

Reading *Hangover Square*: Ideology and Inversion in the Novels of Patrick Hamilton

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Abstract

The novelist Patrick Hamilton (1904-1962) is routinely portrayed as an author of bleak but comic tales of thwarted love and unfulfilled desire. His ear for the banalities of everyday pub talk and his ability to articulate the internal contortions of the self-deluded are much remarked upon. However, his Marxism, which was crucially important to Hamilton, especially during the period coinciding with the appearance of his most masterful work, is routinely dismissed, sidelined or simply ignored. This is a curious omission given the contemporary proclivity for reading things into, rather than 'out of', texts.

His one explicitly Marxist novel, 1939's Dystopian fable, *Impromptu in Moribundia* is used as a convenient target to attack the literary manifestation of an apparently naive, ill-informed and jejune Marxism. In it Hamilton uses a technique of 'inversion' (linguistic, ideological, scientific and social) to produce a far reaching critique of English society and bourgeois culture set in an explicitly public, Dystopian space. After this critically and commercially unsuccessful novel, Hamilton produced *Hangover Square* (1941) his most internal, sombre and pessimistic book. For many commentators it is his finest novel but one which is unconnected to its gauche predecessor.

This paper argues that *Hangover Square* uses the same technique of 'ideological inversion' (via the often criticised device of its chief character, George Harvey Bone, being prey to 'dead' moods during which the world is recast as unfamiliar) as found in *Impromptu in Moribundia*. However, the result in *Hangover Square* is the exploration of a private, Dystopian space dialectically linked to a description of a society heading towards the

inevitable outbreak of war. Focusing predominantly on *Hangover Square*, it is argued that the novel represents an accomplished application of dialectical analysis, Dystopian pessimism, and the explosive resolution of objective contradictions.

Hamilton Biography

The novelist and playwright Patrick Hamilton (1904-1962) is most well known for his plays *Rope* (1929) and *Gas Light* (1938) both of which were made into popular films. A constantly stuttering re-appreciation of Hamilton over the last ten years or so has also brought other works including the novel *Hangover Square* (1941) to wider public attention. Overall, however, he remains a little known and marginal figure in the history of British literature. Three full-length biographies, a handful of articles and a few theses in University departments comprise the secondary literature on this intriguing figure.

Space does not permit a detailed account of Hamilton's life. Three biographies exist and, whilst there is a good deal of repetition between them, each provides its own insights into Hamilton's character, habits and personal development, see B. Hamilton (1972), Jones (1991) and French (1993). It is worth noting that Hamilton's Edwardian family was literary and theatrically minded with both his bombastic father and protective mother being published authors of novels, as was his older brother and biographer Bruce. Out of this milieu Hamilton emerged as a well regarded, productive and wealthy author especially during the 1920s and 1930s. As such he combined popular melodramatic stage thrillers such as *Rope* (1929) and *Gas Light* (1938) with specific radio plays and novels. Some of his novels, such as the three collected together as *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky: a London Trilogy* (1935), were perceptive accounts of the alienation of life in the anonymous city. As a novelist, Hamilton is widely acknowledged to have reached his peak in the 1940s especially with the novels *Hangover Square* (1941) and *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947).

Hamilton's Marxism and its 'reading out'

His work during this period is, however, hard to fully grasp without an appreciation of Hamilton's conversion to Marxism. This conversion which occurred during the mid to late 1930s was partly triggered by his brother

Bruce's sympathy towards the Soviet Union. Bruce had stayed with an émigré family in Paris in 1933 and had later the same year gone to Leningrad and then Moscow where he lived for a while by illegal currency trading. Hamilton himself started to accumulate what would become a large Marxist library, chiefly, according to Bruce, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. However, he never joined any Communist party or really engaged in significant agitational activities.

His was an isolated Marxism and his fiction reflects this lack of contact with the proletariat especially in production. Indeed, his fictions tend to focus on the drifting, aimless and dissolute characters who inhabit a world of pubs, music halls, cafes, boarding houses and seaside resorts. His pub fiction tends to be centred around the Saloon Bar and Lounge rather than the Public Bar of the proletariat drinker who, when glimpsed, is often described in a disdainful manner. Hamilton's Marxism was, however, sincere and deeply felt though politically Stalinist through and through. Certainly, his level of delusion concerning the reality of the Soviet Union was reflective of many of those of similar social origin at this time.

