, is what it enables – a *passage* to “the infinity of beings, and experience”, a “new opening”, which can only exist in relation to a truth procedure. Difference is of no philosophical interest – “no light is shed on any concrete situation by the notion of the ‘recognition of the other’” (Badiou, 2001: 27); it is the ‘Same’ that matters:

The Same, in effect, is not what is (i.e. the infinite multiplicity of differences) but what *comes to be*. I have already named that in regard to which only the advent of the Same occurs: it is a *truth*. Only a truth is, as such, *indifferent to differences*. This is something we have always known, even if sophists of every age have always attempted to obscure its certainty: a truth is *the same for all*. (Badiou, 2001: 27)

In a way, Forster’s caves illustrate this point. It is important to note that whatever happened in the caves is not to do with the caves themselves. They are consistently described – first by Godbole (PI, 92), then by the narrator – more than as indescribable (the indeterminacy which postcolonial, feminist and postmodern critics have differently explored), as *indistinct*.¹⁴ Indeed, the caves are pure sameness (in the first sense, as ‘what is’) and indifference. In anticipation of the novel’s main incident, the narrator observes that the visitor to the Marabar caves “returns to Chandrapore uncertain whether he has had an interesting experience or a dull one or any experience at all (...) the pattern never varies, and no carving, not even a bees’ nest or a bat, distinguishes one from another” (PI, 138). And yet, he reasserts that they are ‘extraordinary’ (PI, 138). This may be because they are conceived as being ‘the site of something’ – they are the site of ‘rape’ to Anglo-Indians (and to feminists – cf. Silver, 1988: 100); they are the site of the primordial experiences of good and evil to Godbole, and so on and so forth.

¹⁴ In this resembling Forster’s description of India, as critics have noted. SEE India is described as a world of sameness and indifference (PI, 126), where nothing seems to happen. Early in the novel, when Aziz is smoking the hookah with his friends, the narrator comments on the pleasure of the scene – “no trouble happening” (PI, 33). For Aziz and friends, all English become “exactly the same” (PI, 34).

This is not because they allow for different interpretations, but because *anything* can happen there (or not). Forster himself described the caves in these terms: “When I began *A Passage to India* I knew that something important happened in the Malabar [sic] Caves, and that it would have a central place in the novel – but I didn’t know what it would be” (Forster, 1977: 27). The caves, he goes on, “were something to focus everything up: they were *to engender an event like an egg*” (Forster, 1977: 27).

Criticism has recognised the ‘alleged assault on Adela’ as ‘the fulcrum of the narrative’, as Peter Childs has put it (Childs, 2002:7). This may be so, but Forster’s observation continues to hold: even if what took place in the caves was but a ‘(non)event’, as Harish Trivedi has noticed (Trivedi 1995: 154), it was a one that engendered other (non)events. Adela’s ‘courageous act’ in court is a case in point. At first sight, this would appear to be the closest the book gets to a real event (in Badiouian terms), insofar as there appears to be a truth procedure which results in the formation of a subject. Opinions vary as to what prompted Adela’s retraction of her charge: the memory of Mrs Moore (Restuccia, 1989: 125); the sight of Aziz which brings upon her the realisation that he is, like her, ‘rapable’ (Silver: 1988: 97), that is, a vulnerable ‘object’, who is “devoid of evil but subject as Indian to a discourse of objectification and appropriation structured in a similar way to that she experiences as woman” (Silver: 1988: 102; 103). Fielding’s opinion is that it was McBryde’s ‘exorcism’ (PI, 241). Another possibility is the sight of the low-caste fan-puller or punkah-wallah, which strikes Adela for his (unexpected) beauty and humility:

(...) the first person Adela noticed in it [the court] was the humblest of all who were present, a person who had no bearing officially upon the trial: the man who pulled the punkah. Almost naked and splendidly formed, he sat on a raised platform near the back, in the middle of the central gangway, and he caught her attention as she came in, and he seemed to control the proceedings. (...) Something in his aloofness impressed the girl from middle-class England, and rebuked the narrowness of her sufferings. In virtue of what had she collected this roomful of people together? Her particular brand of opinions, and the suburban Jehovah who sanctified them – by what right did they claim so much importance in the world, and assume the title of civilization? (PI, 220-221)

Under oath, committed to the truth, Adela expects the trial to be difficult – “because her disaster in the cave was connected, though by a thread, with another part of her life, her engagement to Ronny” (PI, 229). However, something unexpected happens: “A new and unknown sensation *protected* her (...). She didn’t think what had happened or even remember in the ordinary way of *memory*, but she returned to the Marabar Hills, and

spoke from them across a sort of darkness to Mr McBryde” (PI, 230, my emphasis). In other words, Adela re-lives the episode, she goes back to that day. The expedition is now experienced as ‘splendorous’ rather than ‘dull’; she notes the sun rise; the walls of the first cave are “beautiful and significant” (PI, 230). In her vision, she cannot tell whether Aziz followed her or not, and finally declares, “I’m afraid I have made a mistake (...) Dr Aziz never followed me into the cave” (PI, 231). Adela withdraws the charges, and Aziz is released, with the chapter drawing to a close by returning to the indifferent *punkah-wallah*, left alone, forgotten, in the empty court room – “no one remained on the scene of fantasy but the beautiful naked god” (PI, 233).

This is not, as the narrator suggests, an encounter with the ‘real’, but a ‘fantasy’. With the non-event rectified as a ‘mistake’, Adela is rejected by the Anglo-Indian community and literally thrown into the lap of India (PI, 233). Like Mrs Moore, her experience has left her feeling “emptied, valueless; there was no more virtue in her” (PI, 234). However, contrary to Mrs Moore, as she tells Fielding, “I have no longer any secrets. My echo has gone” (PI, 239). Barred from joining ‘her own people’, she is preparing to go to the Dak Bungalow, described as ‘below average’ and ‘servantless’, when Fielding offers to put her up (PI, 244). Adela’s recantation receives Fielding’s approbation. His “newborn respect for her” (PI, 244), nevertheless, has been caused by the shift in her position from being an accuser to becoming a victim – “the scapegoat to the Indian community” (Armstrong, 1992: 378). Moved by the thought that Adela, “the queer honest girl” (PI, 249), will be ruined, Fielding defends her before Aziz, whose compensation claims he finds ‘preposterous’ (PI, 251). He points out to Aziz that, despite being ‘a prig’, Adela “is perfectly genuine and very brave” (PI, 251) and appeals to Aziz’s compassion: “Do treat her considerately. She really mustn’t get the worst of both worlds” (PI, 252). In keeping with his “natural sympathy for the downtrodden” (PI, 244), she now deserves his compassion. In fact, though he considers that she has turned into ‘a real person’, in reality it is as an object (‘being examined by life’) rather than a subject (‘examining life’) that he describes her: “Although her hard schoolmistressy manner remained, she was no longer examining life, but being *examined* by it; *she had become a real person*” (PI, 245, emphasis added).

Fielding’s admiration for Adela’s humility, nevertheless, does not preclude the gravity of her mistake, or the fairness of her punishment, “Disaster had shown her limitations, and he realized now what a fine loyal character she was. Her humility was touching. She never repined at getting the worst of both worlds; she regarded it as the due punishment of her stupidity” (PI, 257). It is as though Adela has been ‘put in her place’

(i.e. where she ‘gets the worst of both worlds’), a position that she accepts, as her decision to return to England suggests: “I fit in there” (PI, 260). It is clear that this means accepting the life of a spinster – when Fielding tells her, “I no longer want love” (PI, 261), she replies – echoing Miss Abbott’s renunciation of Gino, and the fate of that other spinster, Orwell’s Dorothy Hare – “No more do I. My experiences here have cured me” (PI, 261).

Once again – as in *Howards End* – love has no place in the novel, even if Adela generously concedes, “But I want others to want it” (PI, 261). Discussing marriage with Adela, Fielding expresses an opinion that comes close to Mrs Moore’s, “Marriage is too absurd in any case. It begins and continues for such very slight reasons. The social business props it up on one side, and the theological business on the other, but neither of them are marriage, are they?” (PI, 260) He concludes, “I suspect that it mostly happens haphazard, though afterwards various noble reasons are invented. About marriage I am cynical” (PI, 260).

Not too cynical, though, it must be added: Fielding does marry in the end, a marriage which seems as much unexpected (despite Aziz’s suspicions) as odd, since he marries Mrs Moore’s daughter.¹⁵ Or maybe we should say ‘queer’. One of the reasons for these views on marriage (which, no doubt, evoke Mr Beebe), might be the novel’s covert homoeroticism. In fact, it could be argued that the novel’s pivotal encounter does not take place in the caves, but between Fielding and Aziz (and it is significant that the College teacher should have been absent from the site of the non-event). The novel’s homoeroticism is discreet but unequivocal. The first time that Fielding and Aziz meet is a moment of immediate intimacy (PI, 82). When Fielding mentions that two ladies are coming to meet him, Aziz replies, “Meet me? I know no ladies.” (PI, 83) – and he is disappointed, “for he preferred to be alone with his new friend” (PI, 84). This intimacy is later deepened when Aziz shows Fielding a picture of his deceased wife (PI, 128), and it is possible to regard Fielding’s belief in his friend’s innocence as a sign that he thinks him queer.¹⁶ The doctor’s arrest brings the two men closer together: after his release, Aziz addresses the College teacher by his Christian name (PI, 236). However,

¹⁵ Fielding’s marriage to Stella has been rightly described as “one of the strangest unexplained mysteries of the novel” (Paxton, 1999: 240).

¹⁶ In an essay written in 1992, Yonatan Touval demonstrates how colonialism and homosexuality are interwoven in Forster’s novel around the issue of indeterminacy. This indeterminacy, however, pertains not only to what happens in the caves, but also to whether something really took place. Touval’s hypothesis is that, for the Anglo-Indian community, “the real violation” was that Adela “was not assaulted enough” or that “Aziz failed to rape” (Touval: 1997, 241). By not raping Adela, Aziz frustrates the Anglo-Indians’ expectations built upon their misconceived ideas about non-western sexuality (Touval, 1997: 244). In other words: Aziz’s queer behaviour makes out a strong case that he may very likely be *queer*.

they gradually fall apart. The rumour that Fielding and Adela were having an affair throws Aziz in a rage (PI, 267) and leads to 'a tragic coolness' between them (PI, 268). When Fielding announces that he is going to England, and that he might visit Adela, Aziz is seized by irrational jealousy: "he suspected his friend of intending to marry Miss Quested for the sake of her money and of going to England for that purpose" (PI, 275). When they meet again in Mau, two years later, Aziz (now married – PI, 290) is still convinced that Fielding has married Adela (PI, 288) and considers their friendship "a foolish experiment" (PI, 289).

The failure of the friendship between the Englishman and the Indian man has been attributed to many factors, from Fielding's friendship with Adela and Aziz's blunder (e.g. Silver, 1988: 99) to the question of compensation (Armstrong, 1992: 376). In addition to these, there is the fact that their friendship challenges the 'natural' divisions of the 'world' that underpin the novel. Because their relationship has a representative value, standing for inter-racial relationships in a colonial context, it cannot, for the sake of realism, but fail (at least for the time being, under colonial rule). What is disquieting about this conclusion, however, is that it fails to take account of Fielding's reactions to *nationalism*. In fact, the gradual estrangement of the two friends begins after the trial, when Aziz tells Fielding, "The approval of your compatriots no longer interests me, I have become anti-British, and ought to have done so sooner" (PI, 250). Aziz, to use Fielding's words (which he fails to use in this case), *has become a real person* – i.e. a subject in his own right, rather than the object of either imperialist arbitrariness or Western liberal justice and compassion. The narrator mentions the new 'person' – the 'general Indian' – that Aziz is trying to conjure up in his poetry, in the wake of the "Hindu-Moslem entente" that had spontaneously emerged around the trial (PI, 264), even if there are hints that it will not last (PI, 264; 265). Aziz is now convinced that "the song of the future must transcend creed" (PI, 265), a goal that he achieves in the last part of the novel, when he proclaims: "I am an Indian at last" (PI, 290).

This does not appear to be good news to Fielding. After the 'queer' victory (PI, 235), he notes, not without some misgivings, that the Indians have become surer of themselves, more 'aggressive' (PI, 258). At the height of their intimacy (at the end of 'Mosque', when Aziz shows him the picture of his wife which seals their 'compact' – PI, 133), Fielding had referred to India as "the queer nation" (PI, 129), while Aziz had referred to him as "a queer chap" (PI, 133). After the trial, however, 'queer' seems to acquire more threatening undertones (some of which continue to be sexual). For Fielding, it now denotes yielding, 'giving in to the East', which he associates with submission, if not

complete obliteration, and regards as a threat. Fielding can dress as an Indian on a festive occasion, but that is as far as he can go in his 'going native':

Aziz was friendly and domineering. He wanted Fielding to 'give in to the East', as he called it, and live in a condition of affectionate dependence upon it. (...) Yet he really couldn't become a sort of Mohammed Latif. When they argued about it something racial intruded – not bitterly, but inevitably, like the colour of their skins: coffee-colour versus pinko-gray. (PI, 258-259)

The question of 'East and West' comes between them (e.g. PI, 270-271), finally causing them to drift apart. Fielding spells it out, appropriately, as a tourist, on his journey back to England, when Italy makes him conclude that India lacks 'form' – "in poor India everything was placed wrong (...) indeed, without form, how can there be beauty?" (PI, 278) Italy, on the contrary, is "the civilization that has escaped muddle" (PI, 278). Fielding fears that his Indian friends will not understand his postcards and that "this constituted a serious barrier" (PI, 278), which turns out to be the case: later, Aziz will describe them as "so cold, so unfriendly that all agreed that something was wrong" (PI, 289). The imperial divide, rendered first in racial, then in touristic terms, is confirmed – and it is confirmed, moreover, *after* Aziz begins to yearn for independence.

'Form' becomes the major theme of the third part. The religious festival at Mau – celebrating the birth of Krishna – is described as a festival of formlessness and absolute alterity: "this approaching triumph of India was a muddle (as we call it), a frustration of reason and form" (PI, 282). It is, once again, inside a muddle, in formlessness, that the reunion of Fielding and Aziz, English and non-English, takes place. The centre of tension has been dislocated to another rift – that between Brahman and non-Brahman (PI, 288-289). 'Temple' re-enacts the central encounter of 'Mosque'. Aziz now comes upon Mrs Moore's son, Ralph, whom he treats of a bee sting. Though initially rude (as he had once been to Mrs Moore), Aziz finally yields and tells the boy (as he had once told his mother) that he is 'an Oriental' (PI, 306). 'Temple' symbolises the interruption of a cycle, which had started with his encounter with Mrs Moore and ended in the rejection of British India.¹⁷ As Aziz realises, "Never be friends with the English! Mosque, caves, mosque, caves. And here he was starting again" (PI, 306). The symbolism of the water, the all-encompassing religious festival – the procession includes "the moment of the Despised and Rejected", with the 'unclean sweepers'

¹⁷ At the beginning of the novel Aziz already showed dislike of British rule – he 'felt caught in the meshes' of the symbolic net that Britain 'had thrown over India' (PI, 39), from which he would like to escape (PI, 40). This image returns later, when he decides to move to an Indian state: "The English (...) persecuted him everywhere; they had even thrown nets over his dreams" (PI, 266).

playing (PI, 300) – and the ceremony where a prisoner is pardoned (PI, 305) all culminate in reconciliation (between the two friends) and forgiveness (of Adela).

The novel's last two scenes dramatise the promises and failures of the inter-cultural encounter. In the first one, 'the four outsiders' (Aziz and Ralph on a boat, Fielding and Stella on another) watch the palanquin of Krishna. As part of the ceremony, a servitor – "naked, broad-shouldered, thin-waisted – the Indian body again triumphant" (PI, 309) – enters the water with a tray. At that moment, the two boats collide and capsize, and they all plunge into the water (PI, 309-310), to dissolve, as it were, in liquid oneness (meanwhile it has started raining). The narrator comments: "That was the climax, as far as India admits of one" (PI, 310). The last scene, which closes the novel, takes place between Aziz and Fielding, riding in the jungle. After 'the funny shipwreck' (PI, 311), they are friends again. And yet, Aziz, now an overt anti-imperialist, is not interested in resuming their intimacy. In contrast with his earlier position, when he had told Fielding, on their way back from the caves, "Oh, kick you out? Why should I trouble over that dirty job? Leave it to the politicians..." (PI, 170), he now cries out to him: "Clear out, all you Turtons and Burtons. We wanted to know you ten years back – now it's too late. If we see you and sit on your committees, it's for political reasons, don't you make any mistake" (PI, 315). To Fielding's derision, Aziz declares India a nation: "'India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one!'" (PI, 315) In a visually powerful, if melodramatic, scene, the book concludes with the two men 'half kissing' and the two horses 'swerving apart':

'(...) we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then' – he rode against him furiously – 'and then,' he concluded, half kissing him, 'you and I shall be friends.'

'Why can't we be friends now?' said the other, holding him affectionately. 'It's what I want. It's what you want.'

But the horses didn't want it – they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it (...) they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet,' and the sky said, 'No, not there.' (PI, 316)

4.2. Orwell's *Burmese Days*

The elusiveness that became the staple of Forster's novel, and that earned him his literary repute, is noticeably absent from George Orwell's portrait of Empire in *Burmese Days*, his gritty, 'naturalistic' novel (Atkins, 1954: 33), which is usually read as a fully-fledged attack on Anglo-India. The book does record, with realistic detail, the cruelties

and injustices of life in Burma under colonial rule; it is also teeming with arguments against the Empire. And yet, a reading that moves beyond the superficial layers of the text, exploring its gaps and contradictions, is bound to find a more complicated picture – and a less anti-imperialistic one.

Burmese Days tells the story of John Flory, manager of a timber company, who has been living and working in colonial Burma for fifteen years. The plot accommodates two major narrative strands. The first one concerns the protagonist's life of loneliness and corruption as a member of the Anglo-Indian community of Kyauktada, as well as his failed attempts to woo the marriageable, newly-arrived from England, Elizabeth Lackersteen. The second strand concerns the tale of ambition of the local Burmese Magistrate, U Po Kyin, who plots to ruin Dr Veraswami, the Civil Surgeon and Superintendent of the jail (BD, 7), in order to obtain a place in the European Club. The two strands develop separately for the best part of the novel, but then converge in the end to dictate the tragic finale of the protagonist.

The novel has been normally read as a polemic against the British Empire, or, alternatively, as a study of the 'failure of communication' and 'of community' (Lee, 1969: 8; 19), a theme that is rendered by way of a thick (pseudo)Freudian symbolic pattern (Lee, 1969: 1). However, the two aspects are present in the novel and cannot be separated. What is more, their separation, which is inbuilt in the novel's structure, presupposes the uncritical acceptance of the fictional universe, which precludes the assessment of the novel's position regarding imperialism *beyond that ambit and those terms*. The 'manipulation' of 'plot structure' and its ideological effects has been noted by Rezaul Karim (Karim, 1999: 101), who has stressed "the underlying connection between the main plot and the subplot" (Karim, 1999: 102). This critic, however, attributes this connection to the fact that both plot and subplot "suggest Flory's imprisonment in isolation and moral corruption, which derive from the imperial situation" (Karim, 1999: 102).¹⁸ In my reading, however, I propose to break this cause-effect link, which has been taken for granted by the majority of critics, and which

¹⁸ Karim identifies three parts for the main plot: the first part presents Flory's degraded moral situation in Burma, in which he is alienated, tacitly accepting imperialism, while at the same time hating it and hoping to be saved by marriage (chapter 2 to 6); the second, the incompatibility between Flory and Elizabeth (chapters 7 to 15); and the third part, in which Elizabeth rejects Flory, in the prospect of a better suitor (younger Verrall), and then accepts him (Karim, 1999: 104). The subplot is provided by U Po Kyin's tale of conspiracy (Karim, 1999: 105). Karim has also highlighted two ideas in the plot: that it is impossible for the colonist to be free (Karim, 1999: 104) and that "Flory's moral condition is ineradicable" (Karim, 1999: 105). He attributes this to the colonial situation: "The events, in the main plot and subplot, function cumulatively to illustrate and confirm that the protagonist's dream of absolution, of release from alienation and dirtiness, is not realizable while he lives in a colonial setting" (Karim, 1999: 100).

amounts to the narrator's (and the protagonist's) own version of the facts. Indeed, to regard the protagonist's 'imprisonment' as an effect of 'the imperial situation' sends us back to the novel's own plot structure – which posits U Po Kyin's conspiracy as a *subterranean* plot that destructively undermines and determines the (overt, public and British-centred) main plot. Apart from the fact that it adheres to an Orientalist vision of the world (which depicts the Oriental as cruel, treacherous, linked to the primitive, subconscious and primeval undercurrents of 'Man'), this scheme also confirms the tale of the imperialist as victim that Flory has been called forth to enact,¹⁹ and must, for these reasons, be rejected.

The 'corruption' of the 'colonial situation' is immediately established at the beginning of the novel, which opens – thus fully revealing its 'exotic' flavour – with the Burmese villain of the story. It is therefore also immediately connected to the Burmese. U Po Kyin's portrayal is rendered in aesthetic and moral terms: he is "beautiful in his grossness", in a way that is attractive but also alien to Western standards (BD, 1). However, his physical appearance, summed up as 'grotesque', is only the exterior expression of his inner malevolence, which is rendered in terms of self-interested cunningness (rather than intelligence) – "his brain, though cunning, was quite barbaric, and it never worked except for some definite end" (BD, 4) – and of a childish indulgence in excess – his laugh is 'disgusting' but 'childlike' (BD, 9); his meals are 'orgies' and 'debauches' (BD, 10).²⁰ The apparent lightness with which he is described, which allows him to be compared to "a great porcelain idol" (BD, 1), is later corrected by another Oriental, the educated and Anglophile Dr Veraswami, who warns the protagonist about the extreme cruelty of the Burmese magistrate, whom he compares to a crocodile (BD, 44). The point is that no European (including the narrator) can have

¹⁹ Karim uses Orwell's colonial fiction – taking up the usual texts, namely *Burmese Days*, 'Shooting an Elephant' and 'A Hanging' – to rebut Orwell's "self-image as 'an anti-imperialist'" (Karim, 1999: 99). He is peremptory: "Although there is a certain duality in Orwell's attitude to the British Raj, his essential and preponderant outlook is imperialist" (Karim, 1999: 100). Orwell's real concern was with "the impact of the Raj on the sensitive imperialist", who is described as "a victim of imperialism, a captive of its by-products, of isolation and moral corruption, and of its code of behaviour" (Karim, 1999: 101).

²⁰ Presented as the exponent of native corruptness, which owes him the epithet of "the crocodile", U Po Kyin has generated consensus among the critics as to his extreme evilness. Interestingly, he continues to be singled out for his "grotesque" physique and judged to be *crueLLer* than the British (Meyers, 1991, 48). Jeffrey Meyers goes as far as contending that his Machiavellian schemes are proof that he "controls even his rulers" (Meyers, 1975, 67). Although he compares the Burmese magistrate to "the imperialists who are his role models", David Waterman similarly refers to him as 'a cannibal' (Waterman: 1999, 94). Finally, John Newsinger has even suggested that he is the embodiment of the emerging neo-colonial comprador class: "Indeed, a good case can be made that U Po Kyin, his monstrous Burmese magistrate, is the first portrait of the neo-colonial politician, flattening off his own people in alliance with the Western powers" (Newsinger, 1999: 10). Newsinger maintains the inhuman ('monstrous') imagery that is close to Orwell's deployment of animals to characterise the Burmese, and which has been often noted and condemned (e.g. Karim, 1999: 110). Most critics thus tend to take for granted and reproduce the novel's presentation of the corrupt magistrate as the epitome of the unfathomable essence of *Eastern* cruelty.

access to the depths of Oriental evil, a point that is voiced (and illustrated) by the doctor, himself an Oriental: “Only an Oriental could know him. You, an English gentleman, cannot sink your mind to the depths of such ass U Po Kyin” (BD, 44).

This instance of Orientalism is no exception in the novel, nor is it at odds with the novel’s dominant point of view, which is clearly Eurocentric. In an unacknowledged paradox (for the novel revels in acknowledging most of its paradoxes), the evilness of the Burmese magistrate, despite being presented as a fact of nature (he had been ambitious and lacking in scruples already as a child), is made to converge with the arrival of the British in Burma. His earliest memory is of the British troops marching into Mandalay, “great beef-fed men, red-faced and red-coated” (BD, 1-2), whom U Po Kyin immediately recognises as superior: “In his childish way he had grasped that his own people were no match for this race of giants. To fight on the side of the British, to become a parasite upon them, had been his ruling ambition, even as a child” (BD, 1). U Po Kyin’s dishonest rise from poverty to a low place in the imperial administration, which involves blackmail, bribery and corruption, and which represents his transformation into the proverbial Oriental despot, thus introduces, and is connected to, the other source of corruption in the novel: the British Empire.

Described as “the real seat of the British power” (BD, 14), the European Club stands in the novel for the British Empire. Indeed, it is within its precincts that we find all the stock imperialist types parading their Anglo-Saxon superiority, in an endless display of bigotry and racism that supplies the novel with its mordant anti-imperialist satire. Ellis is, no doubt, the central figure of the group. He encapsulates the worst of imperialism, which combines arbitrary colonial power with rabid racism. Though he attends church, he dislikes Christian missionaries for their ‘egalitarian’ ideas (BD, 24), being the main opponent to the extension of the Club membership to Orientals. Racism is all-pervasive in his thought and language, which is abusive in extreme (he only checks his language in the presence of ladies – e.g. BD, 27), as can be seen in his long list of racist epithets: “a dear little nigger-boy”, “Dr Very-slimy”, “little pot-bellied niggers breathing garlic in your face” (BD, 20); “black, stinking swine” (BD, 21); “that oily little *babu*” (BD, 22); “black hides” (BD, 28). Then, there is Mrs Lackersteen, the sole representative of the *memsahib*, who has all the stereotypical features, from complaining about servants and asking her husband to give them ‘a good thrashing’ (BD, 26), to not caring to learn the country’s language (BD, 121) and being a snob about ‘the lower classes at Home’ (BD, 26). She is also the domineering, castrating wife (BD, 19) of the lustful, alcoholic and cowardly Mr Lackersteen (BD, 256; 258; 266). But, above all, she is a loyal imperialist,

raising her voice against “all these dreadful Reforms” (BD, 26), which all members in general, and the Superintendent of Police in particular, regard as ‘the ruin of the Indian Empire’ (BD, 30). Finally, there is the figure of Macgregor, the highest-rank officer, who represents a more liberal, albeit paternalistic, type of imperialism: “He had no prejudice against Orientals; indeed, he was deeply fond of them. Provided they were given no freedom he thought them the most charming people alive” (BD, 28). The irony is also targeted at Macgregor’s many affairs with Burmese women, denounced earlier in the novel (BD, 6). Clearly intended as a contrast with Ellis, Macgregor disapproves of the word ‘nigger’, but replaces it with classifications that are no less racial – “the Burmese are Mongolians, the Indians are Aryans or Dravidians, and all of them are quite distinct” (BD, 28).

The dialogues between these characters, rendered with irony, often sarcasm, and against which the protagonist secretly rants (in much the same way that the other Club members do), have supported the novel’s anti-imperialist credentials. Critics adhere to the sense of claustrophobic oppression that the Club scenes emanate, to see in them a representation (and condemnation) of the British Empire. And yet, the Club also appears to be a place of relaxed male conviviality, where the Englishmen can meet for a drink and tell jokes. Macgregor is, no doubt, the most tolerant of the group. He has “a kindly, puggy face”, “wilful geniality” and the narrator vows that “the good nature in his face was quite genuine” (BD, 25). Mr Lackersteen, likewise, is described as “really a very simple-minded man, with no ambitions beyond having what he called ‘a good time’” (BD, 18). Even Ellis appears to be appreciated: “Ellis’s jokes were always genuinely witty, and yet filthy beyond measure” (BD, 25). Furthermore, his overt racism can be played down, since it carries class overtones – he has “a spiteful Cockney voice” (BD, 18; cf. 19) – and sometimes borders on self-parody, as when he reproaches a servant for his English, “Have you swallowed a dictionary?” (BD, 23) Finally, Flory’s relations with the other British – despite the fact that he professes to be their main critic – are more often than not cordial, if not amicable, even before he starts courting Elizabeth. In fact, despite being called by Ellis “Booker Washington, the niggers’ pal” (BD, 31), and considered by all to be ‘a bit Bolshie’ (BD, 31; 32; 27), Flory gets along with everyone. Ellis’s fits of rage are dismissed as typical: “Quarrels were a regular part of the routine of Club life” (BD, 23), and do not prevent the protagonist from participating in the ‘smutty rhymes’ and dirty jokes with the other men (BD, 25). They all praise Dyer and Amritsar, and agree with Ellis’s rants against ‘those cowards in

England' (BD, 30), and when it comes to declaring that 'India is going to the dogs', even Flory joins in (BD, 27).

Flory's hatred of this life is, nevertheless, clearly articulated – at least until Elizabeth appears. This is established from the first moment, when he exclaims, following a night of drinking, "Bloody, bloody hole!" (BD, 15) In fact, we soon learn that Flory leads a double life. When he is at the Club, he is divided between, on the one hand, what he feels and thinks – 'inside his head' (BD, 31) – and, on the other, his compliance to and complicity in the *pukka sahiblog*. At Dr Veraswami's, however, he fully vents his hatred and resentment, taking a secret pleasure from doing it, "like a Nonconformist minister dodging up to town and going home with a tart" (BD, 35). He tells the doctor what he does not have the courage to tell his compatriots (BD, 36), pouring out to him that despite appearances and their 'hanging together', "we all hate each other like poison", and adding that it is 'booze' that "keeps the machine going" (BD, 37). Despite the doctor's protests, Flory continues his ranting against the British, even though he clarifies: 'I'm not seditious. I don't want the Burmans to drive us out of this country. God forbid!', and then goes on to lay out his position:

I'm here to make money, like everyone else. All I object to is the slimy white man's burden humbug. The pukka sahib pose. It's so boring. Even those bloody fools at the Club might be better company if we weren't all of us living a lie the whole time. (...) The Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we'd only admit that we're thieves and go on thieving without any humbug. (BD, 37)

The protagonist may accuse the British imperialists (i.e. his 'friends' at the Club) of lying, but what the novel shows is that he is the one who 'pretends' (BD, 63). Flory himself, in one of his many self-deprecatory moments, recognises this much, "all those fools at the Club, those dull louts to whom you are so pleased to think yourself superior – they are all better than you, every man of them. At least they are men in their oafish way. Not cowards, not liars. Not half-dead and rotting" (BD, 62). Flory's own cowardice, which manifests itself at the Club every time he shirks from direct confrontation (BD, 22), is explained as congenial, its cause being the birthmark on his cheek, which had earned him at school the nickname 'Blueface' and 'Monkey-bum', and brought upon him much humiliation (BD, 64). The birthmark makes him feel self-conscious in the presence of others (BD, 114), and of Elizabeth in particular (e.g. BD, 82; 83; 85; 90), but it is also endowed with a definite moral function: "He always

remembered the birthmark when he had done something to be ashamed of” (BD, 53), for instance, when he loses the courage to do what he thinks is right (BD, 64).

The novel’s claims to be a polemic against the British Empire are thin also on this count. Flory, the chief mouthpiece of the book’s critique of Empire, could hardly have been portrayed in a more ambiguous way. As Eagleton has noted, his point of view is grounded in self-doubt and he “veers between a frustrating raging at his compatriots (a feeling which the novel suggests is excessive and unfair) and what amounts to a declared cynicism” (Eagleton, 1974: 10). But other factors contribute to the novel’s ambiguity. Orwell’s gallery of Anglo-Indian characters is visibly narrower than Forster’s, being much more prone (in a manner that would become characteristic of Orwell’s subsequent novels) to stereotyping. Kyauktada having been introduced as “a fairly typical Upper Burma town” (BD, 15), it does make a difference, for representational purposes, that the British expatriates amount to three timber traders, three officers (one of them the Superintendent of Police) and one memsahib. To this group two other figures will be added: an orphaned, poverty-stricken niece, who has come to India in search of a husband, and a Military Police Officer, the protagonist’s rival – two characters that share or simply take for granted the imperialist assumptions of their countrymen. Finally, the decision to portray the British Empire as a Club has far-reaching implications, some of which can be contested.

At the beginning of the novel, the Club is presented as “the real centre of the town” (BD, 14). In effect, the driving force of the story is the dispute between two natives (one Indian, one Burmese) to be admitted as members to the ‘prestigious’, and much-coveted for, all-white Club. The Club thus becomes metonymic of ‘Western civilization’ – the magnet towards which all feel attracted – or in the narrator’s ironical words, “the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain” (BD, 14). Besides U Po Kyin (who wants to join it for all the wrong reasons), Dr Veraswami too ‘pines’ for the Club, though he does so for what appears to be, despite the protagonist’s cynicism, the right reasons. Dr Veraswami is the educated Indian whose committed imperialism provides a counterpoint to Flory’s anti-imperialist arguments. Their relationship is introduced as ‘a topsy-turvy affair’, “for the Englishman was bitterly anti-English and the Indian fanatically loyal” (BD, 38). Orwell puts in the mouth of this character, described as “very loyal to the Europeans” (BD, 8), all the arguments in defence of the Empire and against nationalism. In one of his visits (like the Club, described as typical), Dr Veraswami receives Flory effusively: “how I have been pining for some cultured conversation!” (BD, 34) What is striking is that, even though he is “a great reader” and

likes books with a ‘moral meaning’, like those “of the Emerson-Carlyle-Stevenson type” (BD, 35), the doctor is completely devoid of critical opinions. He regurgitates (with no irony intended) all the pro-Empire arguments that had been previously voiced by the members of the Club – from holding that, “your officials are civilising us, elevating us to their level, from pure public spirit” (BD, 39), to invoking “the Oriental character” (BD, 39) – “the horrible sloth of the Oriental” (BD, 41). He calls his patients “these villagers – dirty ignorant savages!” (BD, 150) Even more strikingly, considering that they are discussing the riot provoked by Ellis’s cold-blooded blinding of a boy, the doctor dismisses Ellis, “Ah, Mr Ellis iss sometimes over-emphatic in hiss expressions. I have noticed it” (BD, 268). Dr Veraswami is, in the end, a caricature, the stereotype of the Westernised native, with none of the ambivalence that Homi Bhabha has discerned in colonial ‘mimicry’ (e.g. Bhabha, 1994: 121). He is an object of ridicule, especially as far as his English is concerned (e.g. BD, 232). Even after his downfall and demotion, he fails (unlike Aziz) to learn anything from his experience. We find him at the close of the novel seeking ‘cultured conversation’ with a Glasgow electrician, never believing, the narrator sardonically adds, “that a white man can be a fool” (BD, 296).²¹

Dr Veraswami’s yearning for Western civilisation is intertwined with the belief that the Empire is a benevolent institution. The narrator’s observation that the English have built ‘durable jails’, “everywhere between Gibraltar and Hong Kong” (BD, 5; 15) throws doubt on such benevolence. But the issue is approached ambivalently: on the one hand, these jails are *ironically* associated with progress (BD, 15), on the other, this judgement seems to be confirmed, with pre-colonial Burma being, at several moments, actually associated with the Middle Ages (BD, 5; 15; 136). When Flory brings up the issue again with his Indian friend, the doctor counters, “Are not prisons necessary?” (BD, 40) Finally, prisons do not seem to be viewed seriously even by the natives themselves. When the magistrate comments that the editor ‘will get six months’ for publishing his ‘seditious’ article, his accomplice replies, “he does not mind (...) the only time when his creditors leave him alone is when he is in prison” (BD, 6).

Underlying the question of prisons is, of course, the *real* question: that of justice, which fails to receive as much attention. This is clear in the scene following the murder of Maxwell, which leads to the riot, in which Ellis comes across five High School boys and beats one of them with his cane:

²¹ An example of creative violence to the text would be to read Dr Veraswami as a rebel who manages throughout the book to deceive everyone (including the narrator). The scene of the riot, in which Flory finds him in the middle of the crowd comes close to actually suggesting it (BD, 265).

Ellis saw them coming, a row of yellow, malicious faces – epicene faces, horribly smooth and young, grinning at him with deliberate insolence. It was in their minds to bait him, as a white man. Probably they had heard of the murder, and – being Nationalists, like all schoolboys – regarded it as a victory. They grinned full in Ellis’s face as they passed him. They were trying openly to provoke him, and they knew that the law was on their side. Ellis felt his breast swell. The look of their faces, jeering at him like a row of yellow images, was maddening. He stopped short. (BD, 252)

What happens next – the novel’s major incident of colonial violence – is told in a tone of detached (and ironic) objectivity: Ellis addresses the boys in his insulting manner; one boy answers ‘insolently’, but ‘perhaps’ sounding ‘more insolent than he intended’, Ellis hits him with his cane across the eyes; the boys strike back, throwing stones; the police arrives and the boys run away. Ellis then reports that he had been ‘wantonly assaulted’, and the witnesses corroborate his version (“they lied in perfect unison” – BD, 253). In the end, however, the narrator’s irony betrays some ambiguity: the question of truth is relativised: “Ellis, *to do him justice*, probably believed this to be a truthful version of the story” (BD, 253, my emphasis). Furthermore, the boy’s blindness is finally attributed to the incompetence of a Burmese doctor, and the incident is dismissed as “the unprovoked attack on Ellis (for that was the accepted description of it)” (BD, 254). Ellis’s grievance, quoted above, that the boys “knew that the law was on their side” – which had been the topic of a prior conversation with the Police Superintendent (BD, 250) – offer a striking contrast with the rioters’ only demand: “we know that there is no justice for us in your courts, so we must punish Ellit [sic] ourselves” (BD, 257). Flory saves the day by bringing the riot to an end through peaceful means. The issue of justice is, however, left unattended, with the scene becoming yet another episode of the protagonist’s heroics, for the sake of the novel’s major (romantic) plot.