However, it is not Hamilton's attitude towards Stalin and the Soviet Union that is of central concern here. Rather, it is argued that Hamilton's acquisition of key Marxist ideas of philosophical materialism, dialectical inquiry and the critique of bourgeois ideology all find strong expression in both *Impromptu in Moribundia* and *Hangover Square*. These two works can be seen as his attempt to bring such Marxian concerns into the fictional realm, not just in terms of subject matter but as part of the narrative structure of each novel as a whole. Though very different in terms of tone, content and mood, these two novels written close together share a remarkable similarity in terms of the application of Marxist ideas to the narrative form. However, before a consideration of that application is attempted, an analysis of the ways in which Hamilton's Marxism has been received by his various admirers, critics and biographers is in order.

Some commentaries regard Hamilton's Marxism as somehow insincere or a bourgeois dalliance. Others see it as intimately tied to other facets of his character. His brother, Bruce, for example saw it as one of a series of obsessions including an earlier one for Nietzsche

This enthusiasm must be seen as one of his many passionate quests for certainty and a rule of life. It is clear that he clung to Nietzsche's writings as a fortification for his sometimes frantic efforts to get his conduct under control (1972: 51).

McKenna, meanwhile, suggests that Hamilton's Marxism was intimately related to the alcoholism that was ultimately to lead him to a premature death from liver and kidney disease,

Primarily, like many (*soi-disant*) revolutionaries, he drank to get rid, temporarily of capitalism. And, as a good Marxist, he would have recognised his drinking as an imaginary resolution of a real contradiction (1994: ?).

The 'reading out' of Hamilton's Marxism starts with Bruce's dismissal. Today we are used to literary theory providing a justification for minimizing, ignoring or contesting the authorial voice. This is certainly the case with Hamilton; his Marxism is either played down, not mentioned at all, or rendered as insincere, dilettantish and of little interest to the study of his writing. What is interesting, however, is that the expunging of authorial authority is usually used as a justification for reading something into their texts, hidden imperialistic tendencies for example, while in the case of Hamilton it is used as a justification for 'reading out' his Marxism.

Critics and commentators often also conflate his Marxism with his support of Communism and Stalin/Kruschev in the USSR but these are not the same things. We know Hamilton had a naive adherence to the USSR and its defence (which in itself was not unusual given the time and place) but that does not mean his self-professed interest in Marxist philosophy is lacking subtlety, sophistication or insight; it may be but one cannot be read in from the other.

The most crude approach comes when Hamilton's Marxism is seen to be confined to his one novel, 1939's *Impromptu in Moribundia*, a not so subtle tactic but one often applied and spectacularly reinforced on occasion. For example, the recently screened documentary that accompanied the BBC television adaptation of *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* explicitly

referred to 1941's *Hangover Square* as Hamilton's 'next' novel after the 1934 novel *The Plains of Cement* (the third part of the *Twenty Thousand Streets...* trilogy).

Impromptu in Moribundia

According to one of Hamilton's biographers, *Impromptu in Moribundia*, 'From the perspective of the 1990s [it] looks hopelessly dated' (Jones 1991: 215) while, for another of his biographers the book represents a book 'so misconceived, in general and in detail, as to be almost beyond criticism' (French 1993: 154) and as a 'dismal Stalinist tract' (ibid: 230). His brother Bruce was also lukewarm about the book regarding it as being 'directed less against big impostors and falsities than trivial irritations' (B. Hamilton 1972: 86). That this fantasy originally did not sell well and remained out of print for a further sixty years could indeed be seen to attest to its contemporary irrelevance.

The book itself is a satirical fable and is often located within a tradition of fabulous satire that includes Swift and Samuel Butler and especially H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), and as a precursor to Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). It is noteworthy that as a Marxist Hamilton did not follow either his own usual realist mode of narrative nor the socialist realism which the Soviet Union encouraged its supporters to follow in painting and literature. As Jones observes, 'British literary Communists largely eschewed [this] bogus proletarianism and tedious worker-hymning in favour of more adventurous routes employing allegory and even surrealism' (Jones 1991: 215).