An insight into the narrator’s real sympathies has, however, been offered earlier in the novel. Having exposed the racism and chauvinism of the Club, the narrator half-apologetically turns to the difficult lives of the colonisers: “you could forgive the Europeans a great deal of their bitterness. Living and working among Orientals would try the temper of a saint. And all of them, the officials particularly, knew what it was to be baited and insulted” (BD, 32). The example that follows pertains to the taunts of High School boys, in a way that evokes Ellis’s racism and anticipates the scene described above: “their young, *yellow* faces – faces smooth as gold coins, full of that maddening contempt *that sits so naturally on the Mongolian face* – sneered at them (...) hooted after them with *hyena-like* laughter” (BD, 32, my emphasis). The narrator

concludes: “The life of Anglo-Indian officials is not all jam. In comfortless camps, in sweltering offices, in gloomy *dak bungalows* smelling of dust and earth-oil, they earn, perhaps, the right to be a little disagreeable” (BD, 32).

What seems to emerge from the novel’s anti-imperialism, in brief, is the figure of the imperialist as prisoner, an image that is sustained, as Rezaul Karim argued, by the interconnected plot and subplot (Karim, 1999: 102). Though privileging a psychological reading, Robert Lee also pointed to this aspect:

Not only do the English literally imprison the Burmese, but metaphorically at least, the entire novel displays the captivity of all the characters. In their striving for English values, Burmese such as U Po Kyin and Veraswami incarcerate themselves; in the closed world of the Club, the English enslave their servants and each other in bigotry and solipsism; perhaps most significant of all, the jungles make captives of all inhabitants. (Lee, 1969: 17)

The prison imagery is, no doubt, prevalent in the novel, but it is possible to analyse it without succumbing either to Lee’s flattening approach (everyone is a prisoner of their own minds) or to the view that the protagonist, and by extension the imperialist, is a prisoner of colonialism (which, as Karim suggests, is the novel’s dominant meaning). There is an alternative reading, which consists in analysing the political implications of this imagery.

As Eagleton has pointed out, the source of Flory’s grievances is not so much ‘the political realities of imperialism’, as a given ‘atmosphere’ (Eagleton, 1974: 10). This ‘atmosphere’, I will argue, amounts to a state of boredom or ennui. When we first see Flory at the Club, a scene that is rendered as typical, he finally decides to leave, it appears, not because of the content of Ellis’s racist diatribes (or the chauvinist remarks of the others), but because of the fact that it *always amounts to the same*: “Would none of them *ever* think of *anything new* to say? Oh, what a place, what people! What a civilisation is this of ours – this godless civilisation founded on whisky, *Blackwood’s* and ‘Bonzo’ pictures! God have mercy on us, for all of us are part of it!” (BD, 31, my emphasis)

The Club is not only the seat of British power – it is also, perhaps more importantly, a place where *nothing ever happens*. Flory dismisses everything about it as typical and routine: even when there is “a nasty, dirty affair”, like the one provoked by the libellous news on Macgregor, it is ultimately described as “something quite ordinary, quite according to precedent” (BD, 62). As the narrator had earlier observed, “Quarrels were

a regular part of the routine of Club life” (BD, 23). Flory constantly complains of boredom (BD, 55), and he is not alone in that: Westfield, the Superintendent of Police, is bored of paperwork and longs for the War (BD, 24) or for “a full-sized rebellion, and the consequent reign of martial law” (BD, 30). The longing for blood to appease boredom is recurrent – Maxwell shoots one of the rebels, Dr Veraswami informs, because he was “too anxious to use his Rifle” (BD, 233); similarly, when the riot takes place towards the end of the book, Westfield regrets his absence: “Again it had happened – a veritable riot, and he not there to quell it! It seemed fated that he should never kill a man. Depressing, depressing” (BD, 266-267). The heat captures this atmosphere: for the Anglo-Indians, it means endless days of sweating torpor. As the narrator observes, with the exception of the two young newcomers, Elizabeth and Verrall (BD, 220), who seem to be immersed in each other, the heat is viewed by all with horror: “there was something horrible in it – horrible to think of that blue, blinding sky, stretching on and on over Burma and India, over Siam, Cambodia, China, cloudless and interminable” (BD, 33). In the heat, the Empire draws definitely to a halt, becoming a stagnant place, a place where nothing happens.

On the other hand, there are many things going on in Kyauktada – civilians taunting British officers, arrests for political reasons (e.g. of the editor of the *Burmese Patriot*); riots. None of these, however, is taken as more than a matter of routine, i.e. a question of ‘law and order’. As Karim has noted, although Burma was undergoing a period of anti-colonial protest during the period between 1919 and 1930, Burmese nationalism has no significant expression in the novel. Indeed, Burmese nationalists appear to be “no better than a misguided, unruly and chaotic lot” (Karim, 1999: 101). This disavowal is built into the novel, through the subplot, which makes of U PO Kyin the driving force behind most of these incidents. In fact, all anti-colonial activities seem to be a put-up and a sham, a product of the magistrate’s creation. The exposé of Macgregor, accusing him of ruining Burmese women and abandoning his illegitimate children, published in a Nationalist, anti-colonial paper, the *Burmese Patriot*, is part of his malevolent machinations (BD, 5-6) and is not given much attention beyond that (the accusation being itself undermined by the fact that the charge applies to U Po Kyin himself – BD, 5; 10). The Burmese magistrate is also behind the ‘small riot’ following the arrest of the editor of the *Burmese Patriot* – which the narrator summarily dismisses – ‘only two rioters’ die and the prisoner’s hunger strike lasts a mere ‘six hours’ (BD, 114). He is the mastermind of the (false) rebellion that results in the death of a villager (and then, in retaliation, of Maxwell), for which he becomes a hero in the eyes of the British (BD,

232-233) and is later decorated (BD, 298). Even what appeared to be a spontaneous riot caused by Ellis's beating and blinding of a boy is ultimately attributed to him (BD, 265). In other words, nationalism seems to amount to U Po Kyin's strategy to discredit Dr Veraswami before the English (BD, 8); it is the job of an 'agent provocateur' on foolish villagers (BD, 143-144), a 'natives' quarrel' which the British have no difficulty in bringing under control, as the narrator notes in the end – "it was quite safe to travel in the jungle now, for the *futile* rebellion was obviously finished" (BD, 271, my emphasis). In other words, the stagnation is also political: there are no political alternatives in this world. Hence the figure of U PO Kyin, the local despot, who operates *within* the ambit of British rule, even if without the knowledge of his British superiors – as the narrator parenthetically explains, "no British officer will ever believe anything against *his own men*" (BD, 3, my emphasis).

Karim is right in stressing, drawing on Edward Said, that *Burmese Days* "illustrates the irrelevance of the Other, the Object, by undermining its struggle for liberation" (Karim, 1999: 109). And yet, it does so, by *reaffirming* the relation of 'otherness'. The distinction between what is European (the West) and what is 'other than European' (the East) is inbuilt in the novel and accepted, or simply taken for granted, by all characters. Furthermore, this distinction is made at the level of *identity*, rather than agency. As the narrator at one point observes, "in India you are not judged for what you do, but for what you *are*" (BD, 139, italics in original). In the scheme of identities that the novel supports, differences are decisive. The 'encounter' with the 'Other' is only conceivable within the parameters of identity. This is evident when Flory takes Elizabeth to see the *pwe*-dance. The girl is not sure whether it is a good idea to sit among the crowd, but her opinion of the natives is, at best, of supercilious indifference: "after all, natives were natives – interesting, no doubt, but finally only a 'subject' people, an inferior people with black faces" (BD, 121). Flory's tourist-like remarks to Elizabeth, on the other hand, express fascination *precisely* because of difference: "It's grotesque, it's even ugly (...) And there's something sinister in it too. There's a touch of the diabolical in all Mongols. And yet when you look closely, what art, what centuries of culture you can see behind it!" (BD, 107) His position, in practical terms, is not so different from Elizabeth's (she also describes the dancer as "monstrous, like a demon" – BD, 108). Both concur in regarding differences as definitive, as the limits of one's comprehensibility; in Burmese affairs, as the narrator points out, "there is always something impervious to the European mind" (BD, 45). The opposite situation is also assumed: Flory cannot tell Dr Veraswami his most private thoughts, because the doctor,

though a 'good man', "understood little of what was said to him" (BD, 70). The novel's only cross-racial friendship is, in the end, an encounter with sameness, in which the imperialist assumptions of the British are confirmed, hence no encounter at all, as Flory ultimately concedes, "even his talks with the doctor were a kind of talking to himself" (BD, 70).

For the English, the wall of (in)difference is a source of reassurance: Flory's first anonymous letter fails to preoccupy him – "no Englishman ever feels himself in real danger from an Oriental" (BD, 79; cf. 47-48). Echoing Mr Turton's words, he understands and, at this point of the novel, accepts the need not to get involved with Indians: "With Indians there must be no loyalty, no real friendship. Affection, even love – yes. (...) Even intimacy is allowable, at the right moments. But alliance, partisanship, never! Even to know the rights and wrongs of a 'native' quarrel is a loss of prestige" (BD, 80; cf. PI, 174). The same (albeit less anxious) indifference is attributed to the natives (and duly submitted to anthropological analysis), as the scene in which one of Macgregor's servants watches the Englishman exercise in the morning suggests: "His narrow, yellow, Arabian face expressed neither comprehension nor curiosity. He had watched these contortions – a sacrifice, he dimly imagined, to some mysterious and exacting god – every morning for years" (BD, 74).

The mainstay of difference, as this quote demonstrates, is race, which has an overriding presence in the novel: Flory's servant, Ko S'la, is a "rustic-looking Burman with a very dark skin" (BD, 49); the protagonist notes "the naked black coolies" and refers to the servants as "a ring of kindly brown faces" (BD, 71); an old Indian is described as "the colour of earth" (BD, 72), another being 'earth-coloured' (BD, 229); Elizabeth's 'sampan' at Colombo are "coal-black men" (BD, 98) and she shrinks from sitting "among the black people" (BD, 108); the Indian butler of the Lackersteens squints "with his white eyeballs large in his black face" (BD, 102); at church, standing apart from the British, there are 'four pink-cheeked Karen Christians' and a 'dark Indian of uncertain race' (BD, 281). When Elizabeth and Ma Hla May meet for the first time, the narrator notes, "No contrast could have been stranger" (BD, 88), attributing this to race, "Flory thought he had never noticed before how dark Ma Hla May's face was" (BD, 89). Describing the girl to her uncle and aunt, Elizabeth will later mention "her round yellow face" (BD, 101). The attention to skin colour in character presentation or to refer to the natives borders on obsession. The subject is broached in a conversation between Elizabeth and Flory. After associating a certain shape of the head with a 'criminal type', Elizabeth expresses her disgust at 'black skin', to what the protagonist replies:

‘But, you know, one gets used to the brown skin in time. In fact they say – I believe it’s true – that after a few years in these countries a brown skin seems more natural than a white one. And after all, it *is* more natural. Take the world as a whole, it’s an eccentricity to be white.’

‘You *do* have some funny ideas!’ (BD, 122)

Flory’s position is put to the test shortly after, when Elizabeth asks him about the two Eurasians, Mr Francis and Mr Samuel, not being sure how to place them: “Such extraordinary creatures! (...) One of them looks almost white, surely he isn’t an Englishman?” (BD, 125) Elizabeth draws upon the usual racial notions concerning ‘degenerate types’ and ‘dishonest faces’ – “I’ve heard that half-castes always inherit what’s worst in both races” (BD, 126). Though assuming the role of the experienced *and liberal* Anglo-Indian, Flory fails to contradict her. He tells Elizabeth, “Yellowbellies is our friendly nickname for them” (BD, 125), and attributes the derelict situation of the two men to the fact that “the Europeans won’t touch them with a stick”, and that, “unless they chuck all pretension to being Europeans”, they have to live on charity, concluding: “And really you can’t expect the poor devils to do that. Their drop of white blood is the sole asset they’ve got” (BD, 126). However, when Elizabeth asks, “only a very low kind of man would – er – have anything to do with native women, wouldn’t he?”, he answers (while a former affair with an Eurasian girl crosses his mind), “Oh, quite” (BD, 127). Flory’s discourse could hardly have been more ambiguous:

‘Most Eurasians aren’t very good specimens, and it’s hard to see how they could be, with their upbringing. But our attitude towards them is rather beastly. We always talk of them as though they’d sprung up from the ground *like mushrooms*, with all their faults ready-made. But when all’s said and done, we’re responsible for their existence.’ (BD, 126, my emphasis)

In the end, Flory tells Elizabeth that it is not in keeping with ‘the rules’ to talk to Eurasians, but that he does it because he is keen on ‘breaking the rules occasionally’ (BD, 127). In short, for all their apparent open-mindedness and liberal inclinations, Flory’s words fail to convince, as they ultimately amount to a ‘pose’ that aims at challenging the *sahiblog*.

Perhaps more importantly, Flory’s words are confirmed in the narrator’s presentation of Mr Francis and Mr Samuel, the two Eurasians, who are compared to ‘a pair of dogs’²²

²² This image reinforces their lowly racial and class status. Orwell’s animal metaphors in *Burmese Days* have a regular racial incidence. As we have seen, U Po Kyin is like ‘a crocodile’ (BD, 44); his wife, Ma Kin, has a ‘simian face’ (BD, 10); Burmese servants are compared to dogs (BD, 67); an Indian servant of

and to ‘toadstools’ (that is, poisonous *mushrooms*, an image that Flory also uses in the quote above) (BD, 123). In fact, the narrator’s response to Ellis’s rabid racism is one of bemused curiosity: “it was curiously impressive, because it was so completely sincere. Ellis really did hate Orientals” (BD, 21). Flory’s argument that, in the East, “a brown skin seems more natural than a white one” (BD, 122) is the measure of the narrator’s bemusement: “Living and working, as the assistant of a timber firm must, in perpetual contact with the Burmese, he had never grown used to the sight of a black face” (BD, 21). In other words, neither the protagonist nor the narrator is able to move beyond the limits of what is ‘natural’ or what one ‘gets used to’, a perspective that has obvious shortcomings. When Dr Veraswami mentions to his friend his wish to become a member of the Club, the narrator comments on Flory’s reaction:

It always made him ashamed and uncomfortable when it had to be admitted between them that the doctor, because of his black skin, could not be received in the Club. It is a disagreeable thing when one’s close friend is not one’s social equal; *but it is a thing native to the very air of India*. (BD, 46, my emphasis)

That Elizabeth, just arrived from England, reveals the same racial prejudices as any Anglo-Indian no doubt disproves the last claim. However, it also establishes these prejudices as ‘natural’, an idea that is reinforced by the fact that they are also shared by the natives: Dr Veraswami holds that he, “as an Indian, belonged to an inferior and degenerate race” (BD, 38); for Ma Hla May, Flory’s mistress, “the whiteness of his skin had a fascination for her, *because of its strangeness* and the sense of power it gave her” (BD, 54, my emphasis). Finally, when a Chinese child begins crying at the sight of Flory and Elizabeth, the narrator explains that he “saw their white faces and was seized with terror” (BD, 135). They all seem to prove that race is a *natural* category not only of difference (and identity), but also of hierarchy.²³

the Club has eyes “like those of a dog” (BD, 18); a devoted butler is said to have loved his masters ‘like a dog’ (BD, 27); Dr Veraswami’s face recall “that of a black retriever dog” (BD, 43); Ma Hla May is compared to a cat (BD, 53); similarly, Ko S’la’s first wife is “a fat lazy cat” (BD, 77) and Burmese girls have “the faces of kittens” (BD, 107); a native beggar is described as “more like a grasshopper than a human being”, and also compared to a ‘caterpillar’ (BD, 42); common thieves are referred to as “these poor cringing rats” (BD, 76). Among the British, these metaphors are more to do with the characters’ personality (except for Flory’s sisters, who are “disagreeable horse-faced women” – BD, 72): Maxwell “reminded one of a carthorse colt” (BD, 19); Macgregor is likened to a turtle (BD, 25); Mrs Lackersteen’s hand is “like that of a newt” (BD, 26); Mrs Lackersteen is compared to “a meditative snake” (BD, 97); Verral is likened to a rabbit (BD, 190).

²³ Even Flo (Flory’s dog) is distinct from local mongrel dogs, or curs (e.g. BD, 59). Smell, which will be deployed as a class marker in Orwell’s subsequent fiction, is in this novel also a racial marker (with class overtones): Flo “always barked at strange Orientals, but she liked the smell of a European” (BD, 84); natives smell of garlic (BD, 149); Flory is disgusted at Ma Hla May’s Oriental smells, such as coco-nut

The ‘atmosphere’ of imperial stagnation finds another expression, on the personal level, in Flory’s ‘life, described as “lonely, eventless, corrupting” (BD, 66). If Westfield and the others turn to visions of war and blood as an escape from their boring lives, Flory nostalgically turns to the memories of his early days in Burma, when he would shoot, fish and visit prostitutes with his friends (BD, 65). Having become tired of ‘boyish pleasures’, he had turned to reading – he “learned to live in books when life was tiresome” (BD, 68), “to live inwardly, secretly, in books and secret thoughts that could not be uttered” (BD, 70). He had also accepted Burma as his ‘home’ (BD, 72) and started pining for “someone who would share his life in Burma – but really share it, share his inner, secret life” (BD, 73):

A friend. Or a wife? The quite impossible she. Someone like Mrs Lackersteen, for instance? Some damned memsahib, yellow and thin, scandalmongering over cocktails, making *kit-kit* with the servants, living twenty years in the country without learning a word of the language. Not one of these, please God. (BD, 73)²⁴

We see him alone in the jungle, bathing in the clear waters of a stream: “Alone, alone, the bitterness of being alone!” (BD, 57) Even though he has just dismissed Ma Hla May (and has come here to ‘cleanse’ himself of her), he longs for someone to ‘share’ his (Western and romanticised) visions of beauty, ‘bird, flower, tree’ – “Beauty is meaningless until it is shared” (BD, 57).

Flory’s longing for an encounter, is finally addressed with Elizabeth’s arrival. Although he is the one who needs ‘saving’ (cf. BD, 184), Elizabeth and Flory strike their acquaintance with him ‘saving’ her from the harmless buffalo, whose ‘crescent-shaped horns’ (BD, 81) had frightened the newly-arrived girl. Their encounter is first described as an event: “A pang of unreasonable happiness had gone through them both” (BD, 84). Changes immediately follow: Flory quits drinking, sends for the barber and dresses smartly (BD, 102). More importantly, he decides to help the doctor obtain his Club membership, by proposing his name in the general meeting (BD, 152; 156). Reflecting on such a decision, which had ‘nothing heroic about it’ but was ‘unlike him’, Flory asks himself, “Why, after all these years – the circumspect, pukka sahib-like years – break all the rules so suddenly?”, to which he answers:

oil (BD, 52-53). Invited to join the *pwe*-dance, Elizabeth feels ‘doubtful’ – she hesitates to join “the smelly native crowd” (BD, 105).

²⁴ This description inevitably recalls Forster’s Mrs Turton.

He knew why. It was because Elizabeth, by coming into his life, had so changed it and renewed it that all the dirty, miserable years might never have passed. Her presence had changed the whole orbit of his mind. She had brought back to him the air of England – dear England, where thought is free and one is not condemned forever to dance the *danse du pukkasaheb* for the edification of the lower races. (...) just by existing she had made it possible for him, she had even made it natural to him, to act decently. (BD, 156)

There is much irony here (the chapter ends with Flory going back to his old self, by ordering a drink of gin – BD, 162). But it has become clear that Elizabeth represents not so much an encounter, an opening into the real and therefore an event, as a re-encounter with England, which is to say, with the stagnant same. Furthermore, it is an encounter that takes place very much inside his head: in their first meeting, it is Flory who ‘does all the talking’ (BD, 87); having become her ‘cicerone’, he is “too eager in his attempts to interest her in things Oriental” (BD, 121) and impress on her his views: “He so wanted her to love Burma as he loved it, not to look at it with the dull, incurious eyes of a memsahib!” (BD, 121) When he takes her to the *pwe*-dance, he thinks, “she would love it – she must” (BD, 103), and tells her, “It’ll interest you” (BD, 104); also at the bazaar, he repeats, “It’ll interest you” (BD, 129), failing to notice her growing doubts (e.g. BD, 130).

It also becomes clear that Elizabeth’s ‘otherness’ hinges not so much on the fact that she is a woman – “the quite impossible she” – but on the fact that she is an *English* woman. Flory views her as “not beautiful, perhaps, but it seemed so there, in Burma” (BD, 83). As a woman in Burma, she is regarded as a curiosity, an ‘Ingaleikma’, who attracts the gaze of the Burmese (BD, 87-88; 105; 164). This is also how Flory sees her. When the English girl meets Ma Hla May, he watches the two of them watching each other: “For the best part of a minute neither of them could take her eyes from the other; but which found the spectacle more grotesque, more incredible, there is no saying” (BD, 89). In addition, her presence allows him – Flory is in danger of ‘going native’ – to renew his English identity and see Burma, again, as an ‘Other’. Elizabeth notes how in Burma “it’s all rather strange” and the bushes are “foreign-looking” (BD, 82-83). Through her, Flory renews his English point of view and calls Burma “a green, unpleasant land” (BD, 83), “a hole like this” (BD, 86), a ‘beastly country’, whose only ‘merit’ is that ‘it’s good for flowers’ (BD, 85).

The truth is that Flory’s pain is “the pain of exile” (BD, 185). He has “never been home to England” (BD, 70) and his gloomy vision of Burma is conjured up by nostalgia for ‘free’ England (BD, 69; cf. 156). He refers to the Burmese winter, when flowers finally

blossom, as “haunted by the ghost of England” (BD, 66) and of there being “almost English grass” (BD, 67). He finds the European food in Burma ‘more or less disgusting’ (BD, 51), “pretentious and filthy” (BD, 61; cf. BD, 65). Elizabeth is expected to make up for all this and assuage his pain. In his failed attempt to propose to her, the protagonist stresses the ‘foreignness’ of Burma, which is “as alien as a different planet”, and his need to have someone to share it with, “one person who could see it with eyes something like your own” (BD, 186).

Ironically, the problem with Elizabeth is that, despite the fact that she is the feminine ‘Other’, she is too little of what Flory expects her to be. The relationship between Flory and Elizabeth is defined by each other’s (pre)conceptions of ‘otherness’. In fact, they seem to embody a reversal of gender stereotypes – Flory, as his name indicates, is sensitive (hence cowardly) and artistic (he likes reading); Elizabeth, on the other hand, is often described as masculine. She wears her hair short– “as short as a boy’s” (BD, 82); she is fond of guns (BD, 163; 164) and, on the shooting day, is wearing a shirt that looks “like a man’s” (BD, 164). All the things that Elizabeth likes in Flory embody the values of manliness. It is Flory’s chivalry that draws her to him in their first encounter, when he is regarded as “almost a hero” (BD, 87). His shooting clothes make him look ‘quite a handsome man, in his way’, ‘splendidly manly’, ‘like a soldier’s face’ (BD, 167). After seeing him shoot, she feels ‘almost an adoration for Flory’ (BD, 170). Even though Flory is overtaken by feelings of pity and respect for the dead bird, she is seized by “bitter envy, because she had not shot it” (BD, 170-171). Elizabeth’s ‘envy’ puts her in the position of the ‘castrated woman’, suggesting that she will become, when married, a castrating wife. She is depicted as a threatening/frigid woman.²⁵ Her fascination with Ma Hla May is linked to her fascination with masculinity. What draws her to the girl is her sexual ambiguity,²⁶ as it emerges when she asks Flory: “Was that a man or a woman?” and then observes: “Oh, is *that* what Burmese women are like? They

²⁵ Elizabeth frigidity is linked to her snobbery (BD, 92) and xenophobia – “she disliked all foreigners *en bloc*; or at least all foreign men, with their cheap-looking clothes and their revolting table manners” (BD, 95). It also has racist connotations: she finds Burmese men repugnant – “hideous as demons” in her eyes (BD, 99). Robert Lee has seen in her fear of the harmless buffalo, whose horns recall Flory’s crescent-like birthmark, another sign of sexual frigidity (Lee, 1969: 45). Elizabeth is repelled by the buffalos, a symbol of masculinity, because they ‘looked so awful’ (BD, 82) – the same reason why she will reject Flory.

²⁶ Androgyny is recurrently attributed to the Burmese: U Po Kyin’s breasts are “huge as a woman’s with fat” (BD, 138), and the five boys that Ellis bullies are described as ‘epicene’ (BD, 252).

are queer little creatures! I saw a lot of them on my way up here in the train, but do you know, I thought they were all boys” (BD, 89; cf. 101, italics in original).²⁷

Elizabeth’s ideas of manliness are directly linked to what the narrator ironically describes as her “healthy loathing of Art” and of ‘braininess’ (BD, 96). This loathing is traced to (and partly justified by) her mother, whom the narrator negatively depicts as ‘messaging about’ with “such things as Women’s Suffrage and Higher Thought’, literature and painting (BD, 91). Flory’s talk about art (for instance, at the *pwe*-dance) is what drives them apart – “She had thought him a manly man till this evening” (BD, 110). Contrary to the protagonist’s expectations, Elizabeth is actually interested in what the narrator derisively calls “the proverbial Anglo-Indian bore” (BD, 167), hence when Flory falls from the pony, after Verrall’s arrival, she snubs him, walking past him “as though he had been a dead dog” (BD, 195).

This image of death, which anticipates the protagonist’s suicide, stresses the fact that Flory’s encounter with the ‘Other’ is ultimately an encounter with death. In Flory’s imagination, as it becomes clear in the scene that shows him alone in the jungle, nature (beauty), love (someone to share it with) and death are inextricably connected (BD, 57). This is also what defines his relationship with Elizabeth, as the shooting scene establishes: killing thrills Elizabeth and brings her closer to Flory. After shooting her first bird – which she ‘fondles’ – she is “conscious of an extraordinary desire to fling her arms round Flory’s neck and kiss him; and in some way it was the killing of the pigeon that made her feel this” (BD, 172). Their shooting of a leopard together represents their symbolic betrothal: “it was understood that Flory would ask Elizabeth to marry him, though nothing was said about this” (BD, 180).

The marriage, as we had been expecting from the beginning (for this is what Karim has called “an ironic romance” – Karim, 1999: 103), never takes place. Despite enjoying a final moment of glory following the heroic rescue of the British colony during the riot – “it was the buffalo and the leopard over again” (BD, 270) – Flory is disgraced by Ma Hla May, under the instructions of U Po Kyin. But the shattering of Flory’s illusions and the debacle of their relationship (which Elizabeth had never acknowledged) is attributed to Flory’s birthmark – as the narrator concludes, “It was, finally, the birthmark that had damned him” (BD, 290) – thus confirming the protagonist’s long self-consciousness regarding his ‘hideousness’.

²⁷ Elizabeth’s perception of Ma Hla May coincides with Flory’s, who had earlier noticed that ‘the ideal of a Burmese woman was to have no breasts’ (BD, 53), and who now also notices “how outlandish her tiny, stiff body, straight as a soldier’s, with not a curve in it except the vase-like curve of her hips” (BD, 89).

Robert Lee has praised *Burmese Days* for meeting “the highest standard of success in art: It ‘reads’ us, concretizes that which we already suspect, puts in form that which we know; *it substantiates us*” (Lee, 1969: 21).²⁸ Even though I disagree with this notion of art (and the classification of this novel as an artistic success), I agree on the whole with this description of *Burmese Days*, which is what we might call a ‘novel of confirmation’. The plot is built on a network of expectations and a play of identities, which the characters’ lines and their inter-action reinforce and confirm. All of U Po Kyin’s acts are guided by his preconceived ideas of how the British think and act – “when a man has a black face, suspicion *is* proof” (BD, 8); “How little you understand the European mind! (...) No European has any faith in a man with a black face” (BD, 9); the English have “no feeling of loyalty towards a native” (BD, 9); Indians associate with Europeans for reasons of ‘prestige’ (BD, 9).

Whereas Forster’s novel set about contradicting prejudices like these – as in the scene of Aziz’s collar stud, which Ronny wrongly attributes to ‘Oriental slackness’ (PI, 97) – *Burmese Days* moves to the opposite end, to actually *confirm* these prejudices (whose main source is U Po Kyin). The magistrate is proved right in all his assumptions (hence his final victory). The novel confirms, for instance, that Dr Veraswami wants to become a member of the Club for reasons of ‘prestige’ (BD, 45; 47); Flory knows from experience that “suspicion counts for more than proof, and reputation for more than a thousand witnesses” (BD, 154); the narrator also adds: “*at all times* the testimony of one European can do an Oriental more good than that of a thousand of his fellow countrymen (BD, 271, my emphasis).

Other prejudices are substantiated. U Po Kyin confirms Mrs Lackersteen’s suspicions that the natives pretend to be ill to dodge work (BD, 26), when he instructs one of his accomplices (the newspaper’s editor) to claim illness (as Aziz had done in Forster’s novel) so he could ‘stay away’ (BD, 10). Elizabeth’s alternatives, as her aunt reminds her, is to marry or, if she is too choosy, return to England a single woman and work to earn a living (BD, 101). This confirms Ellis’s coarse remarks about her being a husband-hunter who has turned in despair to ‘the Indian marriage-market’ (BD, 112;

²⁸ Unsurprisingly, this critic downplays the colonial element in the novel, by defining its theme as “not anticolonialism, but the failure of community” (Lee, 1969, 19). Drawing on symbolism, imagery and psychoanalysis, Lee argues that the novel is about the plight of the protagonist/ individual against social conventions. In the end, all comes down to a matter of “the frailty of human communication and the failure of language” (Lee, 1969, 22). Lynette Hunter, in her 1984 study of Orwell, confirms this interpretation (Hunter, 1984, 22) and sees in Flory’s tragic failure the outcome of his “problems of expression” (Hunter, 1984, 25).

113). Finally, the status of the European Club as ‘Nirvana’ is confirmed by U Po Kyin and his wife (BD, 147-148).

In short, in this novel (as in Orwell’s subsequent novels) all preconceived ideas and judgements are anticipated and then confirmed, nothing new emerges. In the end, as he had planned, U Po Kyin does ‘kill two birds with one stone’ (BD, 9) – Flory (literally) and the doctor (who is ruined). There are no surprises: Ma Hla May, whom Flory already treated as a prostitute, joins a brothel (BD, 297); U PO Kyin, whose ‘invulnerability’ and future glory had been announced in the opening pages (BD, 3), is elected to the Club. He is later promoted and decorated, but (as expected) dies before building his pagodas. Finally, Elizabeth marries Mr Macgregor (who had started to take an interest in her from the first day – BD, 113) and turns into the perfect *memsahib*, terrorising (also as predicted – cf. BD, 118-119) her servants (BD, 300).

In this fictional universe where confirmation overwhelmingly rules, there are no openings, nothing is allowed to happen. No ‘encounter’ ever takes place, love fails to happen either in the Anglo-Indian community – “Verrall and Elizabeth had been inseparable for weeks, and yet in a way they were almost strangers” (BD, 275) – or across the East/West divide. Not surprisingly, the only events recognised as such (besides the riot) are to do with death (i.e. the death of a *white* man) or with a natural catastrophe (the earthquake). In the first case, the body of Maxwell interrupts the Club’s General meeting, overshadowing Flory’s act of courage in proposing the membership of Dr Veraswami. When the swathed body of the young Englishman is brought into the Club, we are told, “something happened in everybody’s entrails” (BD, 246). However, with the exception of his Indian servant, no one mourns Maxwell – “he had been almost a non-entity”, “with no close friends” (BD, 247). The anger of the British stems from the fact that “the unforgivable had happened – a *white man* had been killed” (BD, 247). In the second case, the earthquake, which leaves behind “an extraordinary *joie de vivre*” (BD, 188) that permits racial barriers to come down, momentarily allowing the butler to participate in the conversation (BD, 189), nevertheless interrupts Flory’s marriage proposal to Elizabeth, and is rapidly forgotten.

4.3. David Lean’s *A Passage to India*

A Passage to India became again a topic of discussion when it was adapted to film and released in 1984, sixty years after its publication. Forster’s dislike of the cinema

industry had made him resist selling the rights for the film, so it was only when he died that the adaptation to the screen became a serious possibility.²⁹ The choice fell on British film-maker Sir David Lean, whose vast filmography goes back to the 1940s, comprising a large number of box-office successes – mostly love stories, war epics and literary adaptations.³⁰ Like the novel itself, the film took fourteen years to make and (another curious coincidence) was Lean's last film. On the whole, it was received with enthusiasm: it won two Oscars, and has already been considered "by far the most cinematically satisfying of all the Forster film adaptations to date" (Sinyard, 2000: 148). Although it draws heavily on Forster's novel (almost to the point of sounding like a collection of quotes), Lean's film is, however, a completely new, autonomous work, which rearranges scenes (having included new ones and removed others) and assigns lines to different characters. The result clearly embodies Lean's vision and personal interpretation of the novel (he was responsible for the script, direction and editing).³¹

Lean's adaptation has been viewed as part of a trend of films and TV series produced in the eighties and after – such as *Heat and Dust* (1983), *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984), *The Far Pavilions* (1984) – which has come to be known as 'Raj Revival' or 'Raj Nostalgia'. With the Merchant-Ivory productions being the indisputable leader in the genre, these films have been associated to the 'heritage film' cycle, with which they share many features. Like 'heritage films', the Raj films have also been linked to Thatcherism: in 1984, Salmon Rushdie teased out the association between the popularity of this wave of 'British-Indian fictions', which he saw as "Raj revisionism", and the rise of conservative ideologies (Rushdie 1991d: 92). In the wake of later

²⁹ Among the people interested in making the film were David Lean, Fred Zinnemann, Joseph Losey, Ismail Merchant and James Ivory, and Waris Hussein (the latter had produced the BBC version) (Brownlow, 1997: 645). Lean was contacted in 1981.

³⁰ The first film that David Lean directed (with Noël Coward) was the war nationalist epic *In Which We Serve*, in 1942, known to be one of Winston Churchill's favourite films (Brownlow, 1997: 168). Lean is best known for his film adaptations of literary classics, such as Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948); T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (*Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962) and Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1965).

³¹ In the promotional material, the film is presented as 'a David Lean film'. Having worked as an editor for ten years, before assuming the role of director, Lean was well aware of the power of the editor to shape the story: "(...) half the effects, when you sit in the movie theatre, are caused by the juxtaposition of pictures. And as a cutter, you select *what the audience shall look at and when*" (Brownlow, 1997: 85, emphasis added). He was also aware of the importance of a good script: "The greatest mental and creative effort in any film is in the writing of the script. The writer not only creates the story but produces human beings out of his imagination, gives them words to speak and thoughts to think. He is the only creative person on a film" (cit. Brownlow, 1997: 312-313). After initial contacts, the idea to have Santha Rama Rau's collaboration to write the script was dismissed. On the role of the director, David Lean said: "The director is an interpreter. His task is to translate the written word into pictures on a screen. I do not mean to minimise this process of translation. It is a highly complicated process of translation involving far too many people" (cit. Brownlow, 1997: 313). On another occasion, Lean wrote: "The trouble is (...) that I'm an interpreter. I wish I could be treated as such. I'm not an author and am not really creative. I'm like a horrible kind of journalist waiting for someone else to write the 'story'. I suppose that's why I feel a sort of fake – and I'm not really because I can, as it were, translate" (cit. Brownlow, 1997: 544-545).

developments in the ‘heritage film’ argument, which I have looked at above, John Hill has more recently preferred to speak of ideological ambivalence (Hill, 1999: xii). Like ‘heritage films’, the Raj films make an ‘incestuous’ (Craig, 1991: 10) use of actors and actresses (an example is Peggy Ashcroft, who plays Barbie in *The Jewel in the Crown*, a role that is evocative of Mrs Moore, also played by her). Once again, a “desire for the typical” (Hutchings, 1995: 220) is satisfied and encouraged, and the films emerge with “a sense of homogeneity and homeostasis” (Hutchings, 1995: 220) that is indeed striking. Finally, they reveal the same concern with presenting visually glamorous scenes that simultaneously serve touristic purposes.

According to Kevin Brownlow’s biography of David Lean, ever since the nineteen-fifties, Lean had been waiting for “an opportunity to show the world what the *real* India was like” (Brownlow, 1997: 331, emphasis added). No less controversially, he also commented that India had never been put on screen (cf. Rushdie, 1991d: 87). Lean’s vision of India is the vision of a tourist offered to other tourists – one of the posters of the film reads: “David Lean, the Director of ‘Doctor Zhivago’, ‘Lawrence of Arabia’, and ‘The Bridge on the River Kwai’ invites you on... A Passage to India” – a description which stresses Lean’s credentials as a purveyor of exotic, tourist ‘escapades’ to Western audiences. The film revels in presenting a costumed and touristy India, even if that means tampering with the original – for instance, through the editing together of shots from different places to reinforce an idea of typicality (Hill, 1999: 100). Although it was already present in the book, the tourist link no doubt becomes more evident in the film.³² As John Hill has noted, while the novel seeks from the outset to avoid representing India as ‘glamorous’ or ‘picturesque’ (Chandrapore, as we have seen, is presented in the novel by way of an anti-touristic discourse), the same cannot be said of Lean’s film, which starts by drawing a clear contrast “between a drab and wet England and a bright and visually spectacular India” (Hill, 1999: 100). The Caves are, indeed, emphasised in the book – but their ‘extraordinary’ (PI, 31; 33) quality cannot be contained visually, let alone in a picturesque manner.

One of the major differences between the novel and the film is the way the opening and closing scenes have been dislocated from India (in the novel) to England. As Peter Childs has noted, this and other decisions contributed to a film “that served to foreground English elements and downplay Indian ones” (Childs, 2002: 110). As

³² The contrast between England and India is structural to the novel (though not in the allegorical, self-ironical way that *Where Angels Fear to Tread* had treated the contrast between Italy and England). The portrayal in the film of well-dressed, well-composed Englishmen (not least, Fielding) is in keeping with Aziz’s view of the English as “so cold and odd and circulating like an ice-stream through his land” (PI, 88).

viewers, we are made to identify with Adela (Judi Davis) and set out with her on a “first-time-in-India, first-time-out-of-England” journey, her desire to see the ‘real’ India becoming our own. We are invited to take on her point of view as a tourist from the first scene, which shows Adela buying her ticket, in the P & O offices in London (a forerunner of a travel agency), surrounded by framed pictures – a steamer in India, the Taj Mahal, and, for the purposes of the plot, the Marabar caves.

We then follow the journey of Adela and Mrs Moore (Peggy Ashcroft), from their arrival in the bustling port at the Bombay Gate, a scene that includes a parade to receive the Viceroy,³³ to their train journey to Chandrapore, which is followed by another, smaller reception of the local dignitaries (Mr and Mrs Turton, played by Richard Wilson and Antonia Pemberton). India becomes a visual spectacle for us, viewers, as much as for Adela and Mrs Moore. Their car sightseeing in Chandrapore provides an opportunity for the screen to display a colourful market and a Hindu funeral, images that are then followed by (and contrasted with) the quiet and green British Civil Station. All this first part (added by Lean)³⁴ is linked to another major change: the shift of focus away from Aziz (who, in the novel, precedes Adela by many pages) to Adela, which entails the reworking of the novel’s two major themes – the imperial experience of the British abroad and the question of relationships (‘only connect’). For one thing, the Aziz-Fielding relationship, central to the novel, is displaced and replaced by the more conventional (in a romantic heterosexual script) Aziz-Adela relationship.³⁵

There are two major reasons guiding this decision: on the one hand, Lean (invoking the specificity of the film medium) wanted to establish ‘what happened at the caves’ as the core of his adaptation (Sinyard, 2000: 150); on the other, he wanted to make Adela more interesting, the result being, in Sinyard’s words, “a heroine who has tantalising connections with some heroines of his other films” (Sinyard, 2000: 151).³⁶

³³ The opening of Lean’s *Gandhi* already featured “a parade in Delhi to welcome the Viceroy in 1912” (Brownlow, 1997: 398). Lean gave up on *Gandhi* for *Lawrence of Arabia*.

³⁴ Lean’s alterations can be explained in the light of economy of enunciation. In only a few shots, the audience is given the essential background information on Adela Quested, Mrs Moore, British India and (through the introduction of the Viceroy on the steamer) the Raj (cf. Brownlow, 1997: 648).

³⁵ Martin and Piggford have identified in Lean a “willingness to oversimplify and de-eroticize Forster’s novel”, giving as example the ‘reconciliatory’ finale (Martin and Piggford, 1997: 27, n5). Indeed, Forster’s homoeroticism has been significantly curtailed. Besides the shift of focus away from the Aziz-Fielding relationship, two other changes are significant: the complete removal of Ralph Moore, who, in the third part of the novel, is the object of homoerotic desire, through Aziz’s gaze; and the remodelling of the *punkah-wallah* as a withered old man.

³⁶ Indeed, some of David Lean’s most successful films, such as *Brief Encounter* (1945), *Summer Madness* (1955) and *Ryan’s Daughter* (1970) address the topic of unconventional love (cf. Dyer, 1993: 139). However, they also show that love against conventions is irremediably doomed.

Adela is identified as the “biggest character problem of all”, and hence has to be “at least partially explained”. The explanation consists in determining beforehand and with clarity what ‘happened in the caves’:

As far as we are concerned she is a young woman who has a hallucination that Aziz has raped, attempted to rape, or molested her. The illusion is so vivid that she bolts out of the cave, plunges down a gully filled with cactus bushes and collapses into the arms of Miss Derek, a very level-headed person, who is completely convinced of her veracity. Miss Quested is certainly aware of the disastrous results of her experience but they in no way shake her belief in the experience. (Cit. Brownlow, 1997: 649)

Lean’s interpretation, to a certain extent, coincides with the second hypothesis advanced by Fielding (and the one he favours) – Adela, not feeling well, broke the strap of her field glasses and imagined that it had been Aziz. The causes, however, could not have been more different. In the novel, her anxiety is put down to her coming marriage (linked to the sudden realisation that she and Ronny are not in love) and to the fact that she is expected to become a memsahib. In the film, on the other hand, Adela is treated as a case of hysteria caused by sexual repression, which is brought to a crisis by an encounter with an exotic, hyper-sexualized ‘Other’. For Neil Sinyard, a David Lean enthusiast, the theme is shared by novelist and director alike (an interpretation that recalls Philippa Moody’s, which I have discussed above):

Both Forster and Lean share a fascinated horror with Englishness – the arrogance and oddness of the English and what Forster memorably called their ‘undeveloped hearts’. Forster and Lean are fascinated by what happens when you take them from their usual habitat and put them somewhere hot where they can lose their inhibitions, shed a skin as it were, but where they come face to face with themselves. (Sinyard, 2000: 154)

As far as Forster is concerned, this account is a misrepresentation. In his early Italian novels, as I argued above (chapter three), Forster had distilled his irony in the tourist’s quest for the ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ in the Italian ‘Other’. Of all the English tourists who display a (more or less open) sexual interest in the ‘Other’ – from Lilia and Philip Herriton to Miss Lavish and Cecil Vyse – none attains any kind of fulfilment. Lacking Forster’s insights, Lean reproduces a more conventional, less critical understanding of the ‘encounter’ with the ‘Other’, in which, as he has famously put it, ‘lids tend to come off’:

[Adela and Ronny are] so controlled and repressed that we are confirmed in our belief in her pale chastity. (...) She leaves England in the rain, pale and pure. Then the sun comes out. Suez, the desert, the heat of the Red Sea. India. I've often wondered why Europeans first arriving in the East either like it or hate it. *Lids tend to come off*. Some become deeply disturbed. I knew one man who went straight back to the airport and took the next plane out. Another who left me flat and spent the whole of his first night in a brothel. It may be that India somehow reflects echoes out of *our distant past* where our inhabitants [sic, inhibitions?] weren't so strong. In a sense we do walk down our aircraft steps *into the past*. (Cit. Brownlow, 1997: 649, emphasis added)

Travelling to India is thus understood not only as a walk into the past, but also as a walk down the psyche, to meet the primitive pulses that civilization has forced down our subconscious. According to this oversimplified Freudian scheme, Indians are perceived as simultaneously backward (i.e. locked in the past) and inferior (i.e. locked in the Id).³⁷ It follows, then, that newly-arrived European men in India look for brothels, not because they (very likely) have done so before (namely, in Europe), but because there is something *inherent in India* that compels them to do so.³⁸ The imperialist assumptions and implications of this stance are evident.

Less evident, but as much pronounced, are its sexist assumptions. The fact that Adela is foregrounded in the film has misled critics, like Sinyard, to conclude: "if it ducks the novel's homo-eroticism it at least undercuts its misogyny" (Sinyard, 2000: 152). The reverse seems to be the case, though: if there are misogynist strands in Forster's novel (and I believe there are), they are accentuated in the film, which treats the novel's inconclusive core 'event' as a case of pathological feminine sexuality.

In fact, Lean's voyeuristic "eavesdrop on Miss Quested" (cit. Brownlow, 1997: 647; 649) confirms the tendency in mainstream film to privilege the male gaze, as Laura Mulvey has famously argued (Mulvey, 1989: 19). Even though her presence in the film cannot be understood in terms of spectacle (Adela is no diva), she does attract (and support) the male gaze who posits her as a mystery that needs explaining. Indeed, in Lean's film, there are no doubts that Adela's 'madness' is the expression of her sexual repression, which, in turn, is connected to her sex. She is clearly presented as a potential 'old maid' whose hopes to marry lie in the East. At the P & O office, Adela announces that she may not need a return ticket and, then, in India, the camera highlights (through

³⁷ Lean himself started psychoanalysis in 1946 (Brownlow, 1997: 226).

³⁸ As Nancy Paxton has put it, "One of the features that makes *A Passage to India* unique among Anglo-Indian novels is that it incorporates some of these new "psychoanalytic" perspectives on truth and sexuality while, at the same time, relying upon the more conventional narrative techniques of the 'ethnographic real'" (Paxton: 1999, 233). David Lean, however, sidesteps the ambiguity and modernist irony which are at the centre of the novel.

close-ups) her growing disappointment at Ronny's (Nigel Havers) lack of sexual feelings for her: on her arrival, at the station, he offers her white flowers, kisses her chastely on the cheek and leaves her to receive 'the great man' (Mr Turton), prompting Mrs Moore's dry observation, "I'd no idea he was *so* important". At home, Ronny says goodnight to Adela without entering her room, when she is obviously expecting him. In case we miss all these hints, Lean inserts a long scene, Adela's bicycle ride to a deserted ('primitive') temple,³⁹ which makes her stare (with some discomfort, but also interest) at the overtly erotic carvings, until she is chased off by a pack of wild monkeys. Santha Rama Rau, who had adapted (with Forster's approval) the novel into a theater play, and who had been involved in the first stages of Lean's adaptation, was distressed by the scene's "vulgarity" (Brownlow, 1999: 655). Her vision diverged greatly from David Lean's, as she believed "Forster's very dramatic, visually arresting novel (...) didn't need the extra heavy-handed emphases that David felt the audience would have to have in order to get the point of this or that scene" (Brownlow, 1999: 655).

The point here is clearly to emphasise Adela's encounter with sexualised India, which induces her to go back on her decision and become engaged to Ronny – possibly because she hopes that an 'un-erotic'/neurotic marriage will 'save her from herself', given the fact that, as Sinyard suggests, she can count on Ronny to 'subdue her sexual yearnings' (Sinyard, 2000: 157). In Forster's novel, the accident involving the Nawab's car had provided the occasion for Adela to change her mind. As will happen with the caves scene, a moment of indeterminacy – we never know the cause of the accident (a ghost? an animal? which animal?) – is replaced by a moment of (re)cognition, which confirms that Adela's sexual troubles are at the root of her decision to marry. The heat, the violent stridency of the monkeys, the full moon, the sudden, heavy rains, with Adela lying in bed, agitated and covered in sweat, thinking of the erotic carvings – are all elements which the audience will recognise as denoting problematic, repressed and guilty-ridden female sexuality.

Feminists have been sensitive to this kind of approach. Brenda Silver rejected a reading that foregrounds sexuality, so it can present Adela as "a hysterical, repressed, overly-intellectual New Woman who fantasizes and is haunted by sex ghosts", and ultimately conclude that "Adela wants to be raped" (Silver, 1988: 87). This is patent in James Buzard's interpretation, which tackles "Miss Quested's chaotic emergent sexuality"

³⁹ Brownlow refers to David Lean's appreciation of the erotic temples at Khajuraho (Brownlow, 1997: 548). It was here, in 1966, that he met his fifth wife, Sandra Hotz (who plays Stella in *A Passage to India*).

along the same lines used to analyse Lucy Honeychurch's *Bildung*, this time to stress Adela's 'madness':

Again, the contact with the alien takes the form of a projected, liberating sexual act (which, like other Forster protagonists, Adela both fears *and desires*, and of which she *falsely* accuses Dr Aziz). Adela flees *madly* through some cactus – a detail that has immediate and familiar results, for it allows Forster to linger over the vision of her body as it lies tortured by a thousand penetrations. (Buzard, 1993: 315, my italics)

To quote Margaret Schlegel, when she is resisting her husband's suggestions to commit her sister to a mental institution – "It's madness when I say it, but not when you say it" (HE, 278) – one could similarly say that it is madness when Forster says it, but *not* when Lean (or Buzzard) say it.⁴⁰ Indeed, there are noticeable differences between the writer's and the director's treatment of women. Lean ignores the novel's portrayal of Adela as a New Woman⁴¹, patent, for instance, in the way she smokes with Indian men at Fielding's tea party (a detail excluded from the film), or in the way she worries about becoming a *memsahib*. As Nancy Paxton has pointed out, 1919 had seen the enfranchisement of middle-class Englishwomen over thirty (Paxton, 1999: 229); even though Forster fails to endorse their cause, he is not entirely indifferent to it.⁴²

Lean completely elides these concerns. Depicted as unstable and unreliable, the repressed 'modern woman' seems to be devoid of political credibility;⁴³ as Paxton puts it: "the New Woman, who was relatively successful in freeing herself from the constraints of Victorian sex and gender roles in the period between 1890 and 1914, [is] recaptured in the 1920s by Freudian psychology" (Paxton: 1999, 236),⁴⁴ a process which the film re-captures and reinforces. Here, it is Mrs Callendar (the memsahib)

⁴⁰ In a scene that pits women (Margaret) against men (her husband and a doctor), Margaret's thoughts have a feminist resonance: "How dare these men label her sister! What horrors lay ahead! What impertinences that shelter under the name of science! (...) However piteous her sister's state, she knew that she must be on her side. They would be mad together if the world chose to consider them so." (HE, 282) In the courtroom scene, Lean makes McBryde ask Adela, when she refuses to incriminate Aziz: "Are you mad?"

⁴¹ As Nancy Paxton argues: "It is not only Adela's status as "new" to India, then, but also her potential sexual openness and unpredictability as an emancipated woman that make her experience in the Marabar Caves so open to question" (Paxton, 1999: 239).

⁴² According to Paxton, after the extreme suffragette campaigns which took place during the twenties there was a 'reversal of sympathy' in Forster (as in many liberals) in relation to the cause of the New Woman (Paxton, 1999: 238). Forster includes in the novel many comments on the status of Indian women. On the Moslem ladies who go on strike because of Aziz, the narrator comments: "their death would make little difference, indeed, being invisible, they seemed dead already" (PI, 218; cf. Indian men on the purdah PI, 268).

⁴³ According to Paxton, "the 'gaps' in Adela's story are used to show that the sexual repression of the modern woman discredits her autonomy and reliability as a political agent" (Paxton, 1999: 241).

⁴⁴ Hence Paxton's conclusion that Adela is sent "back to a single (unrepresented) life in 'feminist' England" (Paxton, 1999: 244).

rather than Miss Derek (the New Woman, a single woman who works for an Indian lady and drives a car) who saves Adela from the caves. Despite her role in the novel to expose McBryde as a hypocrite (it turns out that she is his mistress) and, by extension, his theories of tropical sexuality as pseudo-science, Miss Derek is excluded from Lean's script. The feminist argument – which regards Adela's realisation of 'the possibility of marital rape' as the ultimate cause of her breakdown (e.g. Paxton, 1999: 243) – receives no serious treatment. Rather, it is the sexist stereotyping that triumphs, with Adela being reduced to the quintessentially English vicarage girl (Orwell's 'clergyman's daughter'), who goes on to become an 'old maid', an idea that is spelled out in Lean's defence of the temple scene:

I used that scene to show her as-yet-untapped sexuality. I always imagined to myself (...) that she was brought up in some vicarage somewhere and both parents died. She was a very repressed girl. I wanted to say she was opening out. (Cit. Brownlow, 1999: 653)

Indeed, having fulfilled her role as an object for legal and medical scrutiny (and male prurience), Adela is locked in her chastity and sent back to England, where a life as an 'old maid' awaits her. Besides pathologising feminine sexuality, Lean's film excludes other types of sexuality, such as the "lesbian potential" that Paxton perceives in Mrs Moore and Adela's relationship (Paxton, 1999: 243). Furthermore, the film's definite position that nothing happened between Adela and Aziz (played by Victor Bannerjee) mystifies inter-racial sexuality, by adopting, as Richard Dyer has suggested, the white liberal idea that black sexuality is harmless because it is "almost non-existent in its innocence" (Dyer: 1993, 138). Lean's rendering of Aziz stresses these aspects: the doctor is portrayed as a comical, childlike figure, keen on entertaining his English guests – as his Douglas Fairbanks' act suggest. Unlike Forster's character, Aziz seems to lack any malice: many of his stronger remarks (concerning Adela, the British or the 'slack' Hindus) have been removed, so he can emerge as more coherent and 'likeable' as a person. He does not lie to Adela in the cave scene – Lean makes Adela ask him 'You were married, weren't you?' instead of the novel's 'Are you married, Doctor Aziz?' When he cannot find Adela, he becomes very upset and his account of the facts to Fielding coincides with the point of view of the camera. This 'presumed innocence' is as far off from Forster's mind as the 'presumed guilt' embraced by the Anglo-Indian community; as Dyer argues:

In other words, in the film, this kind of liberalism cannot allow even the possibility that Aziz may have done something sexual because it must protest that he is innocent – whereas the intriguing and disturbing point about the incident in the book is that Aziz’s undoubted innocence may none the less *include* his sexuality. (Dyer: 1993, 138, emphasis added)

Besides his sexuality, we could add, Aziz’s ‘innocence’, may also include his inconsistencies and lies, as well as (though Forster does not go so far) his potentially seditious thoughts against the Raj.

Needless to say, Lean does not go that far either. Although he affirmed that the story was, for him, “a personal not a political story” (cit. Rushdie, 1991d: 91), the changes he introduced certainly served to emphasise the first aspect. Such is the case of the court scene, in which the thread concerning Miss Quested’s repressed sexuality displaces the political elements introduced by Forster. Adela’s withdrawal of her charge, which in the novel had been linked to the *punkah-wallah*’s indifferent beauty, is in the film ascribed to McBryde’s ‘exorcism’. In her statement, Adela also mentions her doubts about marrying Ronny, which in the novel (with the exception of Fielding) are never revealed to anyone. Adela’s identification with the underprivileged comes through more strongly in the novel, when, after putting herself at odds with Anglo-India, Adela considers going to the Dak Bungalow, a shelter for the lower classes. Lean makes no mention to this in the film. In fact, his images of poverty and injustice are nicely integrated into the picturesque rendering of India – like the scene in which we are shown an indistinct mass of dispossessed Indians sleeping under the railway bridge, which Adela and Mrs Moore’s train is crossing.

But it is Lean’s courteous finale, with Aziz and Fielding parting as friends, that reveals the extent of his compromise with a ‘personal’ story. As critics have pointed out, it is a poor substitute for Forster’s tension-filled, more grandiose (and visually more impressive) scene, where Fielding and Aziz ride together, their horses swerving apart in spite of their riders’ commands. Instead of the mixed-feelings of homoerotic attraction, political resentment and cultural misunderstandings, which characterise the book’s closure, the film ends, to quote Richard Dyer, in “an easy decent-chaps-together bit and never mind the imperialism” (Dyer: 1993, 139). Many of Lean’s supporters have defended this change by arguing that Lean’s India is an independent nation on an equal footing with England, which means that true inter-racial friendship has become possible. However, this assumes that such a friendship had not been possible before, an idea that the novel does not entirely endorse.

The crux of the matter is that whenever the question of representing India arises the question of imperialism arises with it, and Lean's film is no exception. The casting of Alec Guinness for the role of a Hindu was criticised on this count;⁴⁵ and so was the film crew's literal appropriation of Indian landscape, which involved the re-carving with small explosions of a holy hill, prompting the following headlines in British newspapers: "What if an Indian director decided he would like to rearrange Stonehenge?" (Brownlow, 1997: 661) The presence of Indians in the film is also much smaller, with the exclusion of characters like the Nawab Bahadur and his poor relation (an Eurasian), and of the two Christian missionaries, who carry an important representative weight. The "new social fabric" which is being woven by educated Indians (PI, 72) – which figures like Mahmoud Ali, Hamidullah, Pan Lal and others illustrate – is also given far less attention in the film.

In fact, Adela's desire to *see* India takes on more critical implications when translated to the screen. In the visual medium, what Forster could have left unsaid (reinforcing the idea of an ever-eluding, ungraspable India), needs to be materialised, needs to be *shown*. In other words, if Adela's wish to see the real India is what brings on the crisis, the film, being a visual medium, is a permanent re-enactment of that crisis. The challenge of showing India *without it being co-opted by an imperialistic, nostalgia-ridden vision*, becomes more difficult to meet.

Graeme Turner has described the invention of the moving picture as "a movement towards realism". In film, he explains, "the camera itself is an apparatus that embodies a theory of reality, an ideology, because it sees the world as the object of a single individual's point of view" (Turner: 1988, 7). It is this commitment to realism, with very defined audience expectations and compositional conventions, that inevitably condemns Lean's film to clash against Forster's more problematic attitude to realism. The limitations of the realist filmic mode emerge, for instance, in the scene of the trial, when Adela's words are illustrated by images. The gap between these images and the ones we saw before, that is, the gap between what happened in the film and what Adela *thinks has happened* is markedly narrow, since the differences between event and flashback are minimal; to quote Peter Hutchings: "Where the novel presents troubling uncertainty, the film presents prosaic evidence" (Hutchings, 1995: 19). Since it has not been constituted as an alternative or opposition to imperialism (which Lean can only dismiss as irrelevant or uninteresting), Lean's 'prosaic' vision thus more easily falls

⁴⁵ David Lean wanted Alec Guinness to play the title role of *Gandhi*, but Guinness refused: "No, no, no, you must have an Indian. (...) You must have an Indian and preferably a Hindu". To which Lean is reported to have said: "No, no. The Indians can't act" (cit. Brownlow, 1997: 393).

back on an imperialist ‘structure of feeling’. The film’s style, to borrow from Richard Dyer’s analysis – its “beautiful photography”, “perfect colour print”, “impeccable timing”, “careful cutting”, “nuanced acting” – accentuates what this critic has called “a neatly rounded off, unproblematic world of domination and imperialism” (Dyer: 1993, 139).⁴⁶ Forster’s ‘liberal imperialism’, resting as it does on the indeterminacy of the plot – a product of the author’s awareness of his epistemological limits, as well as of his vague respect for the ‘unseen’ – is in the filmed version replaced with a liberal imperialism that, because it has committed itself to be less evasive, appears, as result, more imperialist and less liberal. As Richard Dyer has noted, “there’s E. M. Forster’s liberalism and there’s David Lean’s” (Dyer: 1993, 137), which he describes, respectively, as “a valuable and honourable liberalism and a smug, stifling one” (Dyer: 1993, 137).

In the novel, it is suggested that the English dislike ‘muddles’ (PI, 86). David Lean definitely did: the film fills in Forster’s gaps, forces a realist code upon the Marabar incident (albeit a psychoanalytical one), in an attempt to make it more tangible, more graspable, less of a muddle. Lean’s creative powers are channelled into capturing a ‘realist’ image of India (one that is in keeping with his simplistic understanding of the ‘real’) and finding an explanation for Adela’s breakdown. The result is a romantic vision – in this sense, Sinyard is right in calling Adela “one of Lean’s most poignant repressed romantics” (Sinyard, 2000: 159) – which merges the inscrutability of ‘India’ with that of ‘woman’ in the image of the caves, an inscrutability which it then purports to explain as absolute ‘Otherness’, or ‘madness’. Here I diverge from Dyer’s distinction, namely: that Forster’s liberalism is tolerant of “the stubborn core of differences between peoples” whereas Lean’s is a “self-satisfied liberal tolerance”, one that is “based on a complacent assumption that we’re all the same anyway” (Dyer: 1993, 140). In my view, this distinction – which only makes sense in the context of multicultural liberalism (which is Dyer’s context) – makes too much of differences (and, by the same token, of sameness). What, in my view, distinguishes Forster’s liberal vision from Lean’s is that the former recognises at its centre (as an absence, but a problematical one) the category of the *event*, a recognition which destabilises any straightforwardly liberal interpretations. Lean, on the other hand, by explaining away the caves as the site of encounter (and confirmation) of ‘Otherness’, turns up a film, as Sinyard has pointed out

⁴⁶ The film was praised and won awards for its photography, and became a vehicle for tourist promotion in India.

(in a parallel with Lean's earlier film, *Brief Encounter*) in which effectively, 'nothing happens' (Sinyard, 2000: 158).

Conclusion

In *A Passage to India*, we hear Mahmoud Ali complain about Ronny, "Until lately he was quite a nice boy, but the others have got hold of him" (PI, 34). This relationship between the English individual and the Anglo-Indian community is the major topic of *Burmese Days*: like Ronny, Flory has been 'got hold of', but, unlike Ronny, he seems to resent (more or less 'secretly') this situation. As an outsider (and possibly as a New Woman) it is Adela Quested who takes on this role in *A Passage to India*. In her honest yearning to see *real* India, she fails to earn the sympathy of the Anglo-Indians. It is only after she has been 'broken' (precisely, by 'real India'), becoming to them an object of pity which can be of use for imperialistic purposes, that she begins to be appreciated. But even then, the Anglo-Indian position is clear on what (and who) ultimately matters: "Miss Quested was only a victim, but young Heaslop was a martyr" (PI, 192). The narrator stresses this point, when Adela, after her incident and shortly before the trial, leaves the house of the McBrydes: "truly Anglo-India had caught her with a vengeance, and perhaps it served her right for having tried to take up a line of her own. Humbled yet repelled, she gave thanks" (PI, 203).

That Elizabeth Lackersteen is no Adela Quested is evident from the first moment we see her. Adela may be the mere tourist whose only problem, as Fielding will later tell her, is that she lacks any real sympathy for Indians: "you have no real affection for Aziz, or Indians generally" (PI, 258). However, she rejects the life of a memsahib, a life that the calculating Elizabeth is only too eager to embrace. Elizabeth's code of contempt for the weak and 'beastly' – which dictates her class snobbery, her racism, her notions of masculinity, and her rejection of Flory – fits well with the sahiblog. In fact, all things considered, Flory's problem (and what causes his suicide) is that he too identifies with Elizabeth's values and with Anglo-India. He anxiously longs to 'belong', to "live with the stream of life, not against it" (BD, 70). For him, this means (as it will later mean for Dorothy Hare, Gordon Comstock and George Bowling) to live according to the rules of society – in his case, to accept the hated *sahiblog* – "It would be better to be the thickest-skulled pukka sahib (...) than to live silent, alone, consoling oneself in secret, sterile worlds" (BD, 70). Or, as he puts it on another occasion, having decided not to

support his Indian friend at the Club, “What shall it profit a man if he save his own soul and lose the whole world?” (BD, 80) The ‘pariah curs’ that prevent Flory from sleeping – “one dog had taken a dislike to Flory’s house, and had settled down to bay at it systematically” (BD, 61) – are symbolic of his own cowardice at the Club. But the curs also represent his self-hatred, as he self-deprecatorily refers to himself as “cur, spineless cur” (BD, 62).⁴⁷ Flory is self-conscious about his status as a ‘freak’, as ‘the lonely eccentric’, which his birthmark posits as ‘genetic’ rather than social (cf. Eagleton, 1974: 16-17). It is significant that, in this scene, after prolonged hesitation, Flory finally shoots at the baying dog (BD, 73), thus anticipating his suicide, which is preceded by the shooting of Flo.

A common pattern can be discerned in the two novels: Mrs Moore goes mad and dies, Adela is returned home, Flory kills himself – in other words, there seems to be no place in Anglo-India for dissent. This happens, to a great extent, because, on the whole, Orwell and Forster share the same imperialist codes, the same repository of colonial images, which they draw upon to weave their narratives.

Shamsul Islam identified a number of recurrent images in the work of Kipling which became stock motifs in colonial fiction: the image of the Indian as a child, i.e. “a creature of impulse or emotion lacking in self-discipline” (Islam, 1979: 5); the fact that all Englishmen who ‘go native’ and those who engage in inter-racial relationships meet tragic ends (Islam, 1979: 6); the image of “the loyal and affectionate servant” becomes “the prototype of the admirable Indian native”, with the *ryot* (peasantry) and the *rajahs* (decadent princes) portrayed as the ‘real Indians’, while the Western-educated Indian becomes “a stock figure of ridicule” (Islam, 1979: 7); the image of “the inscrutable India”, as Islam points out, “India is seen as a separate entity embodying powers of darkness which defy comprehension and present a challenge to the forces of order or light” (Islam, 1979: 8); the invocation of “climatic theories about tropical or sub-tropical cultures”, which link the climate with evil and perversity, with sexual overtones (Islam, 1979: 9); the dismissal of nationalism, which included the image of the nationalist agitator as “a naughty child who was spoilt by misguided British liberals and democrats who did not realise that Western ways could not work in the Orient” (Islam, 1979: 10-11).

⁴⁷ The dog is a central symbol in *Burmese Days*. It is a marker of class and racial inferiority. It is applied to Dr Veraswami, to stress his devotion to the British, and Flory in particular (BD, 155), as well as to Ma Hla May, to mark her humiliation when she is being expelled from Flory’s house (BD, 158; 159). Elizabeth’s snub of Flory also deploys this image – she walks past him as if he were ‘a dead dog’ (BD, 195), anticipating the protagonist’s suicide, which the novel blames on Elizabeth.

All these motifs are a constitutive part of Orwell's fictional universe: the childlike U Po Kyin; Flory's tragic end; the loyalty of Ko S'la (Flory's servant); the much-ridiculed Dr Veraswami, the educated 'babu'; the inscrutable cruelty of the Burmese villain; the novel's oversexed (tropical) atmosphere; the dismissal of nationalism. Though often put to more ambiguous uses, these motifs can also be found in Forster's novel. Aziz is often described as a child (e.g. PI, 250). He will acknowledge this to Fielding – "I was a child when you knew me first" (PI, 273). He is also described as 'illogical' (PI, 290) and coarse regarding women (Adela in particular – e.g. PI, 242; 252; 267; 268). For Ronny, Aziz is "the spoilt westernized" 'type' (PI, 93), and he calls him "a bounder" (PI, 94). Aziz thus shifts from one stereotype to another – from being loyal and affectionate to the English, to becoming an anti-British 'naughty child'. The narrator's account of this transformation is, no doubt, skewed: according to the narrator, there are only two reactions when an Indian is 'frightened' by the English: "to kick and scream on committees, or to retreat to a remote jungle, where the sahib seldom comes" (PI, 289) – Aziz chooses the latter. There is also the notion that Aziz – because he is a Moslem, a member of a 'conquering race' – does not truly love' the 'mother-land' (PI, 290), which is associated with the countryside, as can be seen in the narrator's description of Hindu villagers as 'real India' (PI, 281). Finally, Orientalist remarks (often made by the narrator) permeate the novel: "Suspicion in the Oriental is a sort of malignant tumour (...) he trusts and mistrusts at the same time in a way that the Westerner cannot comprehend" (PI, 276); "The Mediterranean is the human norm. When men leave that exquisite lake, (...) they approach the monstrous and extraordinary; and the southern exit leads to the strangest experience of all" (PI, 278). The narrator fully assumes an ethnocentric stance, as can be seen in the account of the religious festival of the third part, which is told from what clearly is a Western (us/them) perspective: "this approaching triumph of India was a muddle (as we call it)" (PI, 282); "in a land where all else was unpunctual, the hour of the Birth was chronometrically observed" (PI, 284); "Gokul (the Bethlehem in that nebulous story)" (PI, 284); "by sacrificing good taste, this worship achieved what Christianity had shirked: the inclusion of merriment" (PI, 286). In Mau, the narrator (and Aziz) turns his attention to the divisions within Hinduism (PI, 288-289), which seems in keeping with earlier references to the 'compartments' that Aziz's picnic was trying to challenge, and which the narrator had presented as "the spirit of the Indian earth" (PI, 141).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Forster's ambivalence towards the Empire is traceable to *Howards End*. Margaret's attraction to the Wilcoxes has a lot to do with their 'grit, 'neatness, decision and obedience' all virtues which, she

But there are significant differences between the two novels. As I discussed above, there are openings in Forster's novel that we cannot find in Orwell's: the presence of Indians is surely an important one. As Eagleton has pointed out, "*Burmese Days* is less a considerate critique of imperialism than an exploration of private guilt, incommunicable loneliness and loss of identity for which Burma becomes at points little more than a setting" (Eagleton, 1974: 17). Indeed, Orwell's picture of imperialism lacks the double-sidedness (and the multiplicity of perspectives) that would give it a historical feel. No wonder that, in its more critical version (formulated by Flory), the Raj should amount to little more than a theory of conspiracy informed by racist elements: "The British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to the English, *or rather to gangs of Jews and Scotchmen*" (BD, 38, my emphasis).⁴⁹

As Eagleton has also pointed out, Flory is more of an exile than a tourist (Eagleton, 1974: 17). His hatred of Empire is blended with the nostalgia for his lost youth (BD, 68) and the yearning for an idealised 'freedom' ascribed to England: "In England it is hard to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends" (BD, 69)⁵⁰. What Flory seems to regret in Burma is the absence of 'free speech' – "Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted" (BD, 69; BD, 70) – as well as the vicious excess of 'all the other kinds of freedom' (which recalls Dorothy's decision to recoil from 'freedom'

considers "have formed our civilization" (HE, 112). This is extensive to their imperialism, as emerges from her eulogy of Paul Wilcox to her indolent brother:

'He doesn't want the money, it is work he wants, though it is beastly work – dull country, dishonest natives, an eternal fidget over fresh water and food. A nation who can produce men of that sort may well be proud. No wonder England has become an Empire.'

'*Empire!*'

'I can't bother over results,' said Margaret, a little sadly. 'They are too difficult for me. I can only look at the men. An Empire bores me, so far, but I can appreciate the heroism that builds it up.(...)' (HE, 119)

Henry Wilcox personifies the unprincipled imperialist, always ready to resort to unscrupulous methods to have his way, as when he connives to trap Helen and commit her to an asylum: "He rose to his feet (...). The genial, tentative host disappeared, and they saw instead the man who had carved money out of Greece and Africa, and bought forests from the natives for a few bottles of gin" (HE, 277).

⁴⁹ Orwell's anti-semitic (and racist, in general) strand is present in all his novels. Flory also refers to his experiences with "aged Jewish whores with the faces of crocodiles" (BD, 65). The two descriptions draw on the anti-semitic association of Jews with sexual promiscuity and on a racially-defined and conspiratorial view of finance capitalism, two cornerstones of Nazi ideology. The Nazis were on the rise to power precisely at the time the novel was being written.

⁵⁰ This idealised image of England is partly the outcome of exile, and will be complicated, as we have seen, in Orwell's English novels. Bill Schwarz has stressed "the dominating inescapable centrality of India for the self-image of the English" (Schwarz, 1987: 149). He adds, "The ordered communities of the white settlers created the imagined England – despite the real, often complete relations of estrangement – as home" (Schwarz, 1987: 149).

and cling to her old, repressive life). Needless to say, the freedoms of the natives are left unmentioned.

Another opening in Forster's novel is the presence of women, and the way they are represented, not just in and by themselves, but in relation to the novel's central trope, rape. As feminist critics have noted, in most colonial novels when European women appear, they usually mean 'trouble.'⁵¹ This is surely the case in *A Passage to India* and *Burmese Days*, where the arrival of Adela and Elizabeth provokes, respectively, a political incident and a personal tragedy.

A Passage to India, in particular, has become prone to a kind of feminist reading that accuses the text and its author of misogyny. Forster's Englishwomen have been singled out, in Parminder Bakshi's words, as "the main adversaries in the novel" (Bakshi, 1994: 42-43) or, in Elaine Showalter's, as "part of the enemy camp" (cit. Hubel 1996: 95). There is indeed plenty of evidence in the book of a general and declared animosity against Anglo-Indian women. After a brief descriptive chapter, the novel opens with an all-men meeting, which introduces the main Indian characters, Hamidullah, Aziz and Mahmoud Ali, engaged in friendly conversation. We are told that the 'sad' topic of their talk is the possibility of becoming 'friends with an Englishman' (PI, 33). Their conclusion, that no friendship of this kind is likely to last long, is far heavier on women: "I give an Englishman two years (...). And I give an Englishwoman six months" (PI, 34). Mrs Moore and Adela Quested's arrival in Chandrapore provides the occasion for this assumption to be tested. The Anglo-Indian women are described as snobbish (they snub Aziz – PI, 39-40) and priggish – the windows of the Club are barred "lest the servants should see their memsahibs acting" (PI, 45). They reveal themselves insensitive and even cruel towards Indians (PI, 48), showing no understanding or respect for cultural differences: at the 'Bridge Party', Mrs Turton dreads 'those purdah women' and arrogantly tells Mrs Moore and Adela, "you're superior to everyone in India except one or two of the ranis, and they're on an equality" (PI, 61). The disaster of the party is blamed on the women, "The Englishmen had intended to play up better, but had been prevented from doing so by their womenfolk" (PI, 66). Fielding confirms this perception: soon after arriving in India, he too had discovered that Englishwomen and Indians "wouldn't combine" (PI, 80). Fielding is disliked by his women folk because of his indifference towards them and lack of chivalry – "he took no notice of them, and

⁵¹ About *A Passage to India*, Bette London remarks: "Indeed, if there is one thing in this troubling novel over which East and West can agree, that thing may very well be 'troublesome women'" (London, 1994: 104). On arriving at the campsite, even without any knowledge of the 'incident' that had already occurred, Fielding significantly reflects about Mrs Moore and Adela: "I knew these women would *make trouble*" (PI, 168, emphasis added).

this, which would have passed without comment in feminist England, did him harm in a community where the male is expected to be lively and helpful” (PI, 80). It is a recurrent topic: Fielding later discusses the subject with Aziz, to agree that “they are much nicer in England. There’s something that does not suit them out here” (PI, 130). The novel thus seems to endorse the view that women are antagonistic to India. Feminists have reacted negatively to this idea, seeing in it a sign of Forster’s misogyny and of the chauvinist idea that British women have no claim to a ‘real’ engagement with India. For Teresa Hubel, “*A Passage to India* is hard on women. It portrays them unfavourably – as shrewish harpies, silly gigglers, confused spinsters, and cranky old ladies” (Hubel 1996: 95). Unlike the men, the women seem to lack the insight that the ‘knowing’ of India is an impossible task. Adela is the main victim of this lack of insight, but it also applies to Mrs Moore. Unlike Adela, who is never really admitted into Indian society, Mrs Moore, soon after her arrival in Chandrapore, gains momentary access to it in her encounter with Aziz at the Mosque. Later in the novel, however, her queer behaviour will point again to the ineptitude of women in the colonial context. In fact, if Adela’s ‘crime’ comes near to a kind of epistemological hubris for her unwary, light-headed resolve to “know real India” (in this reading, it is Adela, not Aziz, who stands trial and is ultimately condemned), Mrs Moore’s ‘crankiness’, more than a “descent into meaninglessness”, as Teresa Hubel calls it (Hubel 1996: 100), can be read as the meaningful outcome of her hazardous proximity to India, which the story proves she is unprepared for.

There are many problems with this reading. Teresa Hubel’s description of Adela, above, is hardly fair (Adela conjures up, as I have argued, a far more complex picture) and ignores point of view, which is crucial to the novel. The construction of a feminist perspective that ignores the fundamental difference that separates Adela from the other Anglo-Indian women is doomed to fail. The truth is that, unlike the other white women, Adela courageously encounters the ‘real’, if by it we mean the injustice reality of colonialism, behind the ‘tea parties’ façade, as well as the imperialist faked justice, behind the façade of a ‘benevolent imperialism’. As John Hill has argued, women in Forster’s novels (such as Lucy Honeychurch) often act as challengers of conventions (Hill, 1999: 110). This role is preserved in many Raj films, with women (like Mrs Moore) doubting the moral claims of imperialism or (like Mrs Moore, Adela and Olivia, the protagonist of *Heat and Dust*) transgressing its acceptable boundaries (Hill, 1999: 112).

The attention to the 'Other', which brings with it the construction of 'Otherness' (in this case, woman and Indian), is structural to the novel (it is structural, as I have suggested, to the project of liberalism). One of its effects is to make us oscillate between *either* endorsing Adela, the woman, or Aziz, the Indian/the man, a choice of 'Others' which has pitted feminist against anti-colonial readings. This double-blind can be seen, for instance, in a feminist critic like Frances Restuccia: "At the risk of sounding like Mrs Turton (which is precisely the paradoxical position the novel's textuality and Oriental indeterminacy seem to put one in): Aziz *is* a slippery fellow" (Restuccia, 1989: 115). Although she concedes that Aziz is also 'raped' by British imperialism (Restuccia, 1989: 114), Restuccia condemns 'Eastern' indeterminacy for reinforcing the racism of Anglo-India, to whom Aziz, being neither definitely innocent nor definitely guilty, remains a permanent 'suspect' (Restuccia, 1989: 111). Furthermore, turning her attention to the 'sexist implications of Eastern indeterminacy' (Restuccia, 1989: 111), she considers that the novel's 'misogynist impulse' "is masked by an apparently respectable alliance of the modernist attention to the endlessness of interpretation and anti-Western indeterminacy" (Restuccia, 1989: 117). She regrets that "Oriental obscurity permits the antifemale sentiment to get expressed but not definitely to be assigned to someone who can be prosecuted for it" (Restuccia, 1989: 121). In the end, she ignores the colonial content of the novel to propose "a double, oscillating feminist reading" that can, by turns, expose the book's misogyny and embrace its subversive 'gynesis' (Restuccia, 1989: 128).

Postcolonial feminists, on the other hand, have tended to value Forster's indeterminacy so they can simultaneously address the questions of race and gender. Brenda Silver, for example, has proposed to read "Adela's 'unspeakable' experience in the cave" (rape) "not in terms of sexual desire or repression, but in terms of a deployment of sexuality within a discourse of power that posits a complex network of sameness and difference", in which "what is at stake is both gender difference and racial difference" (Silver, 1988: 88). According to Silver, what Adela finds in the cave is her 'difference' – "she is forced to recognise the social sexing that appropriates her body and names her woman. She experiences, we could say, the material and psychological reality of what it means to be rapable" (Silver, 1988: 100). Her entering the cave thus "plunges her into consciousness of her place as woman: the place of sexual objectification, the place where being sexual object defines woman's existence" (Silver, 1988: 101). Mrs Moore's experience in the cave, by contrast, signifies 'sameness', i.e. "the radical sameness of all discursive systems and their failure to escape the rhetoric of power and

exclusion” (Silver, 1988: 103). Adela’s act at the trial is thus doubly subversive: on the one hand, by acquitting Aziz, she ‘restores his subjectivity’; on the other hand, by maintaining the indeterminacy about the event, “she creates another gap, one that disrupts rather than enabling [sic] the discourse of power and knowledge” (Silver, 1988: 104). Indeterminacy is thus elevated to subversion: “Her refusal to specify, like the Indian women’s refusal to be seen, generates a counter discourse, one that opens up gaps that those in power cannot control or afford, in part by undermining their claim to knowledge and truth” (Silver, 1988: 104). Adela rejects the periphrasis that the Anglo-Indians deploy to refer to rape, which this critic understands as “the refusal to name the reduction of woman and Indian that makes them rapable, the refusal to name it rape” (Silver, 1988: 105); hence this critic’s conclusion that “to speak rape becomes an act of resistance” (Silver, 1988: 105).

Jenny Sharpe’s interpretation likewise foregrounds Forster’s indeterminacy. In her view, the inclusion of the rape scene and the consequent clarification of the ‘mystery’ would have resulted in the lamentable loss of the meanings that the novel creates. It is the delicate equilibrium of what Sharpe designates “the either/or opposition between the colonizing female and the colonized male” (Sharpe, 1993: 120), achieved through the narrator’s refusal to take any of these sides, that makes the novel a masterpiece. Were Adela to be confirmed in the role of a rape victim, the sanctioning of the cliché that native men dream of raping white women would inevitably follow. On the other hand, were Adela to be found guilty of ‘malice’ or neurotic hallucinations, then the misogynist/imperialist view that considered women to be the real problem of India would be condoned. This is the double bind that the court scene enacts, when McBryde declares, “the darker races are physically attracted to the fairer, but not vice-versa”, and is followed by the remark: “Even when the lady is so uglier than the gentleman?” (PI, 224) The debunking of the colonial stereotype (Indian men are lustful and bloody) can only be achieved at the expense of women, by way of misogynist stereotyping (white women are plain and sexually uninteresting). The reverse is also the case: the debunking of a misogynist stereotype (white women in the East mean trouble) is also achievable at the expense of the colonial subject (women are as complicit as men in the colonial venture or, if we prefer, they are as capable to carry ‘the white man’s burden’ and become ‘civilising’ agents). Sharpe argues that the defense of English women (and associated condemnation of Indian men) “inevitably aligns the feminist position with a colonial discourse of rape”, a position which the novel overcomes through “the disruptive presence in the courtroom of an untouchable man who is the object of a

homoerotic gaze” (Sharpe, 1993: 23). Once again, as in Fielding’s fourth hypothesis, the solution comes in the form of another ‘Other’ – in this case, the subaltern, ‘low caste’ ‘Other’, who is brought to our attention by way of the homosexual gaze.

And yet, it is possible to go beyond this kind of reading exclusively built on identity, on the attention to the ‘Other’. In fact, by putting at the centre of the novel the question ‘what happened in the caves?’ (and ‘has anything at all happened?’), Forster not only allows but invites a different kind of approach. The answer to the first question – for Anglo-Indians, feminists and postcolonial critics – has been, for different reasons, rape. As Jenny Sharpe has argued, Forster’s novel “holds up for scrutiny the racism generated around the ‘attack of English women’ during the Punjab disturbances’ in 1919 (Sharpe, 1993: 2). For this critic, rape as a ‘highly charged trope’ had become ‘implicated’ ‘in the management of rebellion’ during colonial times (Sharpe, 1993: 2). Further, it is a trope that is typical of moments of crisis in colonial authority: “the European fear of interracial rape does not exist so long as there is a belief that colonial structures of power are firmly in place” (Sharpe, 1993: 3); on the other hand, “a crisis in British authority is managed through the circulation of the violated bodies of English women as a sign for the violation of colonialism” (Sharpe, 1993: 4). Sharpe therefore associates this version of interracial rape to the last stage of colonialism, when it had become more difficult to sustain its moral and ethical grounds. It was then, too, that the ‘racialization of colonial relations’ was more widely adopted as a ‘defensive strategy’ (Sharpe, 1993: 6):

A discourse of rape – that is, the violent reproduction of gender roles that positions English women as innocent victims and English men as their avengers – permits strategies of counterinsurgency to be recorded as the restoration of moral order. (...) The image of native men sexually assaulting white women is in keeping with the idea of the colonial encounter as a Manichean battle between civilization and barbarism. (Sharpe, 1993: 6)

It is therefore not surprising to find that rape no longer holds a central place in *Burmese Days*, a world in which the belief in the civilising mission is blatantly absent (for one thing, because the natives are corrupt *beyond redemption*). In contrast with Forster’s novel, rape is present as more than a mere suggestion or periphrasis, and its use lacks any of Forster’s subtleties (‘love in a church, love in a cave’). One could argue, Forster needed the indeterminacy of the stock colonial image – the rape of an English woman by an Indian man – to affirm the Indian man’s sexuality, so that he could then be suggestively engaged in a homoerotic relationship with the Englishman. As in the

triangle between Philip Herriton-Caroline Abbott-Gino, the English woman emerges as the mediator between the Englishman and the homoeroticised 'exotic Other'. Orwell's usage, however, could not have been more conventional, bound up as it is to ('straight') masculine and racial codes.

Indeed, sexuality in *Burmese Days* is synonymous with male rapacity: English or Burmese, all powerful men take sexual advantage of young, vulnerable Burmese girls, a fact that is taken as much for granted as the natural jungle that surrounds Kyauktada. There is one major distinction, though: rape seems to be the prerogative of the native man. The word is first uttered by Dr Veraswami to name one of U PO Kyin's many evils, "the girls he has ruined, raping them before the very eyes of their mothers!" (BD, 44) Later, the narrator describes the magistrate's bed, "huge square bed, with carved teak posts, like a catafalque, on which he had committed many and many a rape" (BD, 139). Besides raping native women, an expression of Eastern cruelty,⁵² native men also rape white women. U Po Kyin introduces the subject in a libellous letter against Dr Veraswami which he sends to Mrs Lackersteen: "Dr Veraswami, the letter said, was inciting the natives to abduct and rape the European women" (BD, 141). The letter produces the desired effect, since for Mrs Lackersteen, as the narrator explains, 'Nationalism' conjured up one image only: "of herself being raped by a procession of jet-black coolies with rolling white eyeballs" (BD, 142).

Writing in 1984, Salman Rushdie drew attention to one of the most blatant contradictions of imperial fiction (he is commenting on the Raj books and films' 'revival'):

It is useless, I'm sure, to suggest that if rape must be used as the metaphor of the Indo-British connection, then surely, in the interests of accuracy, it should be the rape of an Indian woman by one or more Englishman of whatever class. But not even Forster dared to write about such a crime. (Rushdie, 1991d: 89)

What is interesting is that, even though Orwell did dare to write openly (no need for metaphors) about the Empire as a matter of economic exploitation and 'thieving' (BD, 37), he nevertheless failed to 'name' the rape between white men and native women – a rape that had not just metaphorical and symbolic purchase, but also historical actuality. With the exception of Mr Lackersteen's 'spirited attempt' to rape his niece (BD, 238),

⁵² Misogynist thoughts are attributed to U Po Kyin: on his future reincarnations, he muses: "he would return to the earth in male human shape – for a woman ranks at about the same level as a rat or a frog" (BD, 4). His wife, however, is described as 'kindly' (BD, 10) and a loyal 'confidante' (BD, 11). She disagrees with his methods and convinces him to do good as a form of accumulating 'merit' (BD, 13).

which is not taken very seriously, nowhere in the book are the sexual exploits of the white men presented as a case of rape. The crime of the English (if there is one) is put in terms either of racial miscegenation – Ellis abhors the sexual adventures of his countrymen, such as Macgregor’s, known for his illegitimate children (BD, 6), for racial reasons (BD, 22-23) – or moral corruption – which is how Flory sees it, especially in relation to himself (e.g. BD, 116). For Burmese women, on the other hand, sleeping with a white man is assumed to be a privilege. Flory talks (or boasts) of having ‘seduced’ (and then ‘chucked’) women like the Eurasian Rosa McFee (BD, 127). His servant is so devoted to him that he had ‘pimped’ for him (BD, 49). The feeling that dominates Flory, however, is not guilty for ruining these girls, but disgust and guilty for being ‘corrupted’ by them. In his self-loathing way, Flory understands and accepts that Elizabeth should snub him for keeping a Burmese mistress. In fact, he takes it as a punishment of “the endless procession of Burmese women, a regiment of ghosts (...) a full hundred at the least” with whom he had engaged in ‘pleasant vices’ and “dirtied himself beyond redemption” (BD, 203). These women have no face for him: “He remembered a blue *longyi* here, a pair of ruby earrings there, but hardly a face or a name” (BD, 203). His relationship with Ma Hla May follows the same pattern. Although she has been cohabiting with him for two years, Ma Hla May is treated as a servant: “she was allowed to come to tea, as a special privilege, but not to other meals, nor to wear her sandals in her master’s presence” (BD, 51).⁵³ When he has ‘done with her’, Flory kicks her out of his room, and when she protests that she is being treated like a prostitute, he replies: “So you are. Out you go” (BD, 54).

In short, native women are not raped by white men for the simple reason that they can be bought. Ma Hla May has been bought from her parents (BD, 52), and she is still “hardly more than a child” (BD, 160). What is more, because they can be bought, native women *are* prostitutes. This idea is conveyed at different moments: watching the girl humiliate herself, in a last attempt to be kept, Flory dismisses her suffering as mere acting: “For in all this there was not a spark of love for him. If she wept and grovelled it was only for the position she had once had as a mistress, the idle life, the rich clothes and dominion over servants” (BD, 161). This idea had been earlier advanced by the narrator, who remarked that ‘Flory’s embraces meant nothing to her’ because she had a native lover (BD, 53). It is also confirmed by her continuous demands for money

⁵³ Daphne Patai has pointed out that, according to Burmese customary law, “open cohabitation counted as de facto marriage” (Patai, 1984: 39). She stresses Orwell’s failure to take this into account, and concludes: “Since Flory’s viewpoint predominates, the reader is invited to consider Ma Hla May as, in fact, a money-grubbing prostitute from beginning to end” (Patai, 1984: 40). This is also my reading.

(which, we are told, are to buy dresses and bangles) and by the fact that she ultimately joins a brothel. Ma Hla May is often compared to a doll – an ‘outlandish doll’ (BD, 51) – inclusive by Elizabeth (who shares Flory’s masculine codes), and described as one (e.g. BD, 52). This characterisation no doubt reinforces her status as an exotic sexual object, thus naturalising the ‘transaction’ and exempting the ‘buyer’ from any responsibility. To take Rushdie’s cue, perhaps the accurate metaphor for representing this stage of imperialism should be that of a native woman (or, at any rate, a native boy) prostituting herself to “one or more Englishman of whatever class”, an image, that is, of unacknowledged rape.⁵⁴

Forster could not have written about this crime either, though his novels contain several hints to the links between tourism, sexuality and money (present, for example, in the relationship between Gino and Lilia).⁵⁵ These links are also present in *A Passage to India*.

Tourism is certain a link in *A Passage to India*. Aziz understands the connection between tourism and empire: watching Fielding and his family on a boat sightseeing – which he calls “patrolling India” (PI, 301) – he reflects: “This pose of ‘seeing India’ which had seduced him to Miss Quested at Chandrapore was only a form of ruling India; no sympathy lay behind it” (PI, 301). Earlier, he had torn up a note from Fielding, who he believes has come with Adela, with the dismissive remark, “He had had enough of showing Miss Quested native life” (PI, 292). Adela’s quest for the ‘real India’ does have sexual overtones, even though Forster did not reduce it to that (as David Lean would). When she meets Aziz, Adela immediately takes to him, believing that “when she knew him better he would unlock his country for her” (PI, 86). As the narrator remarks, she is assuming Aziz to be ‘India’ – she “never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India” (PI, 88-89). In fact, the theme of Adela’s compensation brings back to the picture the issue of economic transaction, which underlies and defines (albeit in different ways) tourism and colonialism alike.

I asked above how to understand the caves in Forster’s novel – as the ‘unknown and unknowable’ ‘Other’, or as the ‘never-coming, never-recognised event’, or both? Most critics have been drawn to the first alternative. But the second one is also present, as a kind of supplement of meaning that resists being dismissed. Like in *Kyauktada*, nothing

⁵⁴ A parallel could be made with Elizabeth, who has come to India for precisely the same reasons (money): “It was almost as nice as being really rich, the way people lived in India” (BD, 98).

⁵⁵ Furbank comments on this link between money and sexuality in Forster’s life, for instance in relation to Mohammed et Adl, Forster’s Egyptian lover (Furbank, 1978: 36).

seems to happen in Chandrapore. Even the central (non)event (in the caves), or its 'echo' (at Aziz's trial) seem to produce little change. The riot that follows the trial is short-lived; as the narrator points out: "The Marabar Caves had been a terrible strain on the local administration; they altered a good many lives and wrecked several careers, but they did not break up a continent or even dislocate a District" (PI, 238). Fielding also notes that despite the changes, everything had stayed the same – "the more the Club changed the more it promised to be the same thing" (PI, 272). And yet, Forster is more honest than Orwell (and his art more truthful) to restrain from *showing*, not only that something might have happened outside the imported little England that is the Civil Station (namely to Aziz, who has become a 'real person'), but also that something might yet happen, in a near future, to India herself.

To conclude, the only kind of event that the liberal imagination can conceive of is a non-event – of which the caves are ultimately representative. As Forster put it, the caves are there "to focus everything up", to "engender an event" (Forster, 1977: 27). In the end, however, all they can engender, in the absence of a real encounter – that is, of an event that can lead to the transformation of the (colonial) situation – is a multi-perspectival sense of identity based on cultural relativism, on the recognition of different 'Others', which simply fails to make things happen. What remains, in the end, is the situation, in which, like the conversation between Adela and the Hindu ladies at the 'Bridge Party' (PI, 62), the only thing that the characters can do – like Fielding and Aziz in the departing scene – is 'strive in vain against the echoing walls of each other's civility'.

Political Visions: from Forster's Liberalism to Orwell's Totalitarianism

At the core of Forster's work – just as at the core of his last novel – is an absence, a kind of Marabar cave that is ultimately defined by its nothingness. In a way, it is hardly surprising that *A Passage to India* should have been Forster's last novel. Forster's difficulties with writing, as he painstakingly recorded in his diaries, had been growing over the years. Having reached the peak of his career, with the publication of *Howards End*, as early as 1910, he began to find it increasingly more difficult to write fiction, a problem which would persist, and become definitive in the following decade. Forster put it down to three factors: "idleness, depressing conditions, need for a fresh view of all life before I begin writing, paralyse me" (Furbank, 1977: 204). In 1911 he began writing *Arctic Summer*, which he abandoned in 1912 and never completed. In the meantime, he wrote *Maurice*. He also started writing erotic short stories, which he did not consider 'literature', since their purpose was only to 'excite himself' (Furbank, 1977: 200). The opportunity to gain 'a fresh view of all life' seems to have presented itself for the last time in his visit to India.

Critics have tried to account for Forster's literary sterility, proclaiming his silence the ultimate 'mystery' (Wilson, 1973: 453). In his introduction to the Everyman edition of *A Passage to India*, Peter Burra interpreted his silence as a sign that he had found, in Forster's own expression, 'perfect adjustment' (Burra, 1989: 333; cf. PI, 145). Mary Lago similarly attributed Forster's 'creative weariness' to his high literary standards (Lago, 1995: 50; cf. p. ix), whereas Benita Parry connected it to his disenchantment over liberal values (Parry, 1979: 141). Reviewers of *Maurice* found in Forster's sexual orientation the key to the mystery (e.g. Wilson, 1973: 453; Steiner, 1973: 480-481). For Jeffrey Meyers, sex prevented Forster from publishing more because it was incompatible with 'art' (Meyers, 1977: 16). Another critical strand has stressed this writer's growing discomfort with the modern world. As Philip Gardner pointed out, after the First World War, Forster never depicted England again in a novel (Gardner, 1973: 2). In his biography, Furbank noted the impact that the 1914-1918 war had on Forster: "He was doubly disturbed – by the war itself, and by the inadequacy of his own response to it" (Furbank, 1978: 1). Being a pacifist (albeit 'by instinct' rather than 'conviction' – Furbank, 1978: 1), he was depressed and decided that 'creation' (i.e. fiction) "was for the moment impossible for him"

(Furbank, 1978: 3). Forster himself recognised that “the world had changed too much for his imagination to feel at home in it” (Gardner, 1973: 25).

Finally, another group of critics have turned to Forster’s relationship with modernism. For Peter Hutchings the novelist was caught between the appeal of the total vision of literary realism and the limits of representation which troubled modernism: “Forster’s antipathy towards modernism is bound up with his questioning of modernity, and the relatively early conclusion of his novelistic career is involved in his sense of the difficulties in adequately presenting the world as a picture” (Hutchings, 1995: 227, n10). Jeremy Tambling has similarly contended that Forster’s silence signalled his rejection of modernism and surrender to ‘Englishness’ (in which modernity had no place): “Lawrence rejected most of the tenets of modernism and Forster did the same by his virtual silence as a novelist after *A Passage to India*” (Tambling, 1995: 2). For this critic, English modernism failed – it “collapsed back into a conservatism that did not spur Forster to anything new after *A Passage to India*” (Tambling, 1995: 11).

All these reasons seem probable, and do not have to be mutually exclusive. However, I would like to explore a different line of argument, partly suggested by Forster himself, partly by Alain Badiou’s philosophical thought, and concentrate on Forster’s reliance on something new (something ‘fresh’) to write fiction, an aspect which I want to connect to his liberal politics. In 1952, in an interview to the *Paris Review*, Forster spoke of his inability to finish *Arctic Summer*, pointing out that his major problem had been “what was going to happen?” – “I had got my antithesis all right (...) But I had not settled what is going to happen, and this is why the novel remains a fragment” (Forster, 1977: 26). He goes on to add:

The novelist should, I think, always settle when he starts what is going to happen, what his major event is to be. He may alter this event as he approaches it, indeed he probably had better, or the novel becomes tied up and tight. But the sense of a solid mass ahead, a mountain round or over or through which (...) the story must somehow go, is most valuable and, for the novels I’ve tried to write, essential. (Forster, 1977: 26-27)

The event is crucial, but it is perceived more as an object (and a problem) – i.e. “something, some major object towards which one is to approach” (Forster, 1977: 27) – than a ‘happening’. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this question was at the centre of *A Passage to India*: “I knew that something important happened in the Malabar [sic] Caves, and that it would have a central place in the novel – but I didn’t know what it would be” (Forster, 1977: 27). This ‘something’ – which I have earlier called the *evental* property

of the caves – is what gives the novel its mysterious and evocative quality. *Arctic Summer*, on the contrary, came to a halt because Forster could not find an ‘event’ or a suitable way of representing its absence.

This problem, I wish to argue, is not a mere ‘technicality’, as Forster himself suggested (Forster, 1977: 25). Forster described Italy, where he had had his literary ‘vision’ and first began to write, as ‘the place where things happen’ (Furbank, 1977: 96). The search for events afflicts all his novels: it is both a theme (much-neglected by critics) – one that springs from a sense that the world is closing in on itself – and a symptom of the politics that underpin such world. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that Forster’s literary sterility was caused not by a loss of faith in the liberal values, but, on the contrary, by the growing crystallisation of these values, a situation which allowed for no openings or changes, except for the purposes of these values’ own reproduction and eventual expansion. This ran counter to the notion of art to which his novels had always aspired.

Orwell did not give up fiction (nor seemed to have any intention to).¹ His novels are as much indebted as Forster’s to a world that tends to stagnation, but they are also less able (or willing) to contradict that world. This is evident in *Animal Farm*, the child-like, fairy-tale-like story (in fact, a very adult combination of political allegory and beast fable), and even more so in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The fact that these works have been approached as political works has caused added problems. It has led criticism to favour historical, political and biographical analyses at the expense of the texts themselves. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance, has been primarily read as a satire of ‘totalitarian’ realities as diverse as German Nazism, Stalinist Communism and Atlee’s Labour Government (cf. Rai, 1988: 118-119), or even of Orwell’s years at his Preparatory School (as Anthony West believed – cf. Crick, 1992: 64-65) – readings that reflect, in Rai’s apt description, “an inability to focus on the fictionality of the novel” (Rai, 1988: 118).²

¹ Although he was seriously ill, he had plans for another two novels, according to Peter Davison (Davison, 1996: 140; cf. Taylor, 2004: 411; Bowker, 2004: 413).

² Most critics have focused on Orwell’s political intentions. By way of illustration, John Atkins did not hesitate to proclaim *Animal Farm* an ‘attack on Stalinism’ ‘*from the Left*’ (Atkins, 1954: 222). Crick rejects the notion that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was meant to be Orwell’s ‘last testament’ (Crick, 1992: 552). “Whatever the defects”, he adds, the novel “does ring true as a theoretical coherent model of what a regime would look like that blended the techniques of Communism with those of Nazism for no other purpose than to perpetuate a power-hungry elite of intellectuals in power” (Crick, 1992: 552). This position had been anticipated by Zwerdling, in the seventies, who similarly attributed the uneven reception of the novel to “a confusion about Orwell’s purpose”. For this critic, the book had adopted “primarily defensive tactics” that aimed more at fighting “*against* a possible future society than *for* one” (Zwerdling, 1974: 105). Deutscher was one of the first to observe (and regret) the tendency, especially in the media, to disregard the author’s *intention* for the purpose of ideological manipulation. This is explained in terms of reading strategies, such as de-contextualisation, selective omission and downright suppression (Deutscher 1955: 35-36). For this critic, the fact that it is not a literary masterpiece makes it more open to that kind of manipulation.

Paradoxically, the over-politicisation of these works has resulted in their actual de-politicisation.³ Daniel Lea has provided a concise description of this process in relation to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

Nineteen Eighty-Four was increasingly claimed for any number of contradictory ideological stances, with scant attention paid to its thematic complexities. As a product of specific cultural history, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* encapsulated the political *zeitgeist* [sic] of hostility and mistrust at the same time as it reflected the underlying similarities of capitalistic and communistic power structures. The deepening divisions between East and West were articulated through a cultural product which sought to expose the machinery of power *in a non-politically specific manner*. Rarely has an artistic object been so divergently manipulated to prove the legitimacy and justness of disparate ideological systems. (Lea, 2001: 29, last emphasis mine)

Lea's account spells out two of the most widely accepted ideas about Orwell: first, that he is outside any political configuration (i.e. outside ideology); second, that he is the more reliable a political commentator for that. Lacking in this way a specific ideological content, Orwell's work becomes *at once* more susceptible to being 'manipulated' by different ideologies (which vary according to the critic's understanding of what Orwell's position is) and more suitable as a platform from which to judge different ideological positions (provided, that is, that the critic's point of view coincides with Orwell's 'non-political', 'non-ideological', 'neutral' one). From this perspective, the contradictions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* are left to be resolved at the reception end of the literary process, with the readers' responses fitting into any of the chartered positions of Cold War politics.

With the end of the Cold War, and despite the fact that most critics continue to turn to extra-textual evidence to explain these works' ongoing popularity (e.g. Newsinger, 1999; Hitchens, 2002), it has become possible to move beyond these dominant reading models. A first step appears to be to reject the assumption that these works form an ideological vacuum, from which all ideological stances can be safely scanned, appraised and ultimately dismissed. I will argue, on the contrary, that they embody, give voice to and frame a set of positions that are no less ideological, indeed, are powerfully and effectively so.⁴ For the purpose, I will be drawing on Slavoj Žižek's understanding of ideology which

³ Indeed, Orwell has largely been associated with an *apolitical* stance. Patrick Reilly, for instance, praised Orwell's non-partisan honesty and commended *Animal Farm* for "recording the victory of ethics over politics" (Reilly 1999: 85). In his words, "It is because Orwell opposes exploiters rather than men, cheats rather than capitalists, that his fable is even more relevant today than when first written" (Reilly 1999: 84).

⁴ The concept of ideology has frequently been dismissed for its elusiveness and ambiguity (Žižek 1994: 3). Williams referred to it as a "difficult term" (Williams, 1995: 26) and other analytical tools have been sought

covers not merely a given content (ideology as ‘a complex of ideas’ and their corresponding material practices), but its frame as well.⁵ There is no simple way out of ideology: “*the stepping out of (what we experience) as ideology is the very form of our enslavement to it*” (Žižek 1994: 6, emphasis in original). A subtler analytical concept is thus called for:

What thereby comes into sight is *a third continent* of ideological phenomenon: neither ideology qua explicit doctrine, articulated convictions on the nature of man, society and the universe, nor ideology in its material existence (institutions, rituals and practices that give body to it), but the *elusive network of implicit, quasi-‘spontaneous’ presuppositions and attitudes* that form an irreducible moment of the reproduction of ‘non-ideological’ (economic, legal, political, sexual...) practices. (Žižek 1994: 15, emphasis added)

The problem befalling Orwell criticism has been the failure to come to terms with his implicit ideology, which cannot be fully accounted for by way of reading strategies like what has been called “kidnapping” (Norris, 1984: 7), ‘confiscation’ (Newsinger, 1999: xi) and ‘hijacking’ (Rai, 1988: 153), that is, appropriation or co-optation, which force on the text a certain political allegiance. A better alternative is to engage with the text, that is, to engage with the fictional universe that emerges from it. It is here – in the form of the ‘non-ideological’ – that the ideological lurks.

In this chapter, I wish to resume the link between liberalism and the absence of/ yearning for an event that has struck me as a central element in Forster’s fiction, by looking at two novels that, in different ways, disturb Forster’s literary achievement: *Arctic Summer*, his unfinished novel, and *Maurice*, his finished, but unpublished novel. As sites of crisis, these works, I believe, shed light on the problems and tensions that cut across Forster’s political

out to replace it: Bourdieu’s ‘doxa’ is a case in point (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1994: 266-267). Williams distinguished between two senses: ideology as (1) “the formal and conscious beliefs of a class or other social group” (often identified with dogmas); and (2) “the characteristic world-view or general perspective of a class or other social group, which will include formal and conscious beliefs but also less conscious, less formulated attitudes, habits and feelings, or even unconscious assumptions, bearings and commitments” (Williams, 1995: 26). Although he considers the first sense to be of primary importance to the sociological study of culture, Williams does not exclude the second “wider and less tangible area”, which he relates more closely to literature and the arts in general (Williams, 1995: 27).

⁵ Žižek’s three different senses of ideology are: (1) ideology as “a complex of ideas (theories, convictions, beliefs, argumentative procedures)” (Žižek 1994: 9), i.e. ideology ‘In-itself’ (Žižek 1994: 10); (2) “ideology in its externality, that is, the materiality of ideology” (Žižek 1994: 9), present “in ideological practices, rituals and institutions” (Žižek 1994: 12), which Žižek also designates as ideology ‘For-itself’ (Žižek 1994: 10); (3) and, the most elusive of the three, “the ‘spontaneous’ ideology at work at the heart of social ‘reality’ itself” (Žižek 1994: 9), or ideology ‘In-and-For-itself’ (Žižek 1994: 10). As Žižek notes, the moment we claim to be able to see through ideology, and, consequently, become sceptical about its power and efficacy – either regarding it as confined to ‘some narrow social stratum’ (the ruling classes), or ascribing to it a ‘marginal role in social reproduction’, or yet choosing instead to situate power in ‘extra-ideological mechanisms’ – that moment “we find ourselves knee-deep in the (...) obscure domain in which reality is indistinguishable from ideology” (Žižek 1994: 14-15).

vision and fictional practice. I will then turn to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (and, more peripherally, *Animal Farm*) to focus on those aspects (largely responsible for the novel's depressing atmosphere) that appear to be an exacerbation of features and tendencies that (usually in a more problematic way) have been anticipated in Forster's liberal universe. Finally, I will consider the circularity and flatness of Orwell's last books as a constant in his fiction, and connect his artistic limitations as a novelist to his final, desperate vision of 'totalitarianism'.

5.1. Love and Art as 'events': *Arctic Summer* and *Maurice*

All of Forster's novels tell the story of bored people (more or less aware of it) who long for *something to happen*. Indeed, underlying the exposure of 'the falsifying conventions of society' (Colmer, 1975: 43), which many critics have regarded as a major theme in his work, is the less acknowledged fact that nothing seems to happen in this half-sedated, complacent world. Conventions are therefore open to condemnation, not just because of their emptiness (and falsity), but also (maybe especially) because they are meant to prevent things from happening. This is clearly patent in Forster's first novel. At its centre is the story of Lilia – a young widow who causes a small scandal in her in-laws' town, suburban Sawston, by marrying an Italian twelve years her junior. The marriage ends in domestic tragedy: Lilia dies giving birth to her baby, which then becomes the focus of the story. Sawston is the place where things are not supposed to happen – hence Mrs Herriton's attempts to prevent Lilia from marrying her son, and, when she becomes a widow, from marrying for a second time (WAFT, 23). Italy is, on the contrary, the place where by definition things *happen* (WAFT, 92). Philip's first visit to Italy makes him critical of Sawston. But then, disillusionment follows: "In a short time it was over. Nothing had happened either in Sawston or within himself" (WAFT, 70). Worse still, Philip concludes, "nothing could happen" (WAFT, 71). He withdraws and takes refuge in beauty and humour, until he is summoned to 'save' Lilia, which is described as "the first time he had had anything to do" (WAFT, 31).

Philip's first rescue mission fails miserably. In the second one, he braces himself to fail again – this time, 'honourably' (WAFT, 133), for which Miss Abbott reproaches him: "To come out of the thing as well as you can! Is that all you are after?" (WAFT, 133) For her, Philip's liberal vision, though sympathetic, is also antagonistic to life: "You appreciate us

all – see good in all of us. And all the time you are dead – dead – dead” (WAFT, 134).

Philip concedes,

Miss Abbott, don't worry over me. Some people are born not to do things. I'm one of them; I never did anything at school or at the Bar. I came out to stop Lilia's marriage and it was too late. I came out intending to get the baby, and I shall return an "honourable failure". I never expect anything to happen now, and so I am never disappointed. You would be surprised to know what my great events are. Going to the theatre yesterday, talking to you now – I don't suppose I shall ever meet anything greater. I seem fated to pass through the world without colliding with it or moving it – and I'm sure I can't tell you whether the fate's good or evil. I don't die – I don't fall in love. And if other people die or fall in love they always do it when I'm not there. (WAFT, 134-135)

To this, Miss Abbott replies, "I wish something would happen to you, my dear friend; I wish something would happen to you" (WAFT, 135). Philip challenges her to prove that he is wrong, and the narrator concludes: "She could not prove it. No argument existed. Their discourse, splendid as it had been, resulted in nothing, and their respective opinions and policies were exactly the same when they left the church as when they had entered it" (WAFT, 135).

It is Harriet who precipitates things by kidnapping the baby and causing its accidental death. Philip is almost killed by Gino, but Miss Abbott's intervention brings them closer to one another. The novel reaches its end and Philip's improvement appears to be complete. But what does it effectively amount to? In their journey back to England, he tells Miss Abbott: "you can't go back to the old life (...) too much has happened" (WAFT, 156). She confesses that she loves Gino, which makes him acknowledge that he does too (WAFT, 158): "Out of this wreck there was revealed to him something indestructible – something which she, who had given it, could never take away" (WAFT, 160). He thinks of her as a Goddess (the Moon goddess, in love with the beautiful shepherd Endymion), and concludes, "For all wonderful things had happened" (WAFT, 160). This appears to confirm the narrator's early pronouncement – "human love and love of truth sometimes conquer where love of beauty fails" (WAFT, 71). Love is, apparently, what has happened. But has anything actually changed? Philip's plans are "London and work" (WAFT, 155), Italy in the Spring (WAFT, 153); Miss Abbott's are going back to her old routine, "Sawston and work" (WAFT, 156).

Miss Abbott and Philip may have found love, but it is unrequited love, in one case, and undeclared (closeted) love, in the other. The allusion to Endymion appears to be fitting – the eternal sleep of the shepherd boy suggests the 'sleep' into which Philip and Miss

Abbott are relapsing. It might be a great improvement by Sawston standards, but it is also a modest improvement, as Philip's thoughts reveal: "Life is greater than he had supposed, but it was even less complete. He had seen the need for strenuous work and for righteousness. And now he saw what a very little way those things would go" (WAFT, 155). In the end, Miss Abbott and Philip's stances are not so different. His half-sedated liberalism, a condition of private retreat in which nothing (not even his half-acknowledged homosexuality) can ever be made to 'happen', is matched by her 'strenuous work' and 'righteousness', which translates into life-denying self-abnegation and hectic charity work. A similar set of problems confronts the heroine of *A Room with a View*. Bored and vaguely looking for an 'adventure', Lucy Honeychurch leaves the Pension Bertolini on her own, thinking to herself: 'nothing ever happens to me' (RWV, 61). Suddenly, something does happen: an Italian man is murdered before her eyes and Lucy finds herself in George's arms. That an event has taken place – i.e. an epiphany-like encounter with the real – escapes neither the narrator nor the characters (as I argued above). Looking back on this scene, Lucy reflects: "The well-known world had broken up, and there emerged Florence, a magic city where people thought and did the most extraordinary things" (RWV, 76). To this world she opposes, "the free, pleasant life of her home, where she was allowed to do everything, and where *nothing ever happened to her*" (RWV, 77, my emphasis). Love, in this novel, is identified with the pursuit of truth, thus moving far beyond the more conventional meanings that the romantic heterosexual plot usually invites.

The same cannot be said of *Howards End*, where the opening event, the love between Helen Schlegel and Paul Wilcox, which precipitates the whole plot, fails to develop. Even though it is described as more than a 'passing emotion' – we are told that Helen's life 'was to bring nothing more intense' (HE, 39) – the relationship is hindered by what is now called the 'outer life'. The set of choices which confronts the heroine has been completely redone, with 'truth' now featuring on the side of common sense, as Margaret's short speech makes clear:

The truth is that there is a greater outer life that you and I have never touched – a life in which telegrams and anger count. Personal relations, that we think supreme, are not supreme there. There love means marriage settlements; death, death duties. So far I'm clear. But here's my difficulty. This outer life, though obviously horrid, often seems the real one – there's grit in it. It does breed character. Do personal relations lead to sloppiness in the end? (HE, 41)

Margaret's own engagement to Mr Wilcox – who stands for the 'outer life' – appears to be more a 'marriage settlement' (one that, furthermore, is symbolic of the nation) than

anything else. There is no longer any room to eventual interventions in the real, and nothing more to expect apart from ‘character’ and ‘grit’.

This again becomes a problem in *Arctic Summer*, a novel conceived as an ‘antithesis’ “between the civilised man, who hopes for an Arctic Summer, and the heroic man who rides into the sea” (Desai, 2003: vii).⁶ At the centre of the novel is thirty-year-old Martin Whitby, a Civil Servant in Whitehall, who is married to Venetia, a relationship described as “orderly love” (AS, 15) and “wedded love” (AS, 16), that is, love that is ‘not adventurous’, that ‘glorifies the known and confirms philosophy’ (AS, 15). As far as religion is concerned, Martin is a ‘sceptic’ – “though he doubted a purpose behind the Universe, he never ceased to act as if there was a purpose” (AS, 14). Like Philip Herriton, he is the liberal who was once nearly ruined by the discovery of ‘beauty’ (AS, 14), but then adjusted to a less lofty (if more comfortable) existence – “He knew himself to be clever and kind and moral and energetic, and to be surrounded by friends who were like him” (AS, 31). The narrator submits him “as an example of a civilized man” (AS, 16), someone to whom nothing happens – “he noted everything, and was thrilled by nothing” (AS, 17). Finally, like Philip Herriton, Martin Whitby is also the quintessential Forsterian tourist, who looks for ‘Romance’ and ‘beauty’, though not in the form of ‘picturesque’ (AS, 39). He finds it momentarily inside the Italian castle of Tramonta, in a fresco depicting soldiers marching into battle. Among these figures, he recognises Cleasant March, the man who had saved his life at Basle station (AS, 4). The image makes a strong impression on him: “It touched him strangely” (AS, 32), though for no apparent, logical reason: “He saw neither the man nor the picture but the power behind both, to which he could give no name” (AS, 33). As the journey in Italy progresses, Martin longs for an event, but none comes. He feels ‘jarred’: “this Italian tour gave him the sense of stage scenery which borrows all its values from the events that take place in front of it. No events did take place – here was the defect” (AS, 39-40). Nevertheless, when a little incident happens – “the crisis came” (AS, 42) – with the film of the cinema catching on fire, Martin simply runs away, leaving his lame chauffeur behind. The incident emphasises the difference between Martin – whose act is described in terms of ‘cowardice’ or, in Venetia’s more reassuring and euphemistic words, ‘slowness of the will’ (AS, 46) – and his brave rescuer, Cleasant March.

⁶ *Arctic Summer*, a novel begun in 1911 and abandoned in 1912. Forster returned to it in 1951, revising the first five chapters to read at the Aldeburgh Festival. It has four different manuscripts: the Cyril Version, the Tramonta Version, the Radipole Version and the Aldeburgh Version (cf. Colmer, 1975: 110). The one I am using is the ‘Main Version’, edited by Elizabeth Heine in 1980, and published on its own by Hesperus Press (2003).

The Marches – the second element of Forster’s antithesis – are two brothers, Cleasant and Lance, who have been raised by the dull (AS, 54), conservative Uncle Arthur (Mr Vullamy/ Vallamy). For them, life is “one long conquest” (AS, 59) and people like Martin Whitby are promptly dismissed as cowards (AS, 58). Their uncle disagrees, “Whitby was neither coward nor villain: he was a man without faith and infinitely dangerous” (AS, 58). He introduces the ‘type’ to his nephews:

He’s against morality – but quietly, mind you, quietly; against religion, but quietly; against the Throne and all that we hold dear in the same way. Lances’s Socialist on Bramley Down is open: we know where we are with him. The country’s real danger is these crawling non-conformist intellectuals. (AS, 57)

He adds, “His object is to modify, till everything’s slack and lukewarm” (AS, 57). Mr Vullamy objects to this type, which he sees as “poisonous and spreading” (AS, 57) – “Whitby’s the age” (AS, 56). The main problem is that Whitby will not put up a fight, and war, to Mr Vullamy, is the only thing that allows people to distinguish between good and evil (AS, 58).

In fact, some of these preoccupations are shared by Martin himself, who is attracted to Cleasant and his heroism. When they meet again, in England, he thinks, “behind young March lay something big that he was curious to unveil” (AS, 79). Part of the attraction is, no doubt, Cleasant’s masculinity, which offers a welcome alternative to Martin’s ‘feminine’ domestic world. This world is dominated by the sisters Borlase, Venetia and Dorothy, who combine a life of leisure in London with an interest in social philanthropy (a portrayal that certainly brings to mind the Schlegel sisters). The Borlase sisters seem to embody with more tenacity than their predecessors (but perhaps the same romanticism) the age’s desire for progress and a national culture: in Italy, Venetia is reading the socialist Jean Jaurès (AS, 6, 8, 13), and Dorothy collects folk songs – “At present folksong and Morris were fashionable” (AS, 73). The narrator is not entirely sympathetic to their organised efforts to ‘tidy up the world’:

Their war cry was ‘Be tidy’. They wanted to help in tidying up the world. It is time. The age of discovery is over – there will be no new countries. It is time to arrange the old (...). Romance, whether in action or thought, is a relic of the age of untidiness; it assumes the unknown, whereas we know, or at all events we know enough. (AS, 15)

To take up Aunt Arthur’s imagery, Dorothy and Venetia stand for the people who go on ‘walking tours’ (like the socialists that Lance sneers at) rather than ‘mountain-climbing’

(AS, 54). Martin shares some of his wife and sister-in-law's social concerns – working at the Treasury, he is the target of Lady Borlase's objections to George Lloyd's liberal reforms, which include a state insurance for the working class (AS, 8). He disapproves of Tramonta's 'snobbery' and his sympathy lies not with 'the gentlemen fighting for upper-class home', but with 'the sweaty galley-slaves who really won Lepanto' (AS, 33). Nevertheless, the situation of 'three gentlefolk, a bailiff, a farm-labourer, and a smartish chauffer' eating 'the bread of angels together' (AS, 29), which he experiences in the Italian countryside, appears to be as far as his socialism can go.

Martin longs for a grandiose and heroic modernity: a new era which is to have no 'dawn' or twilight – "a kind of Arctic Summer, in which there will be time to get something really great done" (AS, 8). Lady Borlase dismisses this 'vision' – "That is so like the modern reformer. Pretentious, vague" (AS, 9) – and even Venetia considers her husband 'too visionary' (AS, 72). But it is this wish to 'get something really great done' that makes the protagonist doubt what modern life has achieved: "we've crawled into little cells and there we're all right. But plunge us in the infinite or the sea, or one of those things, and we drown" (AS, 71-72).

Forster got stuck in this novel. He could only get as far as Lance's suicide (AS, 84), the only solution to the boy's dilemma between the two codes that he lives by: 'decency', which he has broken (AS, 69); heroism and chivalry, which demands that family honour be restored by death. Uncle Arthur's noble goal – to give 'two more men of *the right sort* to a world that needs them sorely' (AS, 65, my emphasis) – is clearly undermined by the fact that it cannot accommodate real intimacy and affection (AS, 67). The novel rehearses a critique of both Uncle Arthur's unemotional conservatism and Martin Whitby's emotional 'softness', but it does so by affirming a common value, heroism. Like Margaret Schlegel in relation to the Wilcoxes, Martin also believes (or, at least, strongly suspects) that the Marches are 'the right sort'. Uncle Arthur may champion the 'gentlemanly middle classes', their 'grit and honesty and latent idealism' (AS, 66), whereas Martin Whitby champions the 'lower' classes. But both men recognise the need for something else – 'Armageddon' and war, in Uncle Arthur's case (AS, 66); something that is but a vague yearning, in Martin Whitby's. The antithesis itself seems to announce nothing new in relation to *Howards End*, as Forster would recognise in a letter written in 1913:

the only book I have in my head is too like *Howards End* to interest me: a contrast again: between battle and work: the chief figure a Knight errant born too late in time who finds no clear issue to which to devote himself: our age demands patient good-tempered labour, not chivalry (cit. Desai, 2003: ix)

The solution offered in *Howards End* – the marriage between Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox, which only symbolism and the novel’s structure had saved from appearing an ‘idiotic finale’ (Forster, 1962: 45) or a mere ‘social habit’ (Forster, 1962: 62) – is, for several reasons, no longer possible. *Howards End* had succeeded (not without casualties, mostly on the Schlegels’ side, which swapped politics for ‘femininity’) in reconciling the ‘independent’ leisure classes with the capitalist/imperialist class that secured their income. This solution, as I pointed out in chapter three, never really satisfied Forster. For one thing, its vision of a pastoral England living in class harmony (albeit with the working classes featuring only in absentia, through representation, in Leonard’s baby) was too bourgeois and *feminine*. It excluded homoerotic love, especially between men.

Arctic Summer headed in that last direction. Martin Whitby’s vague yearning does seem to point to Cleasant March and everything he represents to him (masculinity, heroism); the ‘major event’ or ‘solid mass ahead’ that Forster was unable to create in this novel does appear to be homosexuality itself, and the failure to bring it off might have been at the root of the novel’s own failure, as John Colmer, among other critics, suggested (Colmer, 1975: 113). *Maurice* appears to confirm this supposition. Written immediately after *Arctic Summer*, between 1913 and 1914 (it underwent revisions in 1920, 1932, and 1959), its central concern is to make homosexuality ‘happen’ – hence Forster’s determination, as stated in the novel’s ‘Terminal note’, that it should have a ‘happy ending’ (Forster, 1972: 218). Though it was not meant for publication, *Maurice* represented a breakthrough in Forster’s career. In a letter, the author wrote that it had been ‘weighing on’ him, and that he felt that ‘he had created something absolutely new, even to the Greeks’ (cit. Furbank, 1978: 14).

The novel has been much chastised for its theme, as well as on literary grounds. It has been, as Robert K. Martin has pointed out, Forster’s ‘least appreciated’ and ‘least understood’ novel (Martin, 1995: 100). John Colmer, one of its first critics, pointed out the “unworked thinness of much of its narrative, its self-indulgent tone, the too intermittent play of irony” (Colmer, 1975: 114). Though conceding that it has some merits (which do not come out as clearly), Colmer finally dismisses the novel as “an exercise in personal therapy not a finished work of art” (Colmer, 1975: 114), a verdict that has been taken up by subsequent critics (e.g. Meyers, 1977: 107). Even if this may be partly true (but, then, how many works of fiction have not been therapeutic for their authors?), *Maurice* deserves to be taken seriously; it deserves to be looked at more closely, without being reduced to a theme (or, for that matter, a cause). It is possible to see in it something more universal

(though not in a liberal-humanist sense), that is, something that manages to move beyond the particular *without sacrificing the particular*. This can be found in the novel's concern with truth, a concern that had faltered in both *Arctic Summer* and *Howards End*.

In fact, the major problem with *Arctic Summer* is that its 'antithesis' is built on false premises. It rings false. What probably was the novel's object, Martin Whitby's improvement, his development into a man, is made to rely on the protagonist's rather conventional (and chauvinist) idea of himself: "he had an Englishman's capacity for correcting his faults, and a Quaker's capacity for perceiving them" (AS, 15). The critique of Uncle Arthur's insensitivity is likewise inchoate and superficial – it fails, for instance, to draw out the full implications of his code of decency, namely falsity, sexual frustration and hypocrisy. *Maurice*, no doubt, addresses these issues in a more successful way. The brief (and elliptic) dialogue between the March brothers, in which the more passionate Lance confesses his predicament – "Do you go falling in love, Cles? (...) You've not understood (...) I don't mean anything decent. It's getting a damned nuisance" (AS, 69) – takes centre stage in the later novel, to become articulated with the question of truth. As Robert K. Martin has noted, *Maurice* is "an exploration of the growth in awareness of a homosexual protagonist, *who moves from a false solution to a truer one*" (Martin, 1995: 100-101, my emphasis).

This aspect has been in general ignored, with the novel attracting far more censure than approval. A recurrent criticism has been its 'wishful thinking' element and, especially on account of its happy ending – which for Jeffrey Meyers is "totally improbable" (Meyers, 1977: 101) – its lack of realism. This aspect, however, is what gives the novel its texture and meaning. Indeed, *Maurice* is best approached as a fantasy – in the sense described by Forster himself, whereby the 'true fantasist' is the one who 'merges the kingdoms of magic and common sense' (AN, 121). Fantasy plays a crucial role in this novel, influencing its structure and plot, and helping to realise (on the level of theme) its problems and solutions. The story is built on the distinction between 'real' and 'unreal', a distinction that is destabilised and even turned upside down through the various allusions to dreams and trances. Many actions take place in the liminal regions of sleep and wake, and the novel struggles to move from dream to reality, from desire to fruition, a movement that is imprinted on the novel's chronological structure, which outlines Maurice's development from boyhood to manhood. Hence, at fourteen, Maurice is reluctant to go to sleep (M, 23) and falls asleep calling out the name of the garden boy, George, who has ceased to work for them (M, 24); at public school, he sinks into a state "where all is obscure and unrealized" (M, 25). He has two recurrent dreams: one in which a naked George runs

towards him; another in which ‘nothing happened’, only a voice was heard saying, ‘That is your friend’ (M, 25-26). This dream of a friend (which resembles Martin Whitby’s vague yearning) becomes all-important to him: “He would never meet that man nor hear that voice again, yet they became *more real than anything he knew*” (M, 26, my emphasis). The search for the real is thus intertwined with the search for a friend, entailing a process of truth that has a social as well as personal dimension. Maurice has nothing heroic or special about him – at school, he is merely “a mediocre member of a mediocre school’ (M, 25), and at the end of it, he has remained ‘average’ (M, 28). Mediocrity also characterises his suburban home, described as “a land of facilities, where nothing had to be striven for, and success was indistinguishable from failure” (M, 21). In brief, Maurice lives in a comfortable cocoon, from which he will only begin to wake at Cambridge, where he finally discovers that people are ‘alive’:

Hitherto he had supposed that they *were* what he *pretended* to be – flat pieces of cardboard stamped with a conventional design – but as he strolled about the courts at night and saw through the windows some men singing and others arguing and others at their books, there came by no process of reason a conviction that they were human beings with feelings akin to his own. He had never lived frankly since Mr Abraham’s school, and despite Dr Barry, did not mean to begin; but he saw that while deceiving others he had been deceived, and mistaken them for the empty creatures he wanted them to think he was. No, they too had insides. (M, 32, italics in original)

Risley, the Dean’s unconventional cousin, is Maurice’s first ‘real’ acquaintance (M, 36). It is through him that he comes to know his first lover, Clive Durham, in whose presence Maurice recognises that he is “nothing but falsities” (M, 39). Their relationship takes the form of a journey towards truth. It grows out of Clive’s refusal, against his mother’s wishes, to communicate (M, 43), and results in Maurice’s own religious beliefs being exposed as “second-hand tags – no, tenth-hand” (M, 47) and, ultimately, in his renouncing religion altogether (M, 49).

Maurice’s encounter with Clive is experienced as an event: he feels that “his heart had lit never to be quenched again, and one thing in him at last was real” (M, 41). And yet, he fails to grasp the true meaning of this ‘reality’, or to be true to it. At home, he continues to be false: he pretends to be attracted to a Miss Olcott, an episode that goes inevitably wrong (M, 52-53), and seems to accept without questioning “the niche that England had prepared for him” (M, 53). As the narrator puts it, “Miss Olcott had passed, the insincerity that led him to her remained” (M, 54). Hence, when Clive finally declares his love, Maurice’s reaction is to be ‘scandalized, horrified’ (M, 56). It is only after much pain that he realises

his untruthfulness: “It was all so plain now. He had lied. He phrased it ‘been fed upon lies’, but lies are the natural food of boyhood, and he had eaten greedily” (M, 58). Maurice decides to change, to ‘live straight’: “he would not – and this was the test – pretend to care about women when the only sex that attracted him was his own” (M, 59). As the narrator announces, “After this crisis, Maurice became a man” (M, 60). He is sent down but refuses to apologise to the Dean – “it was the first taste of honesty he had known for years” (M, 77) – and at home everyone notes that he has changed (M, 80). As his relationship with Clive develops, Maurice becomes more aware of the world: “Section after section the armies of humanity were coming alive” (M, 89).

The process is followed, albeit in reverse, by Clive. If Maurice moves from falseness to truthfulness, from apparent ‘normality’ – as even Clive believes that he “was a man who only liked women – one could tell that at a glance” (M, 69) – to ‘abnormality’, Clive moves in the opposite direction, from sincerity to insincerity, from ‘abnormality’ to marriage.⁷ This trajectory is described with subtlety, without acrimony. As a boy, we are told, Clive had had ‘a sincere mind’ (M, 67), a judgement that Cambridge seems to confirm; but he had also cared deeply about tradition and Christianity (M, 68). There are inklings that he may not be completely honest about his ‘conversion to normality’: even though he writes to Maurice, “Against my will I have become normal. I cannot help it” (M, 104), we are never sure that this is so. Significantly, Clive utters these words in a Greek *theatre*, and at the heart of the culture on which he had grounded his homosexuality. When he returns to England, the narrator remarks, “He liked the atmosphere of the North, whose gospel is *not truth but compromise*” (M, 108, my emphasis). That Clive is more misogynous than Maurice (M, 92) also throws doubts on the depth and truthfulness of his feelings for Anne. Their marriage is described as love – “Besotted with love, he gave her his body and soul” (M, 143) – but the description itself is steeped in irony. ‘Soul’ appears to be more important than body: sex is wrapped up in ‘secrecy’ (which, the narrator ironically adds, ‘suited’ Clive), ‘always without a word’. In sum, the marriage is ‘temperate and graceful’, endorsed by ‘beautiful conventions’ (M, 144). Towards the end of the book, it is clear that Clive has lost his grip on reality (which his growing immersion in politics and consequent absence from Maurice’s visits already suggested): his tendency to generalisation is now understood as “part of the mental vagueness induced by his

⁷ Jeffery Meyers has rightly stressed the negative representation of marriage in Forster’s work (Meyers, 1977: 95), but sees in it a sign of Forster’s sympathy towards celibacy – e.g. in the figure of Mr Beebe (Meyers, 1977: 99). I do not think this kind of correspondence can be made. Also, I disagree with his claim that the goal of *Maurice* is to ‘glorify’ homosexual love “at the expense of heterosexual love” (Meyers, 1977: 16). My reading endorses Robert K. Martin’s contention that the central conflict is not between homosexuality and heterosexuality, but between two kinds of homosexuality (Martin, 1995: 100-101).

marriage” (M, 213), and the novel closes with him returning to the house, “to devise some method of concealing the truth from Anne” (M, 215).

Women are throughout the novel associated with social conventions and pretence: Mrs Hall lies to Maurice about George (M, 23), a trait she shares with Clive’s mother, also described as insincere (M, 83). Maurice’s relapse into falseness, during his vacations, is blamed on his mother and sisters, who ‘influenced him incalculably’ – “he came back thinking, and even speaking, like his mother or Ada” (M, 54). The two friends are, therefore, committed ‘misogynists’ (M, 92) – especially Clive, who refers to their love as “a particular harmony of body and soul that I don’t think women have even guessed” (M, 84). Not surprisingly, when Clive becomes ‘cured’, his attention shifts from Maurice to his family (M, 109-110) and he becomes chivalrous towards women (M, 114-115).

Untruthfulness is also what awaits Maurice after losing Clive: he feels caught up in a “front of lies” and regards himself as “an outlaw in disguise” (M, 120). On learning from his family that Clive is engaged to be married (‘the crash came’ – M, 128), he pretends to know the news (M, 129), and when he returns to Penge, after Clive’s wedding, he realises, “There was now a complete break between his public and private actions” (M, 148). Maurice lies to his hosts about his trips to London, letting them think (to Clive’s relief) that they are linked to a marriage proposal (M, 152). Truth has been pushed to the margins of society; it has become a matter of medical intervention. It asks to be ‘cured’, hence Maurice’s visit to Dr Barry (M, 137), and, then, to Mr Lasker Jones, the hypnotist, to whom he hands in a ‘frank’ statement about his ‘condition’ (M, 157). Normality and disease thus interlock with truth in a complex way: if Clive has become ‘normal’ ‘through illness’ (M, 106) – his fainting marks his shift to ‘normality’ (M, 95) and we see a concerned Maurice wanting to ‘heal’ him (M, 102) – it is now Maurice’s turn to be ‘cured’ (e.g. M, 161).

And yet, trance, the cure for Maurice’s ‘problem’ (M, 158), will only aggravate his condition (and it is no coincidence that it should have been the ironical Risley, another homosexual, who provided the hypnotist’s address). The truth is that the half-real space between sleep and wake (to which trance also belongs) is the only space where homosexuality is allowed to exist. Hence, when Dr Barry firmly dismisses Maurice’s claim that he is “an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort” as ‘rubbish’, Maurice concludes: “if his words were rubbish his life was a dream” (M, 139). In fact, lovers can only meet in a state of half-consciousness, especially in dreams or through dreams, which, paradoxically, have the power of ‘waking one up’ to reality. It is a dream that first suggests to Maurice that Clive is his ‘friend’ (M, 49), and Maurice becomes Clive’s lover by answering his call

from a dream (M, 62-63; 71). As Maurice tells Clive, "I should have gone through life half awake if you'd had the decency to leave me alone"; and they agree, "Perhaps we woke up one another" (M, 85).

The scene that brings Maurice and Scudder together, a variation of the first encounter with Clive, reinforces this idea. Neglected by his former lover, Maurice spends a day of 'unreality', ironically, in the company of his future lover, the still-invisible game under-keeper (M, 151). Later, after undergoing trance and at Mr Lasker Jones' advice, he returns to Penge. But it is clear that something is about to happen: "Unusual restlessness was on him. It recalled the initial night at Cambridge, when he had been to Risley's rooms" (M, 161). As in the previous night (M, 153), Maurice opens the window and calls for his 'friend', only this time he does it in his sleep: "He really was asleep when he sprung up and flung wide the curtains with a cry of 'Come!' The action awoke him; what had he done that for?" (M, 167) This time, moreover, his call is answered by Scudder, who climbs the ladder left by the roof repair workers, and enters Maurice's room through the window, bringing solace and recognition, "Sir, I know... I know" (M, 167; cf. 71), as Maurice had once done for Clive.

And yet, the 'reality' to which Maurice awakes in the morning is very different from Cambridge. Class stands between Maurice and Alec Scudder in a way that it never stood between Maurice and Clive (despite the fact that the former is 'suburban', and therefore also 'an outsider' to the Durhams – M, 88). Prejudice and distrust has come between them too: Maurice considers buying a present to Scudder, but, anticipating blackmail, decides that 'it couldn't be a cheque' (M, 175). The game of cricket – 'Park versus Village' (M, 175) – which "took on some semblance of reality" (M, 176) – puts the two men on the same side, 'against the whole world' (M, 176). After the game, however, Maurice feels 'violently sick' (M, 178) and finds the situation 'disgusting' (M, 179), a feeling that is made worse when he learns that the gamekeeper is the son of a butcher (M, 180). His reaction recalls Clive's own rejection of Maurice, a few months earlier, for whom the squire had started to feel 'a physical dislike' (M, 107). The 'indecent' of love between men (and, what is more, two Englishmen) is now replaced by the more serious 'indecent' of class betrayal (M, 180), for which blackmail is accepted as the right punishment – "He had gone outside his class, and it served him right" (M, 181). Even after Mr Lasker Jones's confirmation of his 'inversion' (M, 187), Maurice, though no longer 'afraid or ashamed', continues to insist on that point: "But I must belong to my class, that's fixed" (M, 187).

What makes him change his mind is, again, to do with truth: Maurice arranges to meet Scudder at the British Museum. They arrive as opponents, but when they are on the point

of rupture (Scudder is actually blackmailing him), Maurice's former schoolmaster, Mr Ducie, arrives on the scene and addresses Maurice, convinced that he is a former pupil. Mr Ducie is the teacher who, on Maurice's last day at school, had given him the 'facts' about sex, in a false and partial manner, as Maurice had then intuitively realised – 'Liar, coward, he's told me nothing' (M, 20). It is now Maurice's turn to lie to him, by giving Scudder's name as his own (M, 195). This is an act that simultaneously signals Maurice's renunciation of his past and 'previous identity', as Robert K. Martin has pointed out (Martin, 1995: 104), and earns him Scudder's admiration and trust, who has dropped his threats and started addressing him by his Christian name (M, 196). The two men spend the night together, now as equals: Scudder "wasn't deferential any more. The British Museum had cured that" (M, 200).

The use of the British Museum – which Maurice defines to Alec as "old things belonging to the nation" (M, 193) – is symbolic as well as ironic. Described as "solemn and chaste" (M, 190) and "a tomb" (M, 192), the British Museum stands for conservative England – the England of the Durhams and their (High Church) rector, Mr Borenus, who suspects Scudder of being 'guilty of sensuality' (M, 207), and who pontificates, "until all sexual irregularities and not some of them are penal the Church will never reconquer England" (M, 208).

What is at stake, then, is not only homosexual love, but also England – again, as in *Howards End*, the question appears to be 'who should England belong to?' The answer is certainly a very different one. Hitherto, Englishness had not seemed to be compatible with homosexuality: at Cambridge, Maurice had first repudiated Clive's declaration of love with the words, "you're an Englishman. I'm another" (M, 56). Similarly, Clive had viewed Maurice's rejection as a sign that "Hall was the healthy normal Englishman" (M, 70). Their relationship will henceforth develop in defiance of 'tradition' and 'convention': "They were concerned with a passion that few English minds have admitted" (M, 86). Maurice's challenge will be to reject the tacit connection between Englishness and hypocrisy. Looking at himself in the mirror, in the shop where he is buying Clive's wedding present, Maurice half-ironically muses, "What a solid young citizen he looked – quiet, honourable, prosperous without vulgarity. On such does England rely. Was it conceivable that on Sunday last he had nearly assaulted a boy?" (M, 135) Clive's property, Penge, stands for this England, which fails to attract Maurice's admiration. On his first visit, he notes, "both house and estate were marked, not indeed with decay, but with the immobility that precedes it" (M, 81). Although he appears to agree politically with his

hosts (they all seem to support the Tariff Reform – M, 82), Maurice is sceptical of what the Durhams have achieved:

After dinner the men smoked, then joined the ladies. It was a suburban evening, but with a difference; these people had the air of settling something: they either just had arranged or soon would rearrange England. Yet the gateposts, the roads – he had noticed them on the way up – were in bad repair, and the timber wasn't kept properly, the windows stuck, the boards creaked. He was less impressed than he had expected by Penge. (M, 83)

To 'immobility' is added emptiness: the Durhams' (inner) circle is described as a "region of high interchange and dignified movements that meant nothing" (M, 88). On his first visit after Clive's marriage, Maurice, who now works in the city as a stockbroker, observes, "the sense of dilapidation had increased" (M, 145). Although he is feeling lonely and depressed, he nevertheless tells Scudder, who is about to emigrate, "England for me" (M, 166), a decision that is maintained even after Mr Lasker Jones has advised him to live abroad (M, 185).

As it turns out, it will be England for the two of them. When Maurice realises that Alec, now his lover, has failed to embark to Argentina, he immediately grasps what it means:

He had brought out the man in Alec, and now it was Alec's turn to bring out the hero in him. He knew what the call was, and what his answer must be. They must live outside class, without relations or money; they must work and stick to each other till death. But England belonged to them. That, besides companionship, was their reward. Her air and sky were theirs, not the timorous millions' who own stuffy little boxes, but never their own souls. (M, 209)

On his last visit to the country estate, Maurice confirms that the England that will embrace him and Scudder is not to be Penge: "it struck him once more how derelict it was, how unfit to set standards or control the future" (M, 209). Rather, it is to be found in the 'greenwood' and in 'darkness', with no 'compromise' (M, 213) – "this was the end, without twilight or compromise" (M, 215).

Curiously enough, the novel's 'uncompromising' ending has more often than not been read as an example of escapism. John Colmer is an early example of this tendency. While conceding that *Maurice* seems to suggest "the coming into being of a classless society in which the bonds that bind men will be personal relations, not economic and social power" (Colmer, 1975: 123), this critic nevertheless places the novel within the pastoral tradition, "with its incipient escapism and its nobles retreating to the greenwoods in the guise of shepherds" (Colmer, 1975: 127). His conclusion dismisses the novel as a playful fancy:

“For most modern readers therefore *Maurice* is likely to appear a charming pastoral eclogue in Edwardian fancy dress” (Colmer, 1975: 127). This is only so, however, if we read *too much* in Maurice’s act of heroism (as Colmer does, when he reads it as an attack on ‘economic and social power’) or *too little* (as we all do when we can only see it as an act of escapism). In fact, at no place in the novel does Maurice romanticise the lower classes. As a boy, Maurice behaved as a snob towards servants (M, 23), and as an adult, even after meeting Scudder, he dislikes playing cricket with his ‘social inferiors’ (M, 175). His opinions on the poor are, furthermore, far from romantic: in fact, they superficially shock the charity-prone Anne, who nevertheless is glad to establish that she “had entrusted her hundred pounds to the right sort of stockbroker” (M, 146). For better and worse, Maurice recognises that Alec is “not a hero or a god, but a man embedded in society like himself” (M, 206). But, just as Clive had woken the ‘man’ in him, so Scudder now wakes the ‘hero’.

‘Heroism’ is, indeed, the concept that animates the novel, recalling Martin Whitby’s failed search for a modern hero. Maurice’s ‘heroism’ is tied up with a vision that understands the ‘real’ as truth, and love as part of a process of truth. In the morning of their second meeting, despite his happiness, Maurice is disturbed by a thought: “Yes, he was in luck, no doubt of it. Scudder had proved honest and kind. He was lovely to be with, a treasure, a charmer, a find in a thousand, the longed-for dream. But was he brave?” (M, 200) The answer first seems to be negative, with Alec leaving for ever and Maurice returning to his solitude:

Masses of work awaited him. Nothing had changed in his life. Nothing remained in it. He was back with his loneliness as it had been before Clive, as it was after Clive, and would now be forever. He had failed, and that wasn’t the saddest: he had seen Alec fail. In a way they were one person. Love had failed. Love was an emotion through which you occasionally enjoyed yourself. It could not do things. (M, 204)

For Maurice, clearly, this is exactly what love ought to be about: changing things, doing things. Earlier, Maurice had defended Scudder, not because of his class, but because he “cleaned a gun, carried a suitcase, baled out a boat, emigrated – *did something anyway*, while gentlefolk squatted on chairs finding fault with his soul” (M, 165, my emphasis). Similarly, even though, according to realist codes, Maurice and Scudder fail to live in ‘real’ England, their flight has a meaning, not only insofar as it rejects that ‘real’ (and it does so by calling into question its status as ‘real’, i.e. as truth), but also insofar as it is prepared, during this process, to take risks – in striking contrast with the clientele of

Messrs Hill and Hall, the sheltered ‘middle-middle classes’ who expect Maurice to be able to combine ‘high interest with safety’ (M, 190).⁸

If we take the novel’s ending as an example of ‘fantasy’ – one of Forster’s ‘aspects of the novel’ – the conclusion that the novel is escapist may lose some of its force. For Forster, the defining feature of ‘fantasy’ is that

It asks us to pay something extra. It compels us to an adjustment that is different to an adjustment required by a work of art, to an additional adjustment. The other novelists say, ‘Here is something that might occur in your lives,’ the fantasist ‘Here is something that could not occur. I must ask you first to accept my book as a whole, and secondly to accept certain things in my book.’ (AN, 113-114)

The adjustment that *Maurice* requires from us is not to do with fairies or gods (which is what Forster has in mind here). However, there is no doubt that the figure of the homosexual as the novel depicts it (unashamedly, in its ‘decent’ and ‘indecent’ versions, i.e. Platonic and emotional/physical expressions) will demand from many readers (especially during Forster’s life, but also in our days) just as great an adjustment and as high a ‘price’ as a figure of mythology would. Through the deployment of a fantastic device (rather than an ‘unrealistic’ one), the novel forces us to realise that if the love between two men can only exist in a fantasy world – Clive’s ‘land through the looking-glass’ (M, 152; 212) or Maurice’s ‘greenwood’ and ‘darkness’ – then there is something wrong about the ‘real’ world.

The problem evokes the exchange between Clive and Mrs Hall, shortly before he announces that he is going to faint:

‘We are and we ought to be’, concluded Mrs Hall. ‘Very different.’
‘Not always,’ contradicted Clive. (M, 94)

At this point of the novel, Clive wants to be what he ‘ought to be’ (that is, ‘normal’) and does not want to be what he ought not to be (that is, homosexual). In other words, he is looking for a position in which ‘be’ and ‘ought to be’ coincide, which is not the case with Mrs Hall, who turns a blind eye to her son’s ‘friendship’ with Clive, while probably

⁸ Peter Widdowson has pointed out that, in *Maurice* and other novels, Forster recognised “that conventional realism was limited when an ‘abnormal’ world was to be defined, or when an ideal vision demanded realisation” (Widdowson, 1977: 57). Widdowson also contends that “fiction, far from being ‘realistic’, is a way of realising situations which would be impossible in real life” (Widdowson, 1977: 57). This process, however, must not be confused with a strategy of dislocation, whereby fiction becomes a space where the ‘impossible’ is to be (vicariously) lived. Art is not presented in his work as a substitute for life (cf. Burra, 1989: 321).

considering that it 'ought not to be'. And yet, Clive's moral superiority is, in the end, only apparent. Because his crisis does not entail a truth procedure – in which not only what he is, but also what he 'ought to be' would have to be called into question – his solution is, in the end, just as false as Mrs Hall's more tolerant, though essentially hypocritical, position. The use of dream in this novel is thus closely linked to the novel's troubled relationship with the 'real'. After telling Alec, on their first encounter, about his dream of a 'friend', Maurice dismisses the idea – "I suppose such a thing can't really happen outside sleep" (M, 173). When it does happen, it is, again, connected to sleep: Maurice finds Alec sleeping in the boathouse and lies beside him (M, 210). Finally, Maurice's last encounter with Clive, which takes place among garden shrubs and in the dark, extends this blurred reality to Clive himself: "To the end of his life Clive was not sure of the exact moment of departure, and with the approach of old age he grew uncertain whether the moment had yet occurred" (M, 215). We are left with the doubt that perhaps it is Clive, rather than Maurice, who is living a (false) dream (in all senses, not just sexual). Or even, that Maurice's truth is Clive's own unrealisable fantasy, one that he does not even dare to dream.

5.2. The Triumph of the 'non-event': *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and totalitarianism

Philip Herriton's response to Miss Abbott's renunciation of her stint of 'mad rebellion' in Italy encapsulates the liberal credo in the sanctity of private life and the individual:

'Society is invincible – to a certain degree. But your real life is your own, and nothing can touch it. There is no power on earth that can prevent your criticizing and despising mediocrity – nothing that can stop you retreating into splendour and beauty – into the thoughts and beliefs that make the real life – the real you.' (WAFT, 77)

These words, written around 1904, when Forster was in his mid-twenties, are put to the test in Orwell's most famous creation, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which brings to life the ultimate liberal nightmare: what if one's 'real life' is not really 'one's own'? What if something (some 'power') can actually 'touch it', and destroy the possibility of 'retreat into splendour and beauty', destroy, inclusively, 'splendour and beauty' themselves and, indeed, 'the thoughts and beliefs that make the real life' and 'the real you'?

Nineteen Eighty-Four takes up this concern to depict the complete submission of human life to an all-powerful, all-knowing State, in a way that no retreat into individuality (let alone 'splendour and beauty') is either possible or conceivable. The novel tells the story of

thirty-nine-year-old Winston Smith, who lives in a prison-like world set in the future (Airstrip One, Oceania, 1984), under Big Brother's rule: "Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed – no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull" (NEF, 29). It is from 'the few cubic centimetres of his skull' that Winston launches his rebellion against the totalitarian world of Big Brother. The task is, from the outset, doomed to fail. For one thing, there is an overwhelming discrepancy between the 'small', vulnerable individual – Winston Smith is presented as "a smallish, frail figure" in blue overalls, the Party's uniform (NEF, 4) – and the 'big', all-encompassing State, represented by the enormous buildings of its four Ministries (NEF, 6). The situation seems to confirm Philip Herriton's pronouncement that 'society is invincible'. Indeed, in this world of 'oligarchical collectivism', there is no private property; there are no artistic havens or exclusive clubs to which Winston (like Philip) can withdraw – only the 'inside of one's skull'. As the novel will reveal (and here lies the horror of this psychodrama), not even this will ultimately be possible: one by one, all 'secret' spaces of individuality will be destroyed, the last one being the 'impregnable inner heart' (NEF, 174), which stands for humanity itself. Here lies the line that separates Forster's comedy of manners from Orwell's 'naturalistic novel', Philip Herriton's touristic fantasies from Winston's (real-life) nightmare.⁹

The second element of Orwell's fiction – the first one is the loss of private life – is also anticipated by Philip Herriton: the importance to preserve 'the *real* life – the *real* you'. Reality is at the centre of Winston's struggle against the Party. There is an irreconcilable gap between the Party's description of reality and reality itself, i.e. the everyday life, which is described as "neutral and non-political" (NEF, 77):

The ideal set up by the Party was something huge, terrible and glittering – a world of steel and concrete of monstrous machines and terrifying weapons – a nation of warriors and fanatics, marching forward in perfect unity, all thinking the same thoughts and shouting the same slogans, perpetually working, fighting, triumphing, persecuting – three hundred million people all with the same face. The reality was decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes, in patched-up nineteenth-century houses that smelt always of cabbage and bad lavatories. (NEF, 77)

⁹ I am not dividing Forster and Orwell along the lines of fantasy/ realism (or naturalism). Forster also combines realistic elements with fantasy, often, as Peter Widdowson argued in his discussion of *Howards End*, to an ideological effect (e.g. Widdowson, 1977: 51-52). And, in a different way, so does Orwell. As Carl Freedman has contented, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is built on the combination of two 'antithetical genres': "the loose-jointed, empiricist, Wellsian naturalism" (concerned with details of the 'real' world), and "the totally controlled, programmatic, Swiftian satire" (which draws on fantasy) (Freedman: 1984: 601-602).

Winston's act of rebellion emerges from this gap between real and unreal, perceived as the ugly, decaying reality, on the one hand, and the Party's ideal, on the other. His task is to dispute the Party's notion of the 'real', to call into question its point of view, a Herculean task, no doubt, since it is the Party that, at all levels, defines and controls the means whereby reality is apprehended.

The novel opens with Winston arriving home, a flat in 'Victory Mansions' (NEF, 3), a modern but dingy building with glass doors, which dates from the thirties (NEF, 22). In its hallway hangs a large poster of a black-moustachioed man – "one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move" (NEF, 3) – which reads: 'BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU.' Winston's flat is dominated by a telescreen, a device that cannot be turned off, thus allowing everything that happens in the flat to be 'seen as well as heard' (NEF, 4). The general atmosphere is one of drabness, conveyed by the pervasive smell of 'boiled cabbage' (NEF, 3; 23), as well as the cold and colourless landscape outside, where another poster with the word 'INGSOC' and a helicopter of the police patrol can be seen in the distance (NEF, 4).

Despite the fact that the story is told by a third-person narrator, the focus falls largely (if not completely) on the protagonist.¹⁰ It is from Winston's point of view that we become acquainted with life in Airstrip One: the round-the-clock surveillance; the hysterical leader-worship; the complete arbitrariness in the absence of formal laws (NEF, 8); the state of permanent war (there is rationing, and around twenty to thirty bombs fall on London every week – NEF, 28).

The particulars of this 'totalitarian' society are well-known, but worth spelling out: 'Oceania' is the name given to a police state ruled by 'Ingsoc' and led by Big Brother, the Party's 'disembodied' voice and face (NEF, 216). Power is exerted by a class of intellectuals and technocrats, the 'Inner Party', who amount to less than two per cent of the population. They are hierarchically followed by two other classes: the 'Outer Party' (defined as the 'hands of the State'), and the 'dumb masses' or 'proles', who make up around eighty-five per cent of the population (NEF, 217). The regime, whose only dissenter, the Trotsky-like Emmanuel Goldstein, has dubbed 'oligarchical collectivism' (NEF, 191), uses the technological advances of the modern world (most notably in the field of communication and information technologies) exclusively for repressive and warfare purposes. Oceania is always at war with one of the other two superstates (Eastasia or Eurasia), even though there are no 'genuine ideological differences' between them (NEF,

¹⁰ Robert Lee has stressed this aspect: "In one sense, the entire book merely portrays successive alterations in Winston's Smith's consciousness" (Lee, 1969: 129). As Zwerdling rightly argues, no point of view in the book (and no character) can be trusted (Zwerdling 1974: 108).

193) – Ingsoc (in Oceania), Neo-Bolshevism (in Eurasia) and Death-Worship (in Eastasia) are “barely distinguishable” (NEF, 205).¹¹ The war is largely a sham. Its only goal is to ensure a permanent state of scarcity, deemed essential to keep the population in a state of submissive passivity. Society has been reduced to a mass of compliant individuals, whose general apathy is only interrupted by collective outbursts of hysteria during the regular ‘Two Minutes Hate’ or, less frequently, by public hangings. The discontent which would arise from material dearth (which affects all but the Inner Party members) seems to be contained by means of surveillance, repression and propaganda. This is the job of a powerful State apparatus, which is organised into four Ministries: the Ministry of Truth, concerned with the news, education and entertainment (in fact, with their production and manipulation); the Ministry of Peace, concerned with war; the Ministry of Love, concerned with ‘law and order’ (which is to say, with repression, punishment and torture); and the Ministry of Plenty, concerned with economic affairs (namely, with the production and *non*-distribution of wealth). In addition to external control, there are also internalised control mechanisms, such as *crimestop*, the self-censorship of seditious thoughts, and *doublethink* (previously known as ‘reality control’), which consists in the ability to hold two contradictory beliefs at the same time, without attending to the fact (and meaning) that they are contradictory.¹²

And yet, despite this dismal (indeed, ‘totalitarian’) picture, the protagonist is the living proof that resistance is still possible (if only on a modest scale). His rebellion against the Party starts out in isolation, when he decides to keep a diary (NEF, 9). It then goes on to

¹¹ There are problems with this claim that there are no ‘ideological’ distinctions between the three blocks. How, then, to account for their actual geographical location, which seems far from arbitrary? Eurasia corresponds to the European continent under Russian hegemony; Oceania covers Britain, the British Empire and the Americas under American hegemony; Eastasia integrates China, Japan, Manchuria, Mongolia and Tibet (NEF, 192-193). The exclusion of most of Africa, the Middle East, Southern India and Indonesia (NEF, 195) as a no-man land, and, therefore, the stage for war, as well as a ‘natural’ source of cheap or even slave labour, spells out an imperialist ideology – and one that is not acknowledged as such. The only economic motive for war that the book recognises is the possession of the ‘bottomless reserve of labour’ which can be found outside the three super-states. In any case, these ‘slave populations’ are superfluous: though allowing war to be continuous (that’s their political function), they do not make any difference in the structure of the ‘world society’ (NEF, 196). This points, as Alok Rai has noted, to the real division between ‘developed capitalist economies’ and a ‘Third (or Fourth) World’ of colonised people (cf. Rai, 1988: 15-16).

¹² Richard Rorty has defined ‘doublethink’ as “a kind of deliberately induced schizophrenia, the dwelling of two systems of belief and desire within a single body” (Rorty, 1998, 160) and sought to distinguish between irony and doublethink (Rorty, 1998, 157). According to him, the ironist has doubts concerning his words and identity, while people who have mastered doublethink have no doubts at all. But having doubts does not, to my view, preclude ‘doublethink’. Flory’s simultaneous belief in the despotism and benevolence of the empire (BD, 69) contains the seeds of ‘doublethink’, and one of his major traits is insecurity. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, ‘doublethink’ (or ‘reality control’) encapsulates a state of mind that is capable of endorsing two opposing views at once without regarding it as a contradiction. What is characteristic of this concept is that it does away with the need to distinguish between truth and falsity. Doublethink claims to be different from lying (NEF, 259) and hypocrisy (NEF, 268), but, in fact, as Zwerdling has pointed out, it makes lying tolerable (Zwerdling 1974: 54). The blur between truth and lies is the desirable condition under Big Brother’s regime: when truth is dropped, all action is permanently deferred; history is thus ‘arrested’ (NEF, 223).

take two other forms: a secret love affair and participation in a secret political organisation. All three acts are connected. His urge to write has been provoked by the momentary, but meaningful, exchange of glances with an Inner Party member, O'Brien (NEF, 19). On the same occasion, Winston also notices Julia, the dark-haired girl from the Fiction Department, who is to become his lover. The desire to rebel thus appears to overlap with the desire for the 'Other', lover or friend.

These two encounters – with Julia and with O'Brien – are central to the novel. They develop in parallel, and are inextricably associated with death. Significantly, Winston first meets his future lover and future torturer in a hate ceremony. He feels attracted to Julia because she appears to be “more dangerous than most [girls]” (NEF, 12), and imagines he is raping and murdering her, which makes her, rather than Goldstein, the object of his hate (NEF, 17). These feelings recur in subsequent meetings: at one time, he suspects that she is spying on him and wishes to “smash her skull in with a cobblestone” (NEF, 105); then, when they speak for the first time, in the corridor of the Ministry of Truth, Winston suspects her of being ‘an enemy trying to kill him’ (NEF, 111). Love and death are interlocked – before reading Julia's secret note, which says ‘I love you’, Winston is convinced that it ‘probably means death’ (NEF, 113). He also decides that, “whatever was written on the paper, it must have some kind of political meaning” (NEF, 113). In effect, their sexual involvement is first and foremost described as political: “It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act” (NEF, 133). What Winston finds attractive in Julia is nothing to do with her, not even with her physical appearance – “except for her mouth, you could not call her beautiful” (NEF, 132). Nor is it to do with desire (or even lust, in the terms that Forster would have used). What moves him is the resolve to go against the Party, which he links to the ‘coarseness of her language’ (NEF, 128) and her (sexual) ‘corruption’ (NEF, 131). A similar motive seems to drive Julia, who is attracted to Winston's dissidence – “as soon as I saw you I knew you were against *them*’ (NEF, 128, emphasis in original).

But it is meeting O'Brien, not Julia, that Winston experiences as a real event. As Daphne Patai has pointed out, Winston's ‘true alliance’ is forged with O'Brien rather than Julia (Patai, 1984: 227). It is O'Brien who attracts Winston (not least, physically), and it is to him that his diary will be dedicated (NEF, 84; 106):

He felt deeply drawn to him, and not solely because he was intrigued by the contrast between O'Brien's urbane manner and his prizefighter's physique. Much more it was because of a secret-held belief – or perhaps not even a

belief, merely a hope – that O’Brien’s political orthodoxy was not perfect. Something in his face suggested it irresistibly. (NEF, 13)

When he catches, for a brief moment, O’Brien’s eye – “it was exactly at this moment that the significant thing happened” (NEF, 19) – Winston believes that it betrays recognition and complicity: “Winston knew – yes, he *knew!* – that O’Brien was thinking the same thing as himself” (NEF, 19). Though ‘equivocal’, the incident is registered as “a memorable event” (NEF, 20). Their next meeting confirms Winston’s expectations: “It had happened at last. The expected message had come. All his life, it seemed to him, he had been waiting for this to happen” (NEF, 164). In a scene that evokes his previous encounter with Julia, O’Brien approaches Winston in the corridor and hands him a slip of paper, this time openly, in front of the telescreen (NEF, 165). The note contains O’Brien’s address and is understood as an invitation to join the Brotherhood, as it effectively comes to happen. Winston and Julia’s visit to O’Brien’s flat resembles a ceremony of initiation, in which the protagonist’s confession of ‘Thoughtcrime’ is followed by a toast with wine to Goldstein (NEF, 178) and ‘a sort of catechism’ (NEF, 179).¹³

O’Brien means love and death to Winston, in a way that is even more powerful and complete than Julia (in whom O’Brien shows no interest – NEF, 179). As the novel moves to their next encounter in the Ministry of Love, Julia is removed from the scene (NEF, 232 – she will reappear only briefly towards the end – NEF, 304). The encounter which reunites O’Brien and Winston as torturer and tortured is, as Patai has noted, the novel’s ‘central encounter’, but also a game between ‘opposing players (Patai, 1984: 239). This aspect has escaped neither man: Winston had earlier pointed out to Julia the futility of their act – “In this game that we’re playing, we can’t win. Some kinds of failure are better than other kinds, that’s all” (NEF, 142) – and O’Brien will deploy a similar image to refer to the surveillance and arrest of Winston, “this drama that I have played out with you during seven years” (NEF, 281). It is thus hardly surprising that, when they meet in the Ministry of Love, Winston should admit that he ‘had always known it’ (NEF, 251), readjusting with no apparent difficulty to O’Brien’s new role – “he was the tormentor, he was the protector, he was the inquisitor, he was the friend” (NEF, 256).¹⁴

¹³ Robert Lee has pointed out the religious overtones of this scene, namely the parallel with communion by wine, followed, in the end, by a wafer-like pill (Lee; 1969: 148-149). Daphne Patai also compares Julia and Winston’s interrogation, in this scene, to a catechism (Patai, 1984: 221).

¹⁴ In effect, O’Brien reciprocates (at least part of) Winston’s admiration: while Julia is ‘a textbook case’, Winston is ‘a difficult case’ (NEF, 287), which he has taken up (in a narcissistic way) with pleasure: “I enjoy talking to you. Your mind appeals to me. It resembles my own mind except that you happen to be insane” (NEF, 271).

As critics have observed (e.g. Freedman, 1984: 610), it is not punishment but ‘conversion’ that ensues: O’Brien assumes “the air of a doctor, a teacher, even a priest, anxious to explain and persuade rather than punish” (NEF, 257). He is described as “a teacher taking pains with a wayward but promising child” (NEF, 260), as Winston’s saviour – “I shall save you, I shall make you perfect” (NEF, 256). Winston submits completely: in his total helplessness, he ‘clings to O’Brien like a baby’ (NEF, 262), accepting him as ‘his protector’ (NEF, 263). Torture and pain thus merge to produce love:

He had never loved him so deeply as at this moment, and not merely because he had stopped the pain. The old feeling, that at bottom it did not matter whether O’Brien was a friend or an enemy, had come back. (...) he would send him to his death. It made no difference. In some sense that went deeper than friendship, they were intimates (...). (NEF, 264)

The connection between love and death is clearly made. Love is total submission and the destruction of the self. It entails making Winston ‘hollow’, so he can be re-filled with new ‘content’ – “We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves” (NEF, 269). Love, in other words, is the absorption of the tortured into the torturer: “O’Brien was a being in all ways larger than himself (...) His mind *contained* Winston’s mind” (NEF, 268, emphasis in original). Torture – which ranges from beatings and the extraction of ‘confessions’ to interrogation and psychological manipulation (NEF, 252-254) – is the means to this end. And yet, between Winston and total love (i.e. the love for ‘totalitarianism’) is the ‘impregnable inner heart’, the last haven of humanity and inexhaustible resource of hope (NEF, 174). Because it is the last hurdle, the ‘inner heart’ becomes the last test before complete capitulation. Even after his painful ‘conversion’, Winston still hates Big Brother and loves Julia – “he had hoped to keep the inner heart inviolate” (NEF, 293). O’Brien rapidly detects this failure: “Intellectually, there is very little wrong with you. It is only emotionally that you have failed to make progress” (NEF, 295). Winston is taken to room 101 to be confronted with his deepest fear (rats), and finally betrays his lover, “Do it to Julia!” (NEF, 300) The book ends in total defeat, with the protagonist in the Chestnut Tree Café, drinking bad gin (NEF, 301), as he used to at the beginning of the novel, and recalling Julia’s words, ““They can’t get inside you,’ she had said. But they could get inside you” (NEF, 303). He is still haunted by memories of his childhood, but now calls them ‘false memories’ (NEF, 309). The final surrender (to ‘love’) happens when another military victory is announced on the telescreen and Winston finally feels ‘healed’: “He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother” (NEF, 311).

As successive critics have remarked, what is striking about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the overwhelming sense of entrapment that it conveys, a sense that has been largely ascribed to the notion of ‘totalitarianism’ that the novel illustrates. Shortly before being arrested, Winston reaches the part of Goldstein’s book that reads: “what is the motive for this huge, accurately planned effort to freeze history at a particular moment of time?” (NEF, 225-226). This is as far as he is allowed to go – “He understood *how*; he did not understand *why*” (NEF, 226). In keeping with the atmosphere of the book, the ‘why’ is contained in the ‘how’. The object of the Party, Winston finally learns, is ‘pure power’ (NEF, 275) – “Power is not a means, it is an end” (NEF, 276) – or, in another variation, “The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power” (NEF, 276).

These words powerfully convey the gist of ‘totalitarianism’ – the political doctrine that became famous for asserting, in Alok Rai’s words, “that Fascism and Communism were but two manifestations of a single, evil, idea” (Rai, 1988: 16), which entitled it to become one of the major bulwarks of the Cold War.¹⁵ Critics have resorted to it to explain the novel’s sense of entrapment, thus putting the focus on ‘coherence’. Carl Freedman has stressed the book’s “complex and coherent plot” and praised “its completely significant handling of details”, adding, “nearly every particular is meaningful within the framework of the novel as a whole”, which gives a concrete shape to this “paranoia-inducing totalitarian world in which every detail demands interpretation” (Freedman, 1984: 603). In a less admiring vein, Alok Rai has connected the novel’s ‘internal coherence’ (Rai, 1988: 135) not only to the politics of totalitarianism (of which he is sceptical), by way of Hannah Arendt’s concept of ‘paranoid coherence’, but also, and especially, to the consciousness that mediates this ‘reality’ (Rai, 1988: 135). The ‘key’ to the novel’s “stagnant, locked universe” is, in this critic’s view, “the blocked, hemmed-in, impotent but undefeated state of mind of Orwell’s protagonist” (Rai, 1988: 135).¹⁶ These two aspects, however, cannot be separated. They reinforce each other and are still deeply entrenched in the theory of ‘totalitarianism’. To avoid getting caught inside this theory (and ideology), I propose that

¹⁵ Rai gives a brief genealogy of this concept, from its formulation by the Italian fascists, in the 1920s, to the moment, around the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty, in 1939, when it acquired its more current meaning, as a ‘composite horror’ made up of fascism and communism (Rai, 1988: 14-15). If, at that time, it was still at the service of the libertarian Left, later it became “an ideological weapon in the Cold War between the West and the rest” (Rai, 1988: 16). He also stresses how the concept has become “unserviceable for serious use” (Rai, 1988: 16) and “fallen into disuse among serious historians and social scientists” (Rai, 1988: 17).

¹⁶ For Rai, it is Winston’s impotence and helplessness that emphasises the magnitude of Big Brother’s State: “without the rebellion the tyranny would be undemonstrable, but without the helplessness of that rebellion, the tyranny of the State would be limited in a manner which the underlying intention of the novel cannot permit” (Rai, 1988: 137).

we turn again to the text, this time to view Orwell's picture of 'totalitarianism' at a distance, and from a different perspective.

Whether it is caused by the oppressive nature of the 'totalitarian' regime or by the protagonist's overriding sense of 'helplessness', or both, the outstanding feature of this world is, no doubt, its absolute stagnation. As Patrick Reilly has noted, Oceania is a combination of 'terror and tedium'; it is 'a dull hell' (Reilly, 1998: 120). In fact, nothing is supposed to happen in Airstrip One – all the activity of the Party is aimed at ensuring that nothing does. Goldstein's forbidden book, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, whose lengthy excerpts constitute an important part of the novel (NEF, 191-226), allows this point to come out clearly. According to it, the two cornerstones of 'oligarchical collectivism' are: a social structure made up of three classes ('the High, the Middle and the Low'), which, in its 'essential', 'has never altered' throughout history – "the same pattern has always reasserted itself" (NEF, 192); and a world structure that, likewise, tends to perpetual 'equilibrium'.

Economy is also a closed, static system, with nothing that might resemble what we today call 'globalisation'. The reason is that capitalism no longer exists: each super-state has its own 'self-contained economy'; the scramble for markets has come to an end, and, because of the vast areas of each superstate, "the competition for raw materials is no longer a matter of life and death" (NEF, 194). In the context of the novel, this is a negative development. Wealth and the production of wealth, because they are regarded as a threat to inequality (NEF, 196), are inimical to the Party. As Goldstein puts it, "if it once became general, wealth would confer no distinction" (NEF, 197), and, consequently, the social hierarchy would break down. Wealth is also the sine qua non of freedom. In a developed, plentiful society, "the great mass of human beings who are normally stupefied by poverty would become literate and would learn to think for themselves" (NEF, 198). These premises underpin the Party's policy: it is to *avoid* this state of equality and freedom (thanks to science and technology, now within the reach of modern societies) that people are kept in poverty and ignorance (NEF, 198). One of the major problems for the 'oligarchical collectivists' of Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia is thus "how to keep the wheels of industry turning without increasing the real wealth of the world" (NEF, 198). The answer is found in permanent war.

War, as Alok Rai has pointed out, "is the means for inhibiting all change" (Rai, 1988: 146) – its object is "to keep the structure of society intact", a process which leads to a seemingly paradoxical conclusion, "by becoming continuous war has ceased to exist" (NEF, 207), or, as the Party slogan puts it, 'War is Peace' (NEF, 208). War has important political and

economic consequences: it enables the destruction of “materials which might otherwise be used to make the masses too comfortable, and hence, in the long run, too intelligent”; it is “a convenient way of expending labour power without producing anything that can be consumed” (NEF, 199). It also provides the “emotional basis for a hierarchical society”, by way of “war hysteria and hatred of the enemy”, which doublethink helps to implement (NEF, 200). This belligerent atmosphere thus extends to all corners of society. Oceania is dominated by hatred: there are no family ties, there is no affection, the family has become “an extension of the Thought Police” (NEF, 140) and parents live in fear of being denounced by their children (NEF, 26-27). What is more, there is no sexual pleasure. Political orthodoxy demands chastity; consequently, as Winston puts it, “a real love affair was an almost unthinkable event” (NEF, 71).

Other kinds of ‘events’ are likewise impossible. There is no art in Oceania (only a prolific ‘culture industry’) and scientific knowledge has stopped – the Party is adverse to ‘the empirical method of thought’ –, except in two areas, ‘war and police espionage’ (NEF, 201). Last but not least, there are no politics. The only ‘irrepressible spontaneous demonstrations’ (NEF, 61) are those supporting Big Brother and announced on the telescreen. Oceania is a post-revolutionary world, the outcome of a failed attempt to set up a better society. Somewhere in the late forties or early fifties, according to Winston’s estimate, there had been a revolution, followed by a nuclear civil war (NEF 35-36, 79). Just as Napoleon came after Snowball, Big Brother appeared much later, even though the official version of the facts presents him as the ‘leader and guardian of the Revolution’ (NEF, 38). Winston remembers that all the original leaders of the revolution, except for Big Brother and Goldstein, had been killed in the purges of the mid sixties (NEF, 78). Made in the name of the proles, against capitalism, revolution has produced many changes (mostly terrible ones), but none for the proles, who appear to carry on with life as usual (cf. NEF, 74). As Goldstein has registered in his book, since the half of the twentieth-century all political movements had been reduced to “the conscious aim of perpetuating *un*freedom and *ine*quality” (NEF, 211), their sole purpose being “to arrest progress and freeze history” (NEF, 212).

Nineteen Eighty-Four is usually described as a book about the future – a ‘futuristic fantasy’ (Rai, 1988: 134). That the action is set in the future (a future that has meanwhile become past) and took on the form of a dystopia or anti-utopia certainly corroborates this description. And yet, in many ways, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is also, perhaps especially, a

book about the past.¹⁷ The past haunts Airstrip One, a ghost-like version of London: Big Brother's statue is found next to Cromwell's (NEF, 119-120), and churches like St Clement's and St Martin's, despite the widespread destruction, are not just words in an old nursery rhyme (e.g. NEF, 102-103).

The novel's atmosphere of stagnation, in which *nothing* is supposed (and expected) to happen (in science, economy, love, not just politics), is coterminous with a pervasive interest in the past, an interest curiously shared by the 'totalitarian' state and its resistance alike. The destruction of the past is the basis of the Party's power – one of its pillars, the Ministry of Truth, sits on 'enormous furnaces', to which 'memory holes' are linked to facilitate the continuous destruction of documents (NEF, 40). The past holds a strong fascination for Winston too. He hunts for it in a series of objects, which he endows with almost fetishistic value, and to which he connects his act of rebellion. Hence, writing is a seditious act not just for its content, but also because it is done in a forty-year-old notebook with a pen described as "an archaic instrument" (NEF, 8). Similarly, what appeals to the protagonist in the glass paperweight is "not so much its beauty as the air it seemed to possess of belonging to an age quite different from the present one" (NEF, 99). The paperweight, in other words, is "a little chunk of history that they've forgotten to alter. It's a message from a hundred years ago" (NEF, 152). Mr Charrington's room (significantly placed above an antique shop) exerts the same appeal: "the room had awakened in him a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory" (NEF, 100). It will become Winston and Julia's love nest, a self-enclosed world, "a pocket of the past where extinct animals could walk" (NEF, 157). Winston's overriding concern is with the 'abolition' of the past; as he tells an indifferent Julia: "Do you realise that the past, starting from yesterday, has been actually abolished? If it survives anywhere, it's in a few solid objects with no words attached to them, like that lump of glass there" (NEF, 162). Objects are evidence of historical facts – this is illustrated by the clipping of the three Party dissenters, Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford, which Winston had once held in his hands, a 'documentary proof' of the party's lies (NEF, 39), "like a fossil bone which turns up in the wrong stratum and destroys a geological theory" (NEF, 82).

Winston's fascination is extensive to people as well as objects: Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford attract him not only because they are rebels, but also because they are "relics of the ancient world" (NEF, 79). Julia is herself a link with the past: she brings him real chocolate, which he believes he has tasted 'at some time or another' (NEF, 127) and 'Inner

¹⁷ It was Orwell himself who established this trend, when he presented the novel as "a novel about the future" (CEJL, IV: 329-330). Jeffrey Meyers has been one of the few to see it as "a very concrete and naturalistic portrayal of the present and the past" rather than a "'nightmare vision' of the future" (Meyers, 1975: 144).

Party coffee', 'real coffee', whose smell Winston recognises as "an emanation from his early childhood" (NEF, 147). Likewise, when he tastes wine at O'Brien's flat, he is captivated by the fact that "it belonged to the vanished, romantic past, the olden time as he liked to call it in his secret thoughts" (NEF, 178). The proles, too, are "the last links that now existed with the vanished world of capitalism" (NEF, 90). Winston tries to learn more about this past through the testimony of an eighty-year-old man, but becomes rapidly disappointed: the proles are unable to 'compare one age with another' – "They were like the ant, which can see small objects but not large ones", they lack any 'standard' whereby the 'claims of the Party' can be measured (NEF, 96-97).

The point about clinging to the past, then, seems to be the need to have a standard of comparison, so the present can be appropriately assessed: "Why should one feel it to be intolerable unless one had some kind of ancestral memory that things had once been different?" (NEF, 63) Hence, the question that seems to haunt the protagonist, "Was life better before the Revolution than it is now?" (NEF, 96), becomes all-pervasive: "He meditated resentfully on the physical texture of life. Had it always been like this? Had food always tasted like this?" (NEF, 62) Even in bed with Julia, he "wonders vaguely whether in the abolished past it had been a normal experience to lie in bed like this" (NEF, 150).

Winston's discontent with the present is fuelled by his 'memories' of the past, especially his childhood (NEF, 5; 31; 85). Referring to a post-revolutionary time of war and hunger, these memories are far from idyllic. Nonetheless, they are representative of a series of 'values' – 'privacy', 'love', 'friendship', 'family' – that the protagonist associates with his mother and sister (who sacrificed for him – NEF, 32), and that he cannot find in 1984. Together, these values conjure up what Winston calls the 'Golden Country', a place of pastoral tranquillity that appears to him in his dreams. It is here that his sexual fantasies with the girl of the Fiction Department are set, in anticipation of their first encounter, a few days later, in the countryside (NEF, 129; 131).

Winston's obsession with the past is thus connected with his nostalgia for a time he perceives as a repository of essential, inalienable 'values' (precisely the values that the Party is keen to destroy). But it is also connected with one of the regime's main tenets, the 'mutability of the past', which has brought into being a vast and complex apparatus in which Winston, a functionary of the Records Department (NEF, 11), is himself involved. His job is to 'rectify' the news items, so that, for instance, Big Brother may be seen to "predict the thing that had actually happen" (NEF, 41), and 'rectify' statistics, so that the figures may 'agree with the later ones' (NEF, 41). In other words, his job is to eliminate contradictions or discrepancies between the Party's discourse and reality, or, more often

than not, between different instances of the Party's discourse. The process is described thus:

Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct; nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record. All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and re-inscribed exactly as often as was necessary. (NEF, 42)

Winston counters this practice with a staunch belief in the immutable past and objective reality. The past (like society itself) is to him indivisible and static, two features which he identifies with truth and objectivity – “And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting” (NEF, 37). As a result, because “the Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears” (NEF, 84), it is to them that Winston turns, embracing ‘common sense’ and the crudest version of empiricism: “the obvious, the silly and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth's centre” (NEF, 84). Winston's illness is, therefore, according to O'Brien, ‘a defective memory’: “you are unable to remember real events, and you persuade yourself that you remember other events which never happened” (NEF, 258). Winston's dispute with the Party is, then, ultimately a dispute over reality:

Only the disciplined mind can see reality, Winston. You believe that reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right. You also believe that the nature of reality is self-evident. (...) But I tell you, Winston, that reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes: only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. Whatever the Party holds to be truth, *is* truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party. (NEF, 261)

For the Party, reality is in the mind, and since there is only one mind, one point of view (the Party's), it follows that reality exists ‘only in the mind of the Party’. Conversely, reality for Winston is outside the mind, ‘existing in its own right’, that is, ‘objectively’. The two positions are, nevertheless, false, as false as the absolute oppositions – inside/outside; subjective/objective; mind/real – on which they draw. In fact, each position depends on the other: the Party depends on the permanent tampering of ‘external’ reality (i.e. on the frantic production of evidence) to support and impose its own ‘mind’; Winston

depends on his own mind (his memories, his values, his belief in ‘objective reality’) to contradict the mass of ‘evidence’ that the Party produces, preventing him to access ‘true’ reality.

The Party’s position excludes truth. As Richard Rorty has pointed out, “the effect is all that matters to O’Brien”, which is to say, “truth and falsity drop out” (Rorty, 1998: 149).¹⁸ And, despite claims to the contrary, Winston’s position also excludes truth, which he treats as something (an exterior object, a value) that has to be defended, rather than an open process conducive to change (inclusive of the self).¹⁹ Not surprisingly, Winston’s defence of truth is ultimately not antagonistic to O’Brien’s ‘game’, in which one item (love for Julia, ‘two plus two equals four’) can be replaced by another (love for Big Brother, ‘two plus two equals five’), without any significant change resulting from it.

Moreover, truth in the sense of a process is necessarily conducted in the present, in keeping with an understanding of history as open-ended. This, however, the protagonist cannot bring himself to do, for one thing, because he fails to contradict, let alone supersede, the Party’s own sense of history – as he tells Julia, “History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right” (NEF, 162). Goldstein’s book sheds light on the Party’s relationship with history. According to it, past events have “no objective existence, but survive only in written records and in human memories” (NEF, 222). The falsification of historical records is thus aimed at controlling these records and memories (i.e. at controlling the ‘past’). The purges and ‘vaporizations’ are meant to eliminate people who “might perhaps commit a crime at some time in the *future*” (NEF, 220, my emphasis). Finally, the ‘creation’ of ‘Newspeak’ and of self-regulating mechanisms such as crimestop (NEF, 220) and doublethink (NEF, 223) aim at making resistance not only impossible but also inconceivable – that is, they aim at preventing the emergence of *new* events, in the *present*.

All these strategies and devices, in sum, work towards the same end: to preclude change, to prevent the occurrence of events, the encounter with the ‘real’. Only the past remains open, with the Party deciding whether an event did or did not happen. It is *this* that Winston considers the greatest crime: “If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this

¹⁸ From a liberal (and postmodern) position, Richard Rorty considers ‘the possibility of truth’ in Orwell’s novel to be ‘a red herring’ (Rorty, 1998: 152): “it does not matter whether ‘two plus two is four’ is true, much less whether this truth is ‘subjective’ or ‘corresponds to external reality’. All that matters is that if you do believe it, you can say it without getting hurt” (Rorty, 1998: 146). He thus consecrates the supreme value of liberal democracy, freedom of speech (irrespective of truth).

¹⁹ As Slavoj Žižek has put it (clearly drawing on Badiou): “Truth is not inherent, it is not the (re)discovery of what is already in myself, but an Event, something violently *imposed* on me from the Outside through a traumatic encounter that shatters the very foundations of my being.” (Žižek, 1999: 212).

or that event, it *never happened* – that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death?” (NEF, 37)

Winston shares with Goldstein (and the Party) the idea that events are things of the past. As such, they can be either frozen into a private repository of values (supposedly a source of inspiration to resistance), as Winston does, or continuously re-written for the purposes of Realpolitik, as the Party does. Significantly, when Winston comes across the clipping of Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford – which he considers to be “enough to blow the Party to atoms, if in some way it could have been published to the world and its significance made known” (NEF, 82) – he immediately destroys it. What is important to him is the photograph and the memory of that incident – “the fact that having held it in his fingers seemed to him to make a difference even now, when the photograph itself, as well as the event it recorded, was only memory” (NEF, 82). The event, in other words, exists only in a mediated way, in the form of an ‘*after the event*’ (NEF, 162, emphasis in original). That is, first, as a photograph (of something that once happened), then, as a memory of that photograph. Similarly, all the gestures that Winston admires are those that rehearse or mimic past gestures – like Julia’s act of undressing, “a gesture belonging to the ancient time”, which makes Winston wake up “with the word ‘Shakespeare’ on his lips” (NEF, 33; cf. 131), or the ‘gesture of the arm’ made by Winston’s mother to protect him, which is repeated by the Jewish woman of the news film (NEF, 167).

In sum, for Winston, the past is more important than the present, hence he can agree with the Party’s slogan, “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (NEF, 37). Oddly enough, the future is not directly linked to the present (as the site open to new events), but to the past (in which nothing can be changed). Both present and future are made to depend on the past. At the beginning of the novel, Winston dedicates his diary to the *past* as well as the future: “To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free” (NEF, 30). Later, following his admission into the (false) resistance group of the Brotherhood, he toasts ‘to the past’, meeting with O’Brien’s agreement that the past is more important than the future (NEF, 184).

Winston’s entrapment in the past – hence the image of him “spinning out a present that had no future” (NEF, 159) – is linked to and reinforced by his entrapment in language and culture. The enormous apparatus that sustains the Party’s ‘mutability of the past’, which takes place everyday at the Records Department and in other departments of the Ministry of Truth, is also an important centre of cultural production. Versions succeed one another, until there seems to be no point in distinguishing between true and false ones:

It was merely the substitution of one piece of nonsense for another. Most of the material that you were dealing with had no connection with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection that is contained in a direct lie. Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version. *A great deal of the time you were expected to make them up out of your head.* (NEF, 43, my emphasis)

Surprisingly perhaps, Winston's job turns out to be a rather 'creative' job. Oceania may be dull, but it certainly has a hectic cultural life. The Ministry of Truth is responsible for the supply of "newspapers, films, textbooks, telescreen programmes, plays, novels – with every conceivable kind of information, instruction or entertainment, from a statue to a slogan, from a lyric poem to a biological treatise" (NEF, 45). It even employs people who are responsible for the production of 'garbled versions' of subversive texts which "for one reason or another were to be retained in the anthologies" (NEF, 45). Indeed, most of the jobs involve some cultural activity – another example is photography and video faking, which also depend on the participation of actors (NEF, 45). This culture industry intervenes, in addition, 'at a lower level for the benefit of the proletariat' (NEF, 45), with the production 'entirely by mechanical means' of 'rubbishy newspapers', 'films oozing with sex', 'sentimental songs' and pornography (NEF, 46). It is, finally, involved in the creation of 'Newspeak' – Syme's job (at the Research Department) is to destroy words (NEF, 54), in order to "narrow the range of thought" (NEF, 55). As Goldstein states, the main problem for the ruling elite in Oceania is 'cultural' – "a problem of continuously moulding the consciousness" (NEF, 216). Material inequalities are compensated for by way of ideology, through an investment in culture. What is taking place, in other words, is a cultural (and, strictly speaking, linguistic) *revolution*, as Syme points out, "The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak" (NEF, 55).²⁰

²⁰ Žižek's insights can be of use here. In his book on totalitarianism, he challenges the assumption that the terror unleashed by totalitarianism was the result of the violent subordination of the symbolic to the material (so widely represented throughout literature in the plight of the creative individual against the mechanistic, brutalising and materialistic totalitarian order). Žižek contends that the reverse can be the case:

Perhaps the time has come to render problematic the standard topos, shared by practically all the 'postmodern' Leftists, according to which political 'totalitarianism' somehow results from the predominance of material production and technology over intersubjective communication and/or symbolic practice, as if the root of political terror lay in the fact that the 'principle' of instrumental reason, of the technological exploitation of nature, is also extended to society, so that people are treated as raw material to be transformed into a New Man. What if it is the exact *opposite* which holds? What if political 'terror' indicates precisely that the sphere of (material) production is *denied* in its autonomy and *subordinated* to political logic? Is it not that all political 'terror', from the Jacobins to the Maoist Cultural Revolution, presupposes the foreclosure of production proper, its reduction to the terrain of a political battle? (Žižek, 2001: 139, italics in original)

In the end, everything is reduced to discourse, everything amounts to writing – events are literally brought into existence (or annulled) by an act of writing. Existing is a question of being in the records: the job of another Party member at Winston’s Department is “tracking down and deleting from the press the names of people who had been vaporized and were therefore considered never to have existed” (NEF, 44). The world of Oceania appears to be a ‘shadow-world’ (NEF, 44). Obedient, compliant people like the Parsons and rebellious, but condemned, people like Winston exist side by side with less defined beings: there are ‘unpersons’ (like Withers, whom the Party had pronounced dead and, by consequence, ‘had never existed’ – NEF, 48); there are ‘ghosts’, that is, people who had disappeared, come back to denounce other ‘traitors’, and then vanished forever (NEF, 48); there are “corpses waiting to be sent back to the grave”, like Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford (NEF, 79); there are people (apparently, like Mr Charrington) who have no place in the present and lead ‘a ghostlike existence’ (NEF, 157); there are, finally, people who are brought into existence through ‘a few lines of print and a couple of faked photographs’, like Comrade Ogilvy, Winston’s own creation (NEF, 50). It is, in other words, a world where reality and unreality is hardly distinguishable.

In effect, everything that happens in Winston’s life has an air of unreality about it. The account of his first encounter with O’Brien, at the beginning of the novel, stresses this aspect: “It had happened that morning at the Ministry, if anything so nebulous could be said to happen” (NEF, 11). In hindsight, Winston anxiously dismisses O’Brien’s meaningful glance at him: “That was all, and he was already uncertain whether it had happened. Such incidents never had any sequel” (NEF, 19). Similarly, after reading Julia’s note, he is seized by an almost adolescent insecurity – “such things did not happen in real life” (NEF, 118). Winston’s sexual fantasy does come true, as does his friendship with O’Brien and admission into the Brotherhood. The point is that, even when things happen in this world, they are not *real* – the love for Julia is a political act (and a sexual fantasy) that achieves nothing,²¹ O’Brien is a false friend and the Brotherhood is a fake organisation.

Nor could it have been any different. The problem with this world of pretence is that there is no way of exposing that pretence, or no willingness to do it. It is a world where

Žižek’s point is that totalitarian phenomena “indicate the political agent’s failure actually to restructure the sphere of production” (Žižek, 2001: 265, n. 93), and are accordingly the result of a retreat *from the material*. The New Man is not the creation of (technological and other) transformations at the level of production, but ultimately of a (post)political intervention that undermines material practices by subordinating them to symbolic ones. The New Man is, then, in fact the Last Man.

²¹ Winston’s love for Julia fails to convince, beyond its symbolic importance as a ‘value’. As the protagonist reflects after being tortured: “He hardly thought of Julia. He could not fix his mind on her. He loved her and would not betray her; but that was only a fact, known as he knew the rules of arithmetic. He felt no love for her, and he hardly even wondered what was happening to her” (NEF, 240).

indifference –also in the sense of lack of ‘difference’ – reigns. For Winston, pushing his wife over a cliff “would have made no difference” (NEF, 142). His idea of sex as rebellious follows the same logic – “not merely the love of one person, but the animal instinct, the simple *undifferentiated* desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces” (NEF, 133, my emphasis). Even his act of resistance is predicated on the premise that it is useless, for he is going to be caught, *regardless of what he does*:

Whether he wrote DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, or whether he refrained from writing it, made no difference. Whether he went on with the diary, or whether he did not go on with it, made no difference. The Thought Police would get him just the same. (NEF, 21)

In the end, it does not really matter whether O’Brien is friend or foe (cf. NEF, 27; 264); and whether Winston and Julia are dead or alive “makes very little difference” (NEF, 142). Nothing seems to be worthy of distinction; truth, as Winston notes, is elusive: “How could you tell how much of it was lies?” (NEF, 76)

In fact, only death and pain seem to be real. Death, not love, is what could have happened between him and his wife Katharine – Winston describes his desire to kill her as “something that had happened, or rather had failed to happen” (NEF, 140). Death, furthermore, is the only thing that is certain to happen, following his arrest by the Thought Police, “that predestined horror” (NEF, 146). When the moment arrives, it is received with exultation: “It was starting, it was starting at last!” (NEF, 230) What follows only confirms what Winston had always known: “the consequences of every act are included in the act itself”; “Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death” (NEF, 30). In the same way that, with Newspeak, nothing new will be able to emerge on the level of language – in which, as Syme explains to Winston, “a word contains the opposite in itself” (NEF, 54) – so everything is itself and its contrary: Mr Charrington, the freedom-provider, is also the prison-provider; the scene of love (Mr Charrington’s room) is also the scene of betrayal and violence – “The end was contained in the beginning” (NEF, 166). Moreover, Winston is both a victim and his own torturer, as O’Brien reminds him, when he confronts him with his broken figure in the mirror: “you reduced yourself to it. This is what you accepted when you set yourself up against the party. It was all contained in that first act. Nothing has happened that you did not foresee” (NEF, 286). In short, torture is the only thing that ‘happens’ in this novel – the only thing that can produce *change*.

Or so the novel claims. Winston’s prolonged torture is justified on the grounds that Winston has to be ‘cured’ before being destroyed because he is “a flaw in the pattern”

(NEF, 267). And yet, as Alok Rai has pointed out, Winston is already and irrevocably part of the pattern (Rai, 1988: 140). Besides being a member of the ‘Outer Party’ and working for it, he is also, as Patai contends, an ‘active participant’ in O’Brien’s ‘game’, the rules and terms of which it has accepted (Patai, 1984: 231). Winston can write in his living room, and elude the telescreen, because ‘for some reason’ the telescreen was ‘in an unusual position’, allowing him a place outside the range of the camera (NEF, 7). In fact, this detail is deemed responsible for his act: “it was partly the unusual geography of the room that had suggested to him the thing that he was now about to do” (NEF, 7-8).

What is more (and here is the core of the entrapment), Winston’s values and frame of reference are fundamentally the same as O’Brien’s (Patai, 1984: 220).²² Like Flory in relation to imperialism, Winston is part of the society that he claims to repudiate. As he observes in relation to the Two Minutes Hate, in which he actively participates: “The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in” (NEF, 16). Furthermore, like Flory, Winston is also tormented by doubts that he “might also be wrong” (NEF, 83) and has visions of himself as “lost in a monstrous world where he himself was the monster” (NEF, 28); “a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear” (NEF, 30); a ‘lunatic’ (NEF, 83).²³

The possibility that he may be mad is never really discarded. After reading Goldstein’s book, Winston is sure that he is not mad: “Sanity is not statistical” (NEF, 227). After the Party’s painful intervention, he has changed his mind, “Sanity was statistical” (NEF, 290). The change, however, is more apparent than real. It hardly matters which of these statements he holds, for one thing, because Goldstein’s book has been written by the Party, with O’Brien’s own contribution (NEF, 274). Furthermore, in a scene that evokes Gordon

²² For instance, Winston may regret that there no longer are any ‘friends’, only ‘comrades’ (NEF, 51). However, reflecting on the fact that he cannot tell whether O’Brien is ‘a friend or an enemy’, he concludes: “Nor did it even seem to matter. There was a link of understanding between them, more important than affection or partisanship” (NEF, 27). Winston also regards his mother and sister’s sacrifice for him as the application of a universal value, namely, “a conception of loyalty that was private and unalterable” (NEF, 32), rather than of the socially-constructed disposition to place men over women, sons over daughters. He nostalgically complains about the lack of values in the present-day world (not an original complaint!) – “Such things, he saw, could not happen today. Today there were fear, hatred and pain, but no dignity of emotion, no deep or complex sorrows” (NEF, 32) – and yet, his relationship with Julia is intentionally cut off from emotion (cf. Williams, 1971: 80-81). Whereas ‘pure’ sex is rebellion, the expression of the individual against a castrating State, love is the defeat of the self, its subsiding into complete orthodoxy, which is equated with ‘unconsciousness’ and, by extension, femininity (cf. NEF, 58).

²³ As Robert Lee has pointed out, all of Orwell’s protagonists have a ‘wound’, which sets them apart from the rest of society. Like Flory’s birthmark, which disappears when he dies, Winston’s varicose ulcer is cured with his capitulation to the regime (Lee, 1969: 74; 141). It is a sign of his asocial behaviour, of his status as an outcast.

Comstock's final embrace of capitalism, Winston confesses that his readiness to capitulate had been prior to his decision *and to his torture*:

In reality, as he saw now, he had been ready to capitulate long before he had taken the decision. From the moment he was inside the Ministry of Love (...) he had grasped the frivolity, the shallowness of his attempt to set himself up against the power of the Party. (NEF, 289)

It is, therefore, with resignation that he concludes (this time evoking Dorothy Hare): "Nothing had changed except your own attitude: the predestined thing happened in any case" (NEF, 290-291).

There is a last aspect that I wish to address: the idealisation of the 'proles' in this novel, their elevation, as it were, to the stature of a 'value', their conversion into a symbol (or fetish) of 'hope'. I want to connect this process to a related one – stereotyping, especially of women. The novel's epitome of prole hope is, no doubt, the woman that Winston watches pegging diapers, a few moments before his arrest by the 'Thought police'. What is striking about Winston's enraptured description of this figure is the way her transformation into a symbol of solidity (a 'value') translates into the way her body is perceived: "a monstrous woman, solid as a Norman pillar" (NEF, 144), "a woman of fifty, blown up to monstrous dimensions by childbearing", with "a solid, contourless body, like a bloc of granite (NEF, 228). Her body, moreover, is the measure of her humanity: she "had no mind, she had only strong arms, a warm heart and a fertile belly" (NEF, 228). Nonetheless (or because of that), this woman becomes the symbol of hope: "everywhere stood the same solid unconquerable figure, made monstrous by work and childbearing, toiling from birth to death and still singing. Out of those mighty loins a race of conscious beings must one day come. You were the dead; theirs was the future" (NEF, 230).²⁴

Orwell's representation of women has been taken to task for its misogyny and stereotyping, as I mentioned and illustrated in chapter three. All his male protagonists, from Flory to Gordon Comstock to George Bowling adhere to a code of 'masculinity', which, by way of exclusion and opposition, activates a chain of correlations around

²⁴ Beatrix Campbell has compared this image to another one, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, "a solitary image of an exhausted, but noble, woman poking a stick down a drain", stressing the same context of solitude and the observer's external position (Campbell, 1984: 130). She draws attention to the fact that Orwell 'falsifies' the records, by omitting from his writings (as in *The Road to Wigan Pier*) working-class activists and organisations (Campbell, 1984: 128), as well as women workers, in a region well known for its textile industry (Campbell, 1984: 129). She concludes, "He excludes the working class from history" (Campbell, 1984: 135; Cf. Beddoe, 1984: 153). In the wake of Raymond Williams, Campbell also stresses the association of the working-class (the 'proles') with animals (Campbell, 1984: 132; cf. NEF, 163), which is in keeping with Orwell's construction of 'otherness' (cf. Patai, 1984: 249). Julia is linked to the proles (and to animals) by way of her sensuality and lack of interest in intellectual issues (she becomes 'bored and confused', and falls asleep).

femininity that is basically antipathetic to women. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is no exception. Winston's misogyny is unapologetically stated: "He disliked women, and especially the young and pretty ones. It was always the women, and above all the young ones, who were the most bigoted adherents of the Party, the swallowers of slogans, the amateur spies and nosers-out of unorthodoxy" (NEF, 12). After writing in his diary, Winston washes the ink off his hands as he fears that 'some nosing zealot in the Ministry' might notice, parenthetically adding, 'a woman, probably' (NEF, 30). This misogyny is shared by Julia herself, who (like Dr Veraswami disparaging on his 'race'), is contemptuous of her sex, "Always in the stink of women! How I hate women!" (NEF, 136)

Moreover, as in Orwell's previous work, the women in Oceania are either sexually promiscuous (like Julia) or frigid (like Katharine), with mothers providing the third (and most positive) alternative. This division is embodied by the prole prostitute, whose seediness is deemed 'alluring' (NEF, 67-68), and the Party women, whose orthodoxy is synonymous with chastity. It also represents two different instances of stupidity: 'unconscious' orthodoxy (the prole women, who are stupid and therefore pose no threats to the Party) and fanatic orthodoxy (the girls of the Anti-Sex League, who thrive under the Party). Julia seems to be an exception to the rule. She is just as orthodox as Katharine on the outside – "she always excelled all others in shouting insults at Goldstein", (NEF, 160) – but this is only a façade, behind which her real self is allowed to exist (a strategy that, incidentally, is not so different from Dorothy's less interesting, but no less hypocritical, double life). Julia's sexual promiscuity is, no doubt, her redeeming feature: it draws Winston to her, making her, in his eyes, 'a rebel'. Surprisingly, perhaps, her rebelliousness finds expression in the adoption of *traditional* notions of 'femininity': she puts on make-up and wears perfume for Winston – the same scent that the prole prostitute had used (NEF, 149) – and fancies wearing a dress, silk stockings and high-heeled shoes: "In this room I'm going to be a woman, not a Party comrade" (NEF, 149).²⁵ As Patai has noted, Julia is in fact "serving another stereotype: that of the apolitical, private-minded, egocentric female" (Patai, 1984: 241), a stereotype we had become familiar with in *Animal Farm*, in the figure of Mollie, the vain, self-centred mare (e.g. AF, 30). Julia has no interest in intellectual discussions – she is 'not clever' and 'does not much care for reading' (NEF, 136). Although she works in the Fiction Department, it is not as a writer, as she dryly puts it,

²⁵ It is interesting how femininity in Orwell's work is often accompanied by the image of the 'mask'. Like Ma Hla May, when she demands money from Flory (BD, 204) or the pwe-dancers (BD, 108), the prole prostitute, an old, toothless woman, wears a thick mask of make-up (NEF, 72). At one point, Julia's face also turns into a mask – a bomb has fallen near them and her face is "deathly white, as white as chalk" (NEF, 135) – making Winston think that she is dead, when she is merely covered with plaster. When she puts on make-up, Winston thinks her 'far more feminine' (NEF, 149).

“I’m not literary, dear” (NEF, 137). Neither is she interested in public matters: she has no interest in other people’s suffering or in contributing to a better future – “I’m not interested in the next generation, dear. I’m interested in *us*” (NEF, 163, italics in original). Finally, she is practical (NEF, 143) and cold – the suicide of her first lover arouses no compassion in her (NEF, 137) and she has no qualms about Winston’s desire to kill his wife (NEF, 141). Her loyalty to Winston (she refuses to never see him again – NEF, 180) appears somewhat out of character, but, in the end, she is the first to betray the other (NEF, 271). In sum, Julia poses no real threat to the Party – as Winston had declared, she is ‘only a rebel from the waist downwards’ (NEF, 163). Her ambitions are private rather than public, her only wish being “to construct a secret world in which you could live as you chose” (NEF, 142). It is a wish that Winston’s mother had been able to realise, in spite of her lack of intelligence (or perhaps because of it), as Winston nostalgically reminisces:

He did not suppose, from what he could remember of her, that she had been an unusual woman, still less an intelligent one; and yet she had possessed a kind of nobility, a kind of purity, simply because the standards that she obeyed were private ones. (NEF, 171)

This opposition between the intellectual and the emotional also bears upon the characterisation of the proles. The proles are described at once as “swarming disregarded masses”, strong enough to destroy the Party (NEF, 72) – hence, Oceania’s greatest hope for the future – and as people who are too stupid to rebel. They can only struggle for things that do not ‘matter’, such as cooking-pots (NEF, 73). Their problem is lack of consciousness – “Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious” (NEF, 74). Winston’s hope is thus curtailed by the Party’s conviction (which he shares) that the proles are stupid, which is the reason why they are left alone; as Winston puts it in his notebook, ‘nobody cares what the proles say’ (NEF, 11). Nothing serious happens when they express the wrong ideas, like the woman in the cinema, whose reaction against the film’s sadism is dismissed as a ‘typical prole reaction’ (NEF, 11). Winston’s belief that ‘hope lies in the proles’, is, therefore, far from convincing – just as flimsy a belief as any of the Party’s slogans, as Winston himself recognises: “When you put it in words it sounded reasonable: it was when you looked at the human beings passing you on the pavement that it became an act of faith” (NEF, 89). The association between poverty, animality and unconsciousness, which I discussed above (especially apropos *A Clergyman’s Daughter*), is made once again. Like animals, the proles draw their knowledge from their ‘instinct’ (NEF, 87) and their force from their

number and physical strength – “they needed only to rise up and shake themselves like a horse shaking off flies” (NEF, 73). They are explicitly and repeatedly compared to animals – by the Party, who “taught that the proles were natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals” (NEF, 74), its slogan being ‘Proles and animals are free’ (NEF, 75); by the narrator, who confirms, “Left to themselves, like cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina, they had reverted to a style of life that appeared to be natural to them, a sort of ancestral pattern” (NEF, 74); by Winston, who uses the same imagery to question an old man about the past: “they could ship you off to Canada like cattle” (NEF, 94).

In fact, Winston is drawing on the same duality that dictated the outcome of the animals’ revolution in *Animal Farm*, a duality which posits hard-working animals as stupid and ‘low’, against power-seeking animals as intelligent and ‘high’.²⁶ All members of the Inner Party (and some of the Outer Party) clearly belong to the latter category. O’Brien possesses “a certain charm of manner”; he is “curiously civilised” and recalls “an eighteenth-century nobleman” (NEF, 12). He has “a remarkable grace” (NEF, 182), a face that is “so ugly and yet so civilised” (NEF, 183). His defining feature is intelligence (NEF, 13), which Winston cannot help admiring even when he is under torture (NEF, 264). Winston himself is portrayed as ‘civilised’ – he risks leaving his notebook open because the ink is still wet and he does not want to ‘smudge the creamy paper’ (NEF, 22). He is also averse to menial jobs – “he hated using his hands” (NEF, 23). Syme, the Newspeak specialist, also has ‘delicate hands’ (NEF, 53) – just like Mr Charrington, to whom Winston attributes “a vague air of intellectuality, as though he had been some kind of literary man, or perhaps a musician” (NEF, 97), who has ‘soft-palmed hands’ (NEF, 98). Finally, Emmanuel Goldstein, though “somehow inherently despicable”, is also presented as ‘clever’ (NEF, 14).

Winston’s neighbour is a foil to all these figures. Described as “a fattish but active man of paralysing stupidity”, Parsons is “one of those completely unquestioning, devoted drudges on whom, more even than on the Thought Police, the stability of the Party depended” (NEF, 24). He is dismissed as ‘illiterate’ (NEF, 59) and ‘imbecile’ (NEF, 114), his stupidity being closely associated with his characteristic smell of sweat (NEF, 24; 59; 114). Lack of intelligence and manners is certainly what distinguishes him from other orthodox Party members: Parsons accepts everything the Party says “with the stupidity of an animal”, whereas the intelligent, superior Syme does it “in some more complex way, involving doublethink” (NEF, 62).

²⁶ As Patrick Reilly has pointed out, by depicting the pigs as ‘clever but corrupt’ and the rest of the animals as ‘noble but idiot’ (Reilly 1999: 70), Orwell is asserting that “hierarchy is the law of nature” (Reilly 1999: 80), and thus condemning any revolutionary endeavour to inevitable failure.

The intellectual/emotional divide actually underpins a more important one: the divide between public and private spheres. If the secret romance with Julia dominates Winston's private life (the realm of 'emotions'), the relationship with O'Brien represents his engagement with public life (the realm of politics, power and reason). Julia and Winston commit themselves to 'staying human' (NEF, 173, 174). And yet, the moment they step into the public (though secret) sphere of politics, only a few pages later, to become members of the resistance, they immediately betray that commitment by declaring to be prepared to engage in a series of atrocities – from murdering innocent people to 'throwing sulphuric acid in a child's face' (NEF, 179-180). In other words, the moment they take up politics, they express their readiness to act like the powers they have condemned, thus proving that virtue is not compatible with politics. The proles remain good (and stupid) because they have kept out of politics and public life; that is, they have not been engaged in making history, but simply in *living their own private lives* – just like Winston's mother, just like people in undemocratic capitalist times:

And yet to the people of only two generations ago, this [being "lifted clean out of the stream of history" by the Party] would not have seemed all-important, because they were not attempting to alter history. They were governed by private loyalties which they did not question. What mattered were individual relationships, and a completely helpless gesture, an embrace, a tear, a word spoken to a dying man, could have value in itself. *The proles*, it suddenly occurred to him, *had remained in this condition*. They were not loyal to a party or a country or an idea, they were loyal to one another. *For the first time in his life* he did not despise the proles or think of them merely as an inert force which would one day spring to life and regenerate the world. The proles had stayed *human*. They had not become hardened inside. They had held on to the *primitive emotions* which he himself had to re-learn by conscious effort. (NEF, 172, my emphasis)

What ultimately defines the proles – making them 'for the first time' admirable – is their humanity, the fact that they are viewed as the degree zero, so to speak, of human existence, a condition which conceives of them as devoid of intellectual or political volition and that confines them to a sentimentalist understanding of emotions. In this understanding, emotions are made to appear incompatible with reason, and are ambivalently elevated (or dismissed, as the case may be), activating, in its wake, a long chain of associations that includes the feminine, the private, the 'primitive' and the unconscious/animalistic.²⁷

²⁷ Orwell's use of animal metaphors, though with less expression in this book, sustains this kind of duality and hierarchy. It continues to be attached to women, the proles and orthodoxy: Goldstein is compared to a sheep (NEF, 14; 15; 17); a woman in the Two Minutes Hate is compared to a fish (NEF, 16); the Parsons children are "tiger cubs which will soon grow up into man-eaters" (NEF, 25); an orthodox man, in the canteen, speaks like a duck (NEF, 53; 57); Parsons has "a frog-like face" (NEF, 58); the human 'type' that

Paradoxically, by way of this logical operation, animality becomes the measure of one's 'humanity'.

Conclusion

Two of the major topics of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – the paramountcy of private values, and the relationship between individual and society – are also seminal in Forster's work. Forster had similar misgivings regarding the political management of society and progress, and was likewise prone to believe that power corrupts people. In a letter to his friend Lowes Dickinson, written in 1917, he referred to what he called "his own 'hard little theory'", namely "that all rational and philosophic effort towards a good society was futile" (cit. Furbank, 1978: 46).²⁸ Around the same time, in a letter to Siegfried Sassoon, he spelled out his pessimistic vision, stressing the problem of "the possession of power":

Give a man power over other men, and he deteriorates at once. The 'troops' are decent and charming, I believe, not because they suffer but because they are powerless. – And the devil who rules this planet has contrived that those who are powerless shall suffer. (Cit. Furbank, 1978: 48)

Throughout most of his fiction, Forster concentrated on the individual's pursuit of love and truth, as against the pursuit of power. The indifferent and dignified *punkah-wallah* of *A Passage to India* epitomises this sympathy for the powerless (which prefigures Winston's vague hope in the poverty-stricken and ignorant proles): it is he, not the proud, educated Aziz, who ultimately represents the true alternative to British imperialism.

Orwell's apocalyptic vision appears (albeit in germinal form) in Forster's fiction, as something that is feared and, to some extent, *inevitable*. Helen Schlegel's pronouncement, at the end of *Howards End* that "life's going to be melted down, all over the world" (HE, 329) anticipates (albeit with less definition and catastrophism) the unified world of 1984, an indistinct mass, despite its three blocks and conflict zones – "Everywhere there is the same pyramidal structure, the same worship of a semi-divine leader, the same economy existing by and for continuous warfare" (NEF, 205). This vision is connected to a marked discomfort over social management and progress – as emerges from the commitment of the

proliferates in the Ministries is the "beetle-like type" (NEF, 63; 118; 130); the proles are compared to rabbits (NEF, 87); an old man (a prole) is compared to a prawn (NEF, 90).

²⁸ Forster's dystopian inclinations can be best appreciated in one of his short stories, 'The Machine Stops' (CSS, 109-146).

sisters Borlase to 'tidy the world up': "It is time. The age of discovery is over – there will be no new countries. It is time to arrange the old" (AS, 15). The protagonist's ambivalence towards his wife and sister-in-law's utopian impulses uncovers the dilemma at the heart of the liberal position: though a supporter of social reform, Martin Whitby recoils from too much social and political interference, which risks at 'softening' the individual (especially, male) and at destroying the harmony of the natural (and traditional) world. Unable to resolve this dilemma, Martin ultimately endorses a pragmatic stance that accepts the capitalist world order, the world 'as it is', provided that he can cling to his own (private) beliefs: "He knew that much of the earth must be *dull and commercial*, and that to revolt against her is ridiculous. Until she changed, his own thoughts contented him" (AS, 5, my emphasis).

Without resorting to Orwell's spiteful associations of 'indecent' (which animate, for instance, the portrayal of Warburton, in *A Clergyman's Daughter*), Forster's depiction of socialists (and the intellectual, progressive class, in general) is, nevertheless, also ambiguous. Socialism is primarily represented as feminine: with the exception of Mr Emerson (and he is a bit 'odd' and has a somewhat effeminate son), socialism seems to amount to a purely intellectual interest taken up, in a half-hearted manner, by leisured women like Margaret Schlegel and the Borlase sisters, or, in an 'extreme', but short-lived manner, by the more impulsive Helen Schlegel. What prevents Forster to succumb to Orwell's pessimistic vision, however, is a deeper philosophical grasp of the complexity of life which results in a very different concept (and practice) of literature.

Indeed, for Forster, the divide between the individual and society is intertwined with the philosophical pursuit of truth – the real is revealed by way of a process (usually set off by love) which, albeit individualistic, possesses a universalising reach. *Maurice*, one of Forster's most criticised novels, provides a fine illustration of this process. The novel does have a deep streak of pessimism running through it (cf. Tambling, 1995: 5; 9). Yet, the truth procedure in which the protagonist is involved acts as a powerful counterbalance to this pessimism, as well as to the novel's apparent escapism. Maurice's trajectory is heroic in the sense that it remains faithful to the 'event', to the point of challenging the boundaries of 'what can be' (not only in reality but in fiction itself). Even though these are very different novels, there are interesting parallels between Forster's unpublished novel and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The atmosphere of unreality that we find in Orwell's novel has a counterpart in *Maurice*. In the latter, however, the protagonist dares to reclaim a place for him (even if it is ultimately a non-place – a utopia) in reality (even if it is in the form of fantasy). Winston, on the contrary, no longer an outcast, remains trapped in a reality that is

a nightmare. These differences can be appreciated in two very similar scenes: Winston's 'conversion' to Party orthodoxy and Maurice's 'conversion' to 'normality'. In the same way that Winston is submitted to torture to become a 'New Man', that is, to be 'saved' and 'made perfect', as O'Brien declares (NEF, 256), Maurice puts himself in the hands of Mr Lasker Jones to become 'normal': "I swear from the bottom of my heart I want to be healed. I want to be like other men, not this outcast whom nobody wants" (M, 184).

The two processes, described as a 'cure', are, in fact, instances of 'reality control'. The question that haunts both Winston and Maurice is 'what is reality?', 'what is real?' As we have seen, for Winston, it is a matter of choosing between his subjective (and increasingly self-doubting) point of view, which claims to be grounded in an indivisible and immutable objective reality, and, on the other hand, the Party's point of view, which is grounded in discourse. For Maurice, it is the outcome of a long process, which hinges on the distinction between true and false. As Robert Martin has pointed out, Maurice's relationship with Clive "effects no change in the homosexual" (Martin, 1995: 105), in fact, it allows him to remain 'normal' on the outside, to continue leading a conventional life. When this fails, Maurice struggles to fit into the world that rejects him. He wants to 'yield': "He longed for the trance, wherein his personality would melt and be subtly reformed" (M, 183). And yet, while Winston's 'conversion' is successful, Maurice's is a failure. In fact, it is a turning-point in the plot, leading him, not only to accept his 'flaw' by rejecting the standards that condemn him, but also to move further deep into (truthful) homosexuality.

The differences between *Maurice* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are also importantly expressed on the level of form. I mentioned above Forster's growing difficulties with writing fiction, which I have connected with his search for an event. In his Clark lectures, delivered in 1927 and published under the title of *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster reflected on the first of his 'aspects', the story, to declare:

Yes – oh dear yes – the novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist. That is the highest factor common to all novels, *and I wish that it was not so*, that it could be something different – melody, or perception of the truth, not this low atavistic form. (AN, 34, my emphasis)

The story may be embarrassing (with its focus on narrative 'suspense', it is proper of 'cave men') but, even if Forster is ready to prescribe the need for something else, namely what he calls "the life by values" (AN, 36), he is still determined to retain the elements of 'mystery' and 'surprise', which he associates with 'round characters' (AN, 85) and the plot – "a plot ought to cause surprise" (AN, 98; 95). Moreover, he stresses that a 'rigid pattern'

“shuts the doors on life and leaves the novelist doing exercises” (AN, 165), and is sceptical of books that are planned beforehand (AN, 168). He concludes with a fundamental idea: “Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out” (AN, 170).

This last point is crucial to understand why *Maurice*, despite its relative datedness, can offer something that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* cannot – ‘expansion’, ‘opening out’. In other words, it is not just that the flaws of Orwell’s novel are the result of his political vision (totalitarianism), as one might think if one concentrates on its internal coherence alone. Rather, it is also that these artistic flaws have themselves facilitated Orwell’s vision, guiding it, giving it its final and terrifying shape.

There has been no shortage of critics censuring the novel’s lack of literary inventiveness. Stopping short of classifying it as a ‘political horror-comic’, Isaac Deutscher charged it with ‘crude symbolism’, a weak plot (like that of a “science fiction film of the cheaper variety”), sensationalism (“with mechanical horror piling up upon mechanical horror”), and lack of “width, suppleness, and originality” (Deutscher 1955: 36). After a detailed analysis of the plot, John Atkins similarly concluded against its literary value:

1984 is one of those books that overpower you as you read but which do not leave any strong conviction in the mind. After you have read it you find yourself discovering faults in retrospect. The imaginative effort which impresses the reader at first turns out to be not imagination at all but a painstaking pursuit of existing tendencies to what appear to be logical conclusions. There is no tension in the story, which weakens its appeal as art. (Atkins, 1954: 252)

In Atkin’s view, Orwell’s propagandistic purpose was ultimately stronger than his literary concerns: “The chief motive of *1984* was the publication of Goldstein’s analysis in such a way that it would reach the largest possible public” (Atkins, 1954: 277).²⁹

By contrast, *Animal Farm* has consistently attracted much literary praise. Woodcock described it as a “crystalline little book” (Woodcock, 1984: 156) and William Empson praised its “beautiful limpid prose style” (cit. Crick, 1992: 491). Because of its ‘linguistic simplicity’, syntactic as well as lexical (Fowler, 1995: 164-170), and its impersonal narrative voice (Fowler, 1995: 170), the book has been extensively commended as a model of good writing (hence its assiduous presence in school curricula). Its style is furthermore

²⁹ This is in keeping with John Wain’s description of Orwell’s work as polemic: all his work “has the same object: to implant in the reader’s mind a point of view” (Wain, 1974: 89). Wain goes on to define a writer of polemic as “always a man [sic] who, having himself chosen what side to take, uses his work as an instrument for strengthening the support for that side” (Wain, 1974: 89).

associated with Orwell's politics of language (Fowler, 1995: 164), a commitment to objective, factual language.³⁰

And yet, if we allow ourselves to be caught up in superficial, stylistic differences and in the (often futile) discussion over historical correspondences – whether *Animal Farm* is an attack on the Russian Revolution or all revolutions; whether the target of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is communism, English Socialism or capitalism – we fail to see that the two works have one important thing in common, namely, the fact that nothing really happens in any of them, that nothing really changes. This is not simply a by-product of each plot, but it is central to the vision (or structure of feeling, or ideology, in Žižek's third sense) in which these plots are steeped. *Animal Farm*, a charming combination of political allegory, beast fable and fairy tale, is locked in a circularity that playfully reduces an event (the animals' revolution) to a non-event (the revolution betrayed). With its epigrammatic, self-evident verities, this 'simple' fable reinforces an image of the world as intrinsically stable and immutable, an image that has, no doubt, contributed to its general acceptance and popularity. As John Atkins put it, "most Englishmen believed in *Animal Farm* before it was written, but they were delighted by the form in which their beliefs appeared" (Atkins, 1954: 222). *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* share the same vision of society as tendentially (if not inherently) static. This is, in fact, the major premise of Goldstein's theory, the idea that "since the end of the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of people in the world, the High, the Middle and the Low" (NEF, 209), and that, in consequence, "From the point of view of the Low, no historic change has ever meant much more than a change in the name of their masters" (NEF, 210), which is, precisely, the scenario that we find in *Animal Farm*.

Much stress has been put on Orwell's experience at the Spanish Civil War and the effect it had on his politics and work – for Fyvel, the Spanish experience was the final stitch in Orwell's metamorphosis from Blair to Orwell; it was the moment in which his "old self-absorption could be readily shed and his new political and literary personality could become the real one" (Fyvel, 1959: 65).³¹ For Robert Lee, *Homage to Catalonia* was a

³⁰ Jenni Calder, for instance, has pointed out that, at a basic textual level, *Animal Farm* is mostly built on "simple and logically constructed" sentences, devoid of ambiguity, "with a minimum of subsidiary clauses", and few metaphors or similes (Calder, 1987: 10-11).

³¹ Alex Zwerdling also argues that, before fighting in the Spanish civil war, Orwell had had no definite political vision. His socialism in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* amounted either to "an enthusiasm of the young or a comfortable creed for the guilty rich" (Zwerdling 1974: 65). In these 'pre-socialist' novels Zwerdling notes an inability either to articulate a clearly anti-capitalist stance or "to think outside the socioeconomic framework of his society" (Zwerdling 1974: 66). In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, which Zwerdling describes as "a classic instance of unradical thinking" (Zwerdling 1974: 67), the solutions presented amount to a "cautious program of changed middle-class attitudes and institutional tinkering", the insufficiency of which the book itself seems to suggest (Zwerdling 1974: 67). In any case, Orwell's anti-communism (even if

“turning point in Orwell’s artistic development” (Lee, 1969: 66), its true value lying in the effect it had on Orwell’s development *after* Spain (Lee, 1969: 75). Although he concedes that some of his themes were older (Lee, 1969: 68), and that the change is more one of scale than kind, ‘quantitative’ rather than qualitative (Lee, 1969: 70), he nevertheless sustains that Orwell’s “Spanish experience (and its consequences) radically influenced his imagination”, making him move “from parochial indignation to apocalyptic despair” (Lee, 1969: 81).

Many critics have noted (often in passing) the common pool of themes and motifs that we find throughout Orwell’s fiction (e.g. Rai, 1988: 120-121). For Zwerdling, Orwell’s social pessimism, which presumed that “the forces of society are stronger than the potential rebel”, was already at work in Orwell’s early novels (Zwerdling 1974: 64). I would like to foreground this aspect, which I find crucial to a better understanding of Orwell’s most famous literary construction, ‘totalitarianism’. Indeed, the thematic continuity that we find in the novels (there are striking similarities also at the level of phrasing)³² is symptomatic of the stability and close-endedness that characterises these author’s political and literary vision.

The lack of privacy runs through all the novels. Dorothy’s days at Mrs Creevy’s private school display the oppressive atmosphere of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: worse than hunger and the cold is having no privacy (CD, 215), and it is only in church that she can get away from “Mrs Creevy’s prying eye” (CD, 249). The same applies to Mrs Wisbeach, Gordon’s first landlady: “you had the feeling that she was always watching you; and indeed she was given to tiptoeing up and downstairs at all hours, in hope of catching the lodgers up to mischief” (KAF, 31). Elizabeth’s life at a Parisian pension, the *patronne* was “a sneak who spent her life in tiptoeing up and down stairs in hopes of catching the boarders washing stockings in their hand-basins” (BD, 93). Orwell’s protagonists counter this reality with secrecy, which is pervasive: Dorothy smiles at thinking of the secret changes in her habits (CD, 286); Gordon Comstock’s “illicit cup of tea” (KAF, 30) is described as

not yet conceived in strictly political terms) is prior to the Spanish Civil War (cf. Williams, 1971; 13), which probably provided the rationale for an existing prejudice. The discomfort with equality runs through Orwell’s novels: in her brief spate as a down-and-out in Trafalgar Square, the narrator notes, Dorothy had become used to “the horrible communism of the Square” (CD, 185-186). Gordon’s vision of Lambeth is of “that great sluttish under world where failure and success have no meaning, a sort of kingdom of ghosts where all are equal” (KAF, 227).

³²The opening line of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen” (NEF, 3) – echoes the opening of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*: “The clock struck half past two” (KAF, 1). It is also reminiscent of *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, which opens with Dorothy waking up at the sound of her alarm clock (CD, 34). Later in the novel, Dorothy is turned out into the streets, on her own, on another cold, *dusty* April day (CD, 264), and the same attention to the passing hours recurs (e.g. CD, 295). In his dreary room, Gordon Comstock notes “the sinister passage of time” (KAF, 37). *Burmese Days* opens in a similar vein, with a first paragraph that notes, “It was only half-past eight, but the month was April”, also mentioning “occasional faint breaths of wind” (BD, 1).

“the major household offence, next to bringing a woman in” (KAF, 31). Bowling’s secrecy, patent in his sojourn to Lower Binfield, is accompanied by paranoia, as he claims to be “perfectly certain that *they* knew all about it. When I say *they*, I mean all the people who wouldn’t approve of a trip like this kind and who’d have stopped me if they could – which, I suppose, would include pretty well everybody” (CUFA, 182) Furthermore, secrecy is accompanied by external compliance and inner resentment. It substitutes the life of the mind for (inter-)action. When she is reprimanded by Mrs Creevy, Dorothy does nothing: “Outwardly she was subdued, and very pale, but in her heart were anger and deadly repulsion against which she had to struggle before she could speak” (CD, 236). She contemplates disobeying Mrs Creevy’s orders, “but she dared not” (CD, 244). More importantly, Dorothy’s conviction, in the end, that “all real happenings are in the mind”, “it’s the things that happen inside you that matter” (CD, 272), anticipates Big Brother’s psychotic regime. Significantly, in the end, Dorothy drops her ‘disciplinary pin’ (CD, 286). She no longer needs any external compulsion, a feature which also links her to Winston’s release at the close of the book.

Orwell’s special concern with history also predates the Spanish Civil War. Long before Winston Smith is made to reflect – “It might very well be that literally every word in the history books, even the things that one accepted without question, was pure fantasy” (NEF, 78) – Dorothy replaces the children’s history textbook, the *Hundred Page History*, because “most of it was lies” (CD, 221). Furthermore, long before *Animal Farm*, her schoolchildren, feeling let down by her, become intractable – as the narrator points out, it is their “healthy instinct that made them rebel” (CD, 250). Dorothy begins to treat them ‘like animals’ – “if you are obliged to teach children rubbish, you mustn’t treat them as human beings. You must treat them like animals – driving, not persuading.” The narrator adds what could accurately be the motto of the regime of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: “Before all else, you must teach them that it is more painful to rebel than to obey” (CD, 260). At this point, Dorothy’s face changes, becoming more like ‘a schoolmarm’, the girls’ previous oppressors (CD, 260), which prefigures the famous final scene of *Animal Farm*. A similar image also appears in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, when, at the Two Minutes Hate, dictator and dissenter merge, as the face of Goldstein ‘melts into’ the face of Big Brother (NEF, 18). When Rosemary meets Gordon, in Lambeth, she also notices how his face has changed (KAF, 250).

Gordon’s descent in the ‘under world’ of Lambeth, to work for Mr Cheeseman, a job with “no room for ambition, no effort, no hope” (KAF, 225), despite the latter aspect, clearly anticipates Oceania’s proles. ‘Down there’, there is no decency, “no feeling of being spied

upon and disapproved of” (KAF, 232); “you *could* be happy, in a sluttish way” (KAF, 232). The idea that the ‘proles’ (now thus called) are free is also voiced by George Bowling (CUFA, 11). The image of the boot ‘stamping on a human face’ (NEF, 280) first emerges in relation to Gordon’s experience of poverty: “The way it gives everyone the right to stamp on you. The way everyone wants to stamp on you” (KAF, 110). Reflecting on the effects of poverty, Gordon Comstock exposes the frailty of Winston’s hope in the proles: “It is in the brain and the soul that lack of money damages you. Mental deadness, spiritual squalor – they seem to descend upon you inescapably when your income drops below a certain point. Faith, hope, money – only a saint could have the first two without having the third” (KAF, 62). Unless proles, in *Airstrip One*, have become saints, how can they represent hope?

George Bowling’s vision of the future is remarkably similar to the world depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (e.g. CUFA, 26-27). For Bowling, “the worst is not the war, “It’s the things that happen afterwards” (CUFA, 160; cf. 174). His vision is, above all, of a post-war world – “I can see the after-war, the food-queues and the secret police and the loudspeakers telling you what to think” (CUFA, 166). Another vision takes place at the Left Book Club, when Bowling is attending a lecture given by an anti-fascist speaker. He describes it as pure ‘hate propaganda’ and thinks that he knows what he is really thinking: “I got inside his skull (...) For about a second I was inside him, you might almost say I *was* him” (CUFA, 156), imagining him “smashing people’s faces in with a spanner” (CUFA, 156).

Finally, Orwell’s views against modernism and progress are regularly voiced: bringing to mind her father’s contempt for the ‘lower classes’ and democracy (CD, 17, 25), Dorothy rejects the “pseudo-religion of ‘progress’ with visions of glittering Utopias and ant-heaps of steel and concrete” (CD, 293). Walking in London, Gordon perceives the crowds in the city as “the black hordes of clerks”, “like ants”, “ant-like men” (KAF, 70). In *Burmese Days*, more than imperialism, it is the mechanisation and modernisation of Burma that Flory rejects, and he fears that the rule of ‘progress’ will follow the British in Burma (BD, 40-41; 43). Macgregor’s painfully exercises every morning – “Nordenflycht’s *Physical Jerks for the sedentary*” (BD, 74) – reappear in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as the ‘Physical Jerks’ that Winston is forced to perform in front of the telescreen (NEF, 33).³³ All things

³³ Macgregor’s morning exercises elicit from the protagonist the following virulent, homophobic comment:

Nasty old bladder of lard [cf. CD, 104]! (...) How his bottom did stick out in those tight khaki shorts. Like one of those beastly middle-aged scoutmasters, homosexuals almost to a man, that you see photographs of in illustrated papers. Dressing himself up in those ridiculous clothes and exposing his

considered, what is ultimately rejected is Socialism, as Gordon's vision (which anticipates Oceania) reveals:

'Some kind of Aldous Huxley *Brave New World*; only not so amusing. Four hours a day in a model factory, tightening up bolt number 6003. Rations served out in greaseproof paper at the communal kitchen. Community-hikes from Marx Hostel to Lenin Hostel and back. Free abortion-clinics on all corners. All very well in its way, of course. Only we don't want it.' (KAF, 97)

Together, all these motifs may flow into the last novel with particular force, but their presence over a period of twenty years *admitting little change* suggests a regularity that borders on obsession and lack of creativity. The stagnated flatness of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, because it can create nothing new, is in keeping with this artistic trajectory, as well as with the book's thesis of 'totalitarianism', which now precludes, not only any event from happening, but also from being formulated or even conceived. There are no openings in this world, where only past events matter and only fake events happen, where everything, like the words of Newspeak, is contained in itself, where the future is reduced to an image of (certain) pain and death. What is more, there are no surprises in this novel. 'Reality' replicates dreams and nightmares with almost literal accuracy. An example is Winston and Julia's first encounter (NEF, 32-33; 129), about which Winston is pleased to observe, "it was almost as in his dream" (NEF, 131).³⁴ The same function is fulfilled by Goldstein's book. Alok Rai considered that its function is to say what the novel cannot say (Rai, 1988: 116). But, in fact, Goldstein's interpolations add very little. As Winston happily concedes, the book says nothing new:

The book fascinated him, or more exactly it reassured him. In a sense *it told him nothing that was new*, but that was part of the attraction. It said what he would have said, if it had been possible for him to set his scattered thoughts in order. It was the product of *a mind similar to his own*, but enormously more powerful, more systematic, less fear-ridden. The best books, he perceived, *are those that tell you what you know already*. (NEF, 208, my emphasis; cf. NEF, 226)

Goldstein's book provides the objective perspective (the 'documental evidence', as it were) that is needed to confirm Winston's (subjective) point of view. It results, nevertheless, in

pudgy, dimpled knees, because it is the pukka sahib thing to take exercise before breakfast – disgusting! (BD, 78)

³⁴ The scene is also reminiscent of Gordon and Rosemary's countryside outing in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, noticeably, there are similar erotic metaphors (the leaves of the trees are 'like women's hair' – NEF, 129), but neither money nor Rosemary's inhibitions (and insistence on contraception) get now in the way.

another instance of the Party's manipulation of a historical (and allegedly subversive) document, and hence, in another proof of the Party's effective 'totalitarianism'. In other words, there is no way out of the entrapment in which Winston finds himself. Robert Lee considered that the worst in Oceania is 'the loss of consciousness' defined as 'the failure of language' (Lee, 1969: 155). However, I prefer to speak of an entrapment in language and consciousness for, in fact, both of them dominate the novel. Described as the mere transferring "to paper the interminable restless monologue that had been running inside his head, literally for years" (NEF, 9-10), Winston's rebellious act of writing has little chance to transcend this entrapment, that is, to constitute itself as a *real* act of rebellion.

Because *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has largely been read as a book about the future – it was still future at the time of composition and the story itself is set in the aftermath of a terrible, traumatic event – it is easy to overlook its complex manipulation of time. In fact, as I argued above, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not so much about the future as about the past – and, for that matter, about a certain past. The book is poised between a dreary and dreadful present (in which nothing but terror and hatred is allowed to happen) and a more complex image of the past, which, not being completely idealised, is nevertheless revered for its alleged human 'values' (which are, above all, *private* values) and fetishistic objects. It does not refute the idea that the capitalist past was synonymous with class oppression and poverty, and yet, it cannot but turn to that past in search of an answer to the present-day 'totalitarian' society.

But *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is also a book about the present – Orwell's present. The connection is explicitly made: Airstrip One "had been called England or Britain" (NEF, 34); Ingsoc is what in the 60s had been called 'English Socialism' (NEF, 38). This, no doubt, could be linked to the novel's closeness to the genre of utopia or dystopia (in which the future is used as a foil to criticise the writer's present), but, as many critics have noted, given the book's and Orwell's anti-utopian vein (Stephen Ingle has recently referred to his "spiteful anti-utopianism" – Ingle, 2006: 168; cf. Zwerdling, 1974: 19; Reilly, 1999: 72; Moylan, 2000: 161), this closeness is more apparent than real. In fact, the future has little place in this novel. Its role is strategic: to allow the present to be treated as a past; in other words, to allow Orwell to speak of his own time *from a future standpoint*, that is, as a *lost past*.³⁵

³⁵ Curiously, Robert Stradling has described Orwell's notion of history along similar lines: for Orwell, he argues, "history is 'the present as seen from the future', and not 'the past as seen from the present'" (Stradling, 1984: 110). This also entailed that Orwell lacked 'any historical perspective' – "he saw the world of his day with peculiar intensity because he saw very little of its past" (Stradling, 1984: 110).

Through this narrative device, the novel offers a requiem for an England that was vanishing under what appeared to be an irrevocable process of modernisation and democratisation around the establishment of a welfare state. As Sinfield points out, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is also an expression of the fear of a workers' state (Sinfield, 1989: 44). The images of crowds of people, described as 'swarms' and 'masses', and the evident dislike of communal places, such as the canteen of the Ministry of Truth, the 'Victory Mansions' (a sort of Council block of flats), or the ubiquitous public gatherings serve (even if unwittingly) a structure of feeling that is fundamentally unsympathetic to many of the changes that were being introduced at the time.³⁶ Goldstein's book, written some time between 1960 and 1984, makes this strategy explicit, by dismissing Orwell's time, from the future, as a negative turning-point: "by the fourth decade of the twentieth century all the main currents of political thought were authoritarian (...) Every new political theory, by whatever name it called itself, led back to hierarchy and regimentation" (NEF, 213).³⁷ Rather than a dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, therefore, an elegy for the 'liberal ideas' that are attributed to a pre-traumatic time, a time preceding these changes or, perhaps, simply, a time preceding change:

By comparison with that existing today, all the tyrannies of the past were half-hearted and inefficient. The ruling groups were always infected to some extent by *liberal ideas*, and were content to leave loose ends everywhere, to regard only the overt act and to be uninterested in what their subjects were thinking. (...) With the development of television, and the technical advance which made it possible to receive and transmit simultaneously on the same instrument, *private life came to an end*. (NEF, 214, my emphasis)

Liberalism is thus presented as the object of the novel's 'anticipated' nostalgia. Oceania's regime, 'oligarchical collectivism', becomes a kind of inverted image of liberal democracy, as it combines its two greatest anathemas – authoritarianism and collectivism. Accordingly, as the story goes, the Party owns everything in Oceania, including the mind of its denizens; there is no private property or freedom of speech; the individual has been crushed (by the Party's 'boot' – NEF, 280); Winston is the 'last man' (NEF, 282).

³⁶ Books like Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, published in 1945, were bemoaning the passing of an age, defined by a certain kind of class relations (cf. Sinfield, 1989: 13). In the face of democracy, as Sinfield has argued, "the instinct of literary intellectuals was to defend traditional ground" (Sinfield, 1989: 87).

³⁷ Orwell himself expressed this view, for instance, in his introduction to the first volume of *British Pamphleteers*:

Probably there never was an age that so cried out for its activities [i.e. for pamphleteering]. Not only are the ideological hatreds *bitterer than ever*, but minorities are suppressed and truth perverted *in a way never before dreamed of*. Wherever one looks one sees fiercer struggles than the Crusades, worse tyrannies than the Inquisition, and bigger lies than the Popish plot. (Orwell, 1948: 16, my italics)

And yet, two aspects, which erupt from the novel's own tensions and contradictions, prevent us from adhering to this reading – a reading that would place us *inside* the theory of 'totalitarianism'. First, despite claims to the contrary, it is important to note that Winston's problem is not that he lacks a private space, but that *he has been reduced to one*, indeed, to the almost parodic point of living inside 'the few cubic centimetres of his skull'. Oceania is an ultra-individualistic place, where no one trusts anyone (not even one's family). What it lacks is a public dimension, without which no political act can be meaningfully carried out.³⁸ The same can be said of Maurice's England, which lacks a place where the protagonist can 'come out' – that is, a place where he can live and love in truth. Rather than being antithetical to private life, public life is the place where love, politics, art and science *can effectively* happen.

Second, despite the fact that capitalism is a thing of the past, the truth is that it continues to haunt Oceania (even more, perhaps, than liberalism). Described as the reality preceding the revolution, which Winston traces back to the forties and thirties (NEF, 38), capitalism is part of Winston's nostalgia, which he associates with art, architecture, cathedrals, and beautiful objects (like the glass paperweight), and which the Party has completely rejected:

The centuries of capitalism were held to have produced nothing of any value. One could not learn history from architecture any more than one could learn it from books. Statues, inscriptions, memorial stones, the names of streets – anything that might throw light upon the past had been systematically altered. (NEF, 102)

One of the foundations of Oceania is inequality, the perpetuation of which it is the role of war and chronic poverty to ensure (NEF, 215). Oceania has a degree of social fluidity: even though it is hierarchical, it functions on a meritocratic rather than hereditary basis (NEF, 218). Its rationale, however, is not economic (which would take it back to capitalism) but political (if not symbolic) – capital has given way to 'power for power sake' as the root of all evils.

This explanation has been exposed by critics as manifestly insufficient. For Patai, the novel rejects "the moral justification for the exercise of power while failing to provide any substitute rationale" (Patai, 1984: 220); for Freedman, the book can provide no 'concrete *why*', only a "meaningless, an abstractly posited bogey", drawn from the novel's

³⁸ Žižek has made a similar point regarding today's relationship between public and private lives, in our media-saturated societies. He rejects the 'fashionable complaint' that "private life is threatened or even disappearing, in face of the media's ability to expose one's most intimate personal details to the public", to stress that the reverse is the case: "what is effectively disappearing here is public life itself, the public sphere proper, in which one operates as a symbolic agent who cannot be reduced to a private individual, to a bundle of personal attributes, desires, traumas and idiosyncrasies" (Žižek, 2005: 116-117).

“programmatically satirical” (Freedman, 1984: 612). Isaac Deutscher similarly dismissed it as a sado-masochistic paradise, Orwell’s “surrender to the mysticism of cruelty” (Reilly, 1999: 66, cf. Deutscher, 1955).³⁹

This failure, however, is the key to the novel. In a post-political world, in which economy has been evacuated, ‘politics’ becomes the only rationale. And yet, as the Party’s obsession with statistics and production levels indicates, economy cannot simply be written off. Capitalism has not really been addressed: it survives in the margins of Oceania, in its gaps and crevices, as the natural excrescence of an over-‘politicised’ world. Indeed, capitalism is never too far away, even if mostly as a ghostly presence (or a haunting absence). The social hierarchy may be almost theological, with Big Brother at its apex, who is “infallible and all-powerful”, whom no one has ever seen, and who will never die (NEF, 216; 217), reality may be shabby and poor; yet, material goods continue to be coveted for themselves, like Winston’s razor blades, or as a matter of distinction, like O’Brien’s flat, which emanates an atmosphere of ‘richness and spaciousness’ (NEF, 175). In fact, it is only the Party members who cannot buy them in the existing shops – it is called ‘dealing on the free market’ (NEF, 8) – which, apparently, serve eighty-five per cent of the population. Capitalism may have become a dream for the intellectual layers of the population, but it continues to be the ‘natural’ way of life for the majority of the population, to whom the dollar (that ultimate symbol of capitalism) is the currency (NEF, 8; 29; 99). In sum, capitalism may be the object of the novel’s elegiac mode, but it is also the novel’s subtext of desire, its self-denied reality.

After buying the paperweight, Winston decides to come back: “he would buy further scraps of beautiful rubbish” (NEF, 104); fantasising about a normal, happy life with Julia, he imagines the two of them walking through the streets “openly, and without fear, talking of trivialities and buying odds and ends for the household” (NEF, 146) – just like Rosemary and Gordon Comstock at the end of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (KAF, 275). For Gordon, the world of non-capitalism (which he simplistically equates with not having money, that is, with being poor) had been a ghostly world – Gordon’s vision of Lambeth is of “that great sluttish under world where failure and success have no meaning, a sort of kingdom of ghosts where all are equal” (KAF, 227). Gordon’s salvation, at the end of the novel, arrives in the form of bourgeois marriage and fatherhood, through which he is reconciled to human life *and capitalism*. The same logic guides Winston (apparently in the

³⁹ For Zwerdling, it is psychology rather than sociology that provides the rationale for Oceania, a reaction against the economic determinism of Marxism, which underestimated psychological factors (Zwerdling 1974: 27). John Atkins similarly perceived (and accepted) the story’s excessive squalor (which is unnecessary in such a technically advanced world) as ‘psychologically necessary’ (Atkins, 1954: 241).

opposite direction) to the proles – away from the ghostly world of the Party, to embrace the lively world of common people, which is also the world of ‘free market’, real-life capitalism. Only this time, the Thought police are there to stop him. In the end, Winston’s false confession – that he is “an admirer of capitalism” (NEF, 254) – is, to a certain extent, true. In fact, the ghostly presence of capitalism extends to the Party itself, which, in the end, promotes Winston, paying him better wages as a reward for his conversion (NEF, 302). No wonder that the protagonist’s betrayal should be associated with the Party’s song of betrayal – “Under the spreading chestnut tree/ I sold you and you sold me” (NEF, 307) – a song Winston hears, after coming across an estranged Julia, with tears in his eyes.

Conclusion

Peter Widdowson's contention that literature "is a kind of uncontrolled free space in which unpredictable things can happen and from which unpredictable effects may accrue" (Widdowson, 1999: 205) pushes to the fore the creative role of the literary as a 'potentiality', an aspect which has also come through in my readings of Forster's and Orwell's novels. However, Widdowson also insists on literature's indeterminacy (Widdowson, 1999: 206), whereas my analysis, because it is indebted to the philosophy of Alain Badiou, turns from indeterminacy to truth. Hence, my contention would be that things do 'happen' in literature, but these things (or 'events'), even if unpredictable, are neither arbitrary nor completely 'uncontrolled', as they are immanent to a given socio-historical and literary 'formation' (the 'situation'), and intertwine with a process that produces truth and, by extension, change. I have articulated this set of concepts with Pierre Macherey's theory of production, to read Forster's and Orwell's novels in the light of the 'ideology' that has gone into them at the moment of production. The work's ideology, with all its gaps and inconsistencies, provides the limits for its reading – its 'determinacy', in Macherey's terminology. It is within these limits that literature's own set of truths, its own knowledge, is produced. The task of criticism, therefore, is to recognise these limits and see beyond them, by developing a kind of active reading – one that goes 'against the grain' – in which the literary work and the knowledge of it constantly throw light on each other.

This is what I set out to do in my reading of Forster's and Orwell's novels. Even though these works had been produced and were largely being received within a liberal-humanist conspectus, in relation to which my three topics of analysis – Englishness, imperialism and liberalism – had been defined, I wanted to tease out the set of relations and type of truths (or truth effects) that were being highlighted, endorsed and propagated, under the political label of liberalism, and, in Orwell's apparently more complicated case (since his work appealed to a wide range of reading constituencies, from anarchism to socialism, Toryism and even American neo-conservatism), liberal-democracy. My question, however, was not how to label these authors' politics, but to find the constitutive elements of what appeared to be a rather broad and deep-rooted consensus.

The first of these elements to emerge was the structural reliance on figures of identity (notably, Englishness) and 'Otherness'. In Forster's novels, the liberal point of view defines itself in relation to an 'Other' – be it the foreign (exotic) 'Other', the object of

tourism (encapsulated in the Italian Gino), or the colonised 'Other', a racial inferior who is both a victim of imperial masters and the recipient of their benefaction (encapsulated in the Indian Aziz). There is a third 'Other', with whom relations are even more strained – the lower-middle-class English 'Other', who can be neither fully 'racialised' nor positively 'exoticised' (represented by Leonard Bast). The ill-fated clerk has a place in Forster's gallery of corpses, which includes the Italian man murdered at the Piazza, with mere instrumental value for Lucy's romance, and Lilia's 'hybrid' baby, a social embarrassment to the Herritons, but also the 'cause' over which their moral (if not racial) superiority is to be fought. All these figures are symbolic of the scores of 'unrepresentable' 'Others', namely the 'unrepresentable proletariat' (Mulhern, 2000: 35) and, more generally, the perceived 'masses', English and foreign, who literally (even fictionally) do not matter.

This, by and large, is the picture we find in Orwell's fiction. There are significant differences, though. Orwell's novels continue to display a certain ambivalence regarding the lower-middle classes, but this is, more often than not, the result of gender prejudice rather than class (compare the positive portrayals of Flaxman and George Bowling, the two salesmen, with the negative stereotypical ones of landladies). The idealisation of the poor, whom Forster had more reluctantly approached, takes on a definite symbolic dimension: the tramps and hop-pickers of *A Clergyman's Daughter* and the poor of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* may have occupied a central place in these novels, but *Nineteen Eighty-Four* elevates their counterparts, the proles, to full symbolic stature, to represent the best of humanity. Sexuality also modifies these authors' common perception of the working-class as 'masculine'. For Forster, it is synonymous with the working-class man, an object of desire that can rise, through love, above his lowly and pitiful condition (as the under-gamekeeper Scudder does, in *Maurice*). For Orwell, on the other hand, the symbol of the working class is womanly fertility, the projected image of a traditionalist and essentially reproductive masculinity (the working-class man is, curiously, either distant or absent).¹ In both cases, women are the ultimate 'Others' – those with whom no connections (beyond an ambiguous sympathy, in Forster's case) can be established. In the rationale of these fictional worlds, they often become the scapegoats: of imperialism, as Jenny Sharpe, for instance, has argued with regard to Adela Quested (e.g. Sharpe 1993: 122-124); of consumerism and

¹ As Ingle has rightly pointed out, Orwell's working class is constituted by "the least oppressed of the oppressed" (Ingle 1984: 22). It excludes the lumpen-proletariat, 'the aimless and dispirited', the 'dirty, small-minded and mean', "the poorer and more ignorant soldiers in Spain, who did not even know to which party they belonged", "the sheep of *Animal Farm*", in short, all those who did not possess the 'right' values (Ingle 1984: 6).

capitalism – like Julia Comstock and Rosemary in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, or Hilda Bowling in *Coming Up for Air*, as Daphne Patai noted (Patai, 1984: 116; 187); or even of the modern utopian impulse to ‘tidy up the world’ (as epitomised by the sisters Borlase in *Arctic Summer*). There is, finally, a political ‘Other’, already present in Forster, but more pronounced in Orwell. As Francis Mulhern has pointed out, the fundamental binary in Orwell’s work is not between exploiters and exploited, but between the English nation and the left intelligentsia (Mulhern, 2000: 39), that is, the ‘common people’ and the intellectual political left.

In all these pairs of opposites, ‘difference’, understood in purely cultural terms and devoid of any sense of struggle and conflict, dominates. ‘Culture’ is the keyword here: Leonard Bast’s class identity is built on his relationship with the (external, literate, high-brow) culture that he lacks and aspires to; Indian ‘Otherness’ is similarly a question of culture, understood as a form of attire and a collection of manners, as Fielding, “dressed up in a native costume”, observes. For him, ‘civilization’ is to be found “not in great works of art or mighty deeds, but in the gestures *well-bred Indians* make when they sit or lie down” (PI, 250, my emphasis). Indian ‘civilization’, therefore, is associated with a number of essential (and essentializing) qualities that lie outside the reach of non-Indians (and lower-class Indians): “this restfulness of gesture (...) reveals a civilization which the West can disturb but will never acquire” (PI, 251). That is to say, other identities may be assumed (if only in fancy dress and temporarily), but difference is ultimately reaffirmed.

The contradiction cannot be missed out: both in Bast’s attraction to ‘culture’ and in the tourist’s attraction to other cultures, difference (and, in the first case, distinction) clashes with a perceived tendency towards sameness; as Helen Schlegel notes with regret, “Life’s going to be melted down, all over the world” (HE, 329). Neither Helen nor her sister, however, can see the connections between this tendency and ‘Wicoxism’ – the dull, practical and profit-ridden way of life that has become dominant in England and that is being spread throughout the empire – or tourism, which facilitates its expansion outside these geographical areas. Like Philip Herriton, Lucy Honeychurch and Martin Whitby, Margaret and Helen are also described as “a couple of tourists” – “but affectionate tourists”, “tourists who pretend each hotel is their home” (HE, 306). These detached consumers of otherness and difference are (more or less) oblivious to the consequences of their cultural rapacity. In Italy, Martin Whitby notes with ambivalence the growth of souvenir shops – “here is stuff of the future (...) here is the cathedral of Milan” (AS, 17). The book conceives of two future alternatives for Italy: either, in Lady

Borlase's perspective, to remain agrarian and backward and, consequently, the object of picturesque for tourists (AS, 26; 28), or, according to Martin Whitby, to embrace modernity in the only way he knows it: "These Milanese seem to me really peasants gone wrong. Italy has to produce a middle class – *every nation that counts has*" (AS, 23, my emphasis).

Just as Englishness is defined in relation to 'Others', as Philip Dodd has argued, difference is defined in relation to sameness, once it becomes part of the process of expansion and integration which has been activated and to which it has been hitched (cf. Dodd, 1986). *A Passage to India* offers a powerful metaphor of this process, when the Collector's invitation for the 'Bridge Party' prompts the narrator to reflect on the outer circles that are not being 'embraced' (PI, 57-58). He then goes on to draw a parallel between this 'earthly invitation' and Christianity – who should be the recipients of 'divine hospitality'? The circles are expansible, it turns out, only to a certain point, beyond which even the two missionaries of Chandrapore acknowledge that "we must exclude someone from our gathering, or we shall be left with nothing" (PI, 58). Paul Armstrong has read this passage along pluralist liberal-democratic lines, by stressing the tension between an 'all-encompassing consensus' and identity: "Must something be excluded from any act of unification lest identity be abolished when differences are overcome?" (Armstrong, 1992: 377) The problem, for this critic, is how to preserve identity. His solution is to allow, or better, to *encourage*, 'multiplicity and disagreement' (Armstrong, 1992: 381). With the question thus formulated, as a matter of finding a balance between 'identity' and 'difference', the real issue is overlooked, namely concerning *the identity of the consensus itself* – what does it ultimately refer to? In Forster's example above it clearly is Englishness and Christianity.²

There is, however, another way of reading Forster's quote, by focusing on its second part – "or we shall be left with nothing". This kind of exclusion does not pertain to identity alone, but also to wealth and, more importantly, to the distribution of wealth. Throughout this work, partly encouraged by the argument put forth by Ellen Meiksins Wood (1991), I have tried to draw attention to the largely unacknowledged links between capitalism and Englishness. The capitalist Wilcoxes are 'English to the backbone', and even Margaret Schlegel, who is not 'English to the backbone', but who will inherit Howards End/ England, is all 'for riches' (HE, 73). The choice of a country

² As Badiou points out there is a specific identity concealed in the eulogy of difference: "the problem is that the 'respect for differences' and the ethics of human rights do seem to define an *identity*! And that as a result, the respect for differences applies only to those differences that are reasonably consistent with this identity (which, after all, is nothing other than the identity of a wealthy – albeit visibly declining – 'West')" (Badiou, 2001: 22).

house (a private property) to embody England, an aspect which is (unwittingly) drawn out in the Merchant and Ivory film, is symptomatic of this central duality between the material and the ideal, which Margaret and Henry's marriage represents. The Wilcoxes may be the incarnation of capitalism, but the task of the Schlegels (and of their liberalism) is to compensate for their flaws; in other words, to provide capitalism with 'a human face' – to make it a capitalism/imperialism that concerns itself with its expanding outer circles, as Leonard Bast's child suggests.

Orwell tackles these same issues from a different angle. He ignores the world of the Wilcoxes, takes some heed of the Schlegels (albeit in a less recognisable form, in figures like Warburton, Ravelston, the pigs in *Animal Farm* and O'Brien – all intellectuals with a left-wing leaning, or what can be seen as such), but concentrates especially on the lower-middle-classes and the respectable poor. If Forster's picture of the social excluded (such as the untouchable punkah-wallah or the under-gamekeeper) points at unforeseen, even fantastic, possibilities, Orwell's social excluded have nothing of their own to offer, their existence being confined to their symbolic value, attributed to them from an outside perspective. In the thirties novels, the poor are perceived for what they lack – not only material goods, but also a culture and a consciousness – thus becoming perceived as 'sleepwalkers' (CD, 98) and 'ghosts' (KAF, 227). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, however, it is the Party members (including Winston) who belong to a world of spectral (non)existence. Despite its claims to 'totalitarianism', and even by the novel's standards, the Party represents a *minority* (fifteen per cent of the population) and is therefore (even according to the Party's dictum, 'sanity is statistical') an *aberration*. Normality is the prerogative of the proles, who live in a more relaxed, though semi-conscious condition, which is also the condition of informal, unacknowledged capitalism.

I discussed above the haunting presence of capitalism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – how its deliberate repression (essential for the book's thesis) is paradoxically compensated for and contradicted in a number of ways: in its constant evocation as an absence, in its presence as a sub-text of desire and, perhaps more importantly (because less obviously stated), as the proles' natural way of life. Because the proles are symbolic of liberal values (of freedom, in particular) and of humanity, it follows that their way of life, capitalism, becomes the natural, free condition of humanity.

All these strands of meaning are built around the figure of the 'Other' and can be teased out by readings that foreground questions of identity, which have dominated Forster's and Orwell's criticism. But it is possible, as I hope to have demonstrated, to displace

this primacy, often taken for granted, by adopting a reading focused on Badiou's notion of event. The effect is subversive, allowing us to move beyond the limits within which these literary works have been produced. As a category exterior to being (and identity), the 'event' allows us to view these limits from the outside, to acquire, as Caroline Abbott recognises in the liberal Philip Herriton, 'a general view of the muddle' (WAFT, 132) – only this time, it is one that includes Philip's (liberal) view. By shifting the focus to the event – or its absence – we are confronted not only with what Robert Colls called a 'capacious liberalism', the frame in which the relationship between self and 'Other', centre and margins, is shaped, but also with what this critic has called the 'resolved nation' (Colls, 1986), in which politics are *not* supposed to happen.

Through this kind of analysis, the similarities and, even more importantly, the differences between Forster's and Orwell's political visions are made more evident. Although they share the same liberal political ground – which takes capitalism for granted and views democracy ambivalently (as something that must be checked by way of representative parliamentarianism and tempered by an ethics of human rights and liberal 'values') – these authors respond differently in their works to the possibility of an 'event' and, consequently, to change.

At the centre of Forster's and Orwell's literary visions is a void – Forster's cave with its echo; Orwell's jungle in Kyauktada, where the cry of the birds is, for Flory, "a lonely, hollow sound like the echo of a laugh" (BD, 56). In both cases, implicit in the vast emptiness, is the yearning for an encounter – only in Forster, the encounter is formulated as an event, even if one that has failed to happen. In fact, Forster's description, in *A Passage to India*, of most of life as "so dull that there is nothing to be said about it" (PI, 145), where nothing happens but where people often react (insincerely) as if something had, spells out the unremarkable multiplicity of life, the absence of (and yearning for) an 'event' and the question of truth, which invite a Badiouian analysis. In his fiction, the 'event' is allowed to interrupt the tourist situation – the Baedeker-ridden world of Anglicised Italian Pensions – but also the imperial situation, posited on a surface level as an encounter between cultures, between East and West, that is, as a tourist situation. In both cases, the quest for the 'real' ('real Italy'; 'real India'), usually read in terms of identity and 'authenticity', becomes instead a quest for the 'event' (for something to happen) *and* a quest for truth. In *A Passage to India*, liberalism defines itself around this absence and desire: it is the liberal Fielding who monopolises the question of what happened in the Marabar caves, to render it in cultural relativistic terms. As we have seen, what matters is not the event per se, but the

views on it; truth is left out of the equation and does not influence the taking of sides (as I have argued, Fielding does not take *Aziz's* side, but the 'humanitarian' side of the weak and victimised).

Nineteen Eighty-Four, on the other hand, is the paradigmatic novel where nothing happens – a description that could also apply to *Burmese Days* and, indeed, to the totality of Orwell's fiction. Critics have identified *Homage to Catalonia* as a turning-point in Orwell's work (e.g. Lee, 1969: 161). The kind of analysis that I have undertaken, however, points to a different conclusion, namely that change is as much absent from his body of work as a whole, as it is from each novel's plot. Indeed, in addition to the almost obsessive repetition of themes and motifs in his novels, which I examined above in more detail (especially in chapter five), the plots are remarkably similar. There are no 'events' in Orwell's novels. Dorothy's 'change within', Comstock's surrender to the money-world (and marriage), Bowling's secret return journey into a world that no longer exists, Winston's 'change' into accepting and loving Big Brother, all ultimately attest to these novels' immutability.³ Orwell's fictional universe is, in many respects, a self-contained whole,⁴ which draws heavily on types, stereotypes and unanalysed social assumptions and prejudices, which his novels seek to confirm rather than challenge or refute (hence my designation of *Burmese Days* as a 'novel of confirmation'). No openings are produced in these novels (though they can be later forced, as I have tried to do); their impulse is towards 'rounding off' rather than 'opening out', to use Forster's terminology (AN, 170). In fact, one might say that in 'totalitarianism', Orwell found a (political) theory that matched the world he had been describing all along in his novels. His picture of totalitarianism – conceived as the negative 'Other' of liberalism – emerged from an uninventive relationship with what there was, with a 'reality' perceived in a simplistic, empirical, commonsensical manner, which allows for no external interventions – hence the novel's overwhelming sense of entrapment. Totalitarianism, the convergence of uneventfulness at all levels (there is no love, no politics, no science, no art in Oceania), is, therefore, also the logical outcome of Orwell's artistic uneventfulness.

³ *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *Howards End* are the closest that Forster comes to Orwell's vision of acceptance: Caroline Abbott firmly tells Philip on the train to England, "All the wonderful things are over" (WAF, 157), whereas Helen Schlegel declares, "I am less enthusiastic about justice now" (HE, 304), and is 'cured' of love (HE, 327).

⁴ The embryo of *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, for instance, can be found in *Burmese Days*, in Elizabeth's rejection of artists who are willing to endure poverty rather than sell themselves (BD, 96) and in her readiness to embrace spinsterhood 'rather than marry such a man' (BD, 97) – Dorothy's reason to reject Warburton.

Conversely, things ‘happen’ in Forster’s novels – things that question the concept of the ‘real’ as part of a process of truth, mostly in the form of a love event, a change-yielding experience, as in *A Room with a View* and *Maurice*, two novels that contrast with the uneventfulness of *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* (even though the latter, as we have seen, recognises this absence and includes it in its plot). This is in keeping with Forster’s notions of art (which his practice reflects), ranging from the belief that the novel needs to ‘expand’ and surprise, to the inclusion of round characters, and, perhaps more importantly, to his treatment of ‘fantasy’ and ‘poetry’, which this writer is not afraid to incorporate in a predominantly realistic fiction, to produce effects that are often disturbing, but also full of ‘potentiality’.

I would like to conclude by offering some thoughts on the present situation of cultural studies, and the role that literature may still come to play in it. Cultural studies, in its British strand, emerged as a specific project after the Second World War, at a time when liberal social democracy was becoming government policy. This materialised in “a distinctive ideology of welfare-capitalism” (Sinfield, 1989: 16). What came to be known as “the postwar settlement” (Sinfield, 1989: 21) was made possible by the economic boom (largely facilitated by the U.S. – cf. Rai, 1988: 154) and the turn to consumer culture (Sinfield, 1989: 20-21). Concomitantly, with the intensification of the hostilities between the capitalist West and the socialist East, known as ‘the Cold War’ (in which Orwell’s ‘totalitarian’ vision played an important part), liberal social democracy lost interest in the pursuit of equality (to which it had committed itself by way of the market) to turn to the rhetoric of ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’. Alok Rai speaks of the sense of imprisonment of social democrats (and ‘democratic socialists’ like Orwell) in their own rhetoric after the war (Rai, 1988: 155) and of the steady evacuation of liberal social democracy of its ‘left positions’ until it created “a vacuum, a space, an ‘absent centre’” which “came to be occupied by the arid theology of ‘anti-totalitarianism’” (Rai, 1988: 157-158).

These general strands flowed into and were reflected on cultural studies, which experienced similar tensions between liberal-democratic tendencies and socialist ones. The latter found its fullest expression in the work of Raymond Williams, who, as Tom Steele has pointed out, insisted on “locating a healthy culture not in the ‘organic’ past (...) but in the socialist future” (Steele, 1997: 197).

The dominant tendency, however, has been (following the general political trend) to embrace the former strand, what Adam Katz has called mainstream, postmodern

cultural studies, which he associates to “a new and increasingly dominant form of liberalism, one that reworks and restores the classical liberal categories of free subjectivity, experience as the source of truth and legitimacy, the nontotalizability of society, and politics as dialogue” (Katz, 2000: 30). Another of its outstanding features is the commitment to the present, and the (often tacit) rejection of what Jacques Rancière has called ‘a politics of the future’ (Rancière, 2007: 5), which leads directly to “an exercise of politics synchronous with the rhythms of the world, with the buzz of things, with the circulation of energies, information and desires: a politics exercised altogether in the present, with the future being nothing but an expansion of the present” (Rancière, 2007: 6). Being thus confined to the present, the political is reduced to becoming “the power of the secularized activities of work, exchange and pleasure” (Rancière, 2007: 6). If this description brings to mind much of the work being currently done under the sign of cultural studies, it is certainly miles away from Williams’ sense of a ‘project’ which would point to the future and be, in that sense too, a politics.

The liberal strand of cultural studies (of which Orwell seems to have been an early practitioner) is built on the kind of self-‘Other’ relationship that I have been looking at in this work, which entails the recognition of a defined set of ‘Others’ (the cornerstone of identity politics), and the rejection of a fully oppositional political ‘Other’, promptly dismissed as ‘totalitarian’. Cultural studies thus shifts to an allegedly neutral political ground that is reminiscent of Orwell’s own position, as emerges from Lawrence Grossberg’s formulation, as one of the tasks of cultural studies scholars, “to question both right and left scholarship from a cultural studies perspective” (Grossberg et al., 1992: 12). In this scenario, the celebration of the consuming culture of a triumphalist capitalism, which has been so often associated with cultural studies, seems to be less an inevitability than a choice.

As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, “the moment one accepts the notion of ‘totalitarianism’, one is firmly located *within* the liberal-democratic horizon” (Žižek 2001: 3). In other words, the moment we cease to be able to discern a *complete alternative* to what there is, we give in (sometimes gleefully) to the liberal democratic consensus, the present hegemonic form of late capitalism. According to this critic, ‘totalitarianism’ has acted as a ‘stopgap’, an ‘unwritten *Denkverbot*’ (Žižek 2001: 3), with two main functions: to prevent thought and the consequent possibility of gaining “a new insight into the historical reality it describes”; to dissuade against the engagement in “political projects that aim seriously to challenge the existing order”, since it declares that they will all lead up either to the Gulag or the Holocaust, in the same way that

Marxism once led to Stalinism (Žižek 2001: 3-5). Though no longer holding the credit it once had, this concept continues to shape our political horizons.

And yet, it has become increasingly more difficult to overlook the fact that capitalism today “defines and structures the *totality* of human civilization” (Žižek 2001: 130, my emphasis), that is, that capitalism has become, in this sense, truly ‘totalitarian’. The effects of this condition have been far from beneficial to large sectors of the population (in developed countries, as well as in developing ones), but they have met with little articulated political response. As Alan Sinfield asked ten years ago, why should the debacle of the Soviet Union have such drastic, paralysing consequences on a Left (heir to the post-1968 New New Left) that had systematically been against it? His answer is that this is not what happened: the real paralysing factor has been the collapse of post-war welfare-capitalism, which finally showed its advocates – all those who believed in a “capitalism continuing, though with vastly more of the 1945 promises realised” – that ‘capitalism can’t be made compatible with a significant element of socialism’ (cit. Milner, 2002: 179). Andrew Milner has identified this same preoccupation at the centre of Williams’s work: “The key question for Williams, as it still must be for us, was thus essentially politico-institutional: that of the radical incompatibility of large-scale capitalism with democracy” (Milner, 2002: 179).

It is this strong and successful link between liberal-democracy and capitalism that needs to be addressed and analysed, and literature offers a ground in which this can be done. Because what goes into literary works is the shaping tissue of our lives, in them and through them we are likely to come face to face with our own contradictions, which are also the contradictions of our world. Literature (or, for that matter, cultural studies) is no substitute for politics, but, from the debris of the familiar, it creates openings, it produces knowledge, not only of what there is, but also of what there is not.

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II. Filmography

A Passage to India (dir. David Lean, 1984)

A Room with a View (dir. James Ivory, 1986)

Maurice (dir. James Ivory, 1987)

Where Angels Fear to Tread (dir. Charles Sturridge, 1991)

Howards End (dir. James Ivory, 1992)