The nameless narrator of the book is transported by means of a vaguely described Wellsian device called the 'Asteradio' to a distant planet, Moribundia, in which the world-view of the English bourgeoisie is made real. It is a society in which characters concretise their class stereotypes at all levels and at all times. Drunken men, for example, are always upper class, wear evening dress, slur their speech, have red noses and are watched benignly by friendly policemen. Moreover,

All the old conflicts, as we know them, such as those between the financial and landed interests, the community and the individual,

the Church and the State, militarism and pacifism, politics and religion, science and religion, or if you like, materialism and idealism, were simply non-existent (P. Hamilton 1939/1999: 110).

Moribundia is the 'physical enactment of the stereotypes and myths of English middle-class culture and consciousness' (Widdowson 1999: xi). It is a land in which 'the ideals and ideas of our world, the striving and subconscious wishes of our time, the fictions and fragments of our imagination, are calm, cold, actualities' (P. Hamilton 1939/1999: 38).

Standing between the aristocratic ruling class and the indolent working class, the most pernicious class of all in Moribundia are the 'Little Men' of the middle class. These are the moral guardians of Moribundian society identically dressed in suits and bowler hats and carrying rolled umbrellas which are used, on occasion, as weapons of moral enforcement. This is the fate that befalls Hamilton's narrator. In a climactic scene, whose close affinities with a similar scene in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* are well documented by McKenna (1999), the narrator is chased and hounded out of Moribundia by them. Starting with a breach of class norms (the narrator hits a member of the Moribundian aristocracy in order to avoid a horse-whipping), a rapidly growing group of previously unseen 'Little Men' commence to follow the narrator. After a failure to remove his hat when the Moribundian National Anthem is being played, increasing numbers of 'Little Men' crowd, prod, poke and hit the narrator such that he is forced to flee for his life back to the 'Asteradio'. Unlike, the working classes, the 'Little Men' here revert to the character that Hamilton regards as reflecting their true class nature. The Moribundian view in which they are 'harmless, helpful, friendly, tolerant, duty-doing little business-men' (P. Hamilton 1939/1999: 182) gives way. In its place the narrator,

...saw cupidity, ignorance, complacency, meanness, ugliness, short-sightedness, cowardice, credulity, hysteria and, when the occasion called for it, as it did now, cruelty and blood-thirstiness. I saw the shrewd and despicable cash basis underlying that idiotic patriotism, and a deathly fear and hatred of innovation, of an overturning of their system, behind all their nauseatingly idealistic postures and utterances (ibid: 182).

As its name suggests 'Moribundia' is a stagnant society, one that is lacking vitality and possibly nearing its end. It is, thus, a reflection of Hamilton's view of England at this time (Widdowson 1978). The 'deathly fear and hatred of innovation' espoused by the affronted 'Little Men' runs to the heart of this Moribundian malaise which is self-consciously professed in the ideology of what the narrator terms 'Unchange'. Unchange is related to the ontological structuring of Moribundian society. Moreover, Hamilton's narrator uses clearly Marxist language in explaining this relationship.

According to the narrator, in our world things change and, ideas as a reflection of things also change. In Moribundia, however, ideas are isolated from things and in this vacuum they do not change. As a consequence, 'in a world in which things are the blind servitors of ideas, there can be no question of things ever changing' (*ibid*: 99). Indeed, in a series of critical passages concerning popular idealist accounts of science, which were proliferating in 1930s British society, Hamilton even describes Moribundian science itself in terms of 'Unchange'. Not only is science reconciled harmoniously with religion and 'finished' but matter itself has broken down not just into energy, but into 'morals'. The result is an anthropomorphised atomic structure of matter with different subatomic particles -militrons, scribitrons, neutrons etc- guaranteeing the integrity of Moribundian matter. These particles are the physical embodiment of Moribundian values such that the Moribundian view of the Universe is one in which its physical structure is founded on 'moral unanimity' rather than physical laws of nature.

For Moribundians this all goes to produce a situation in which their society 'was ideal because it could not change: it could not change because it was ideal' (P. Hamilton 1939/1999: 113). This perfection is another reason for the vilification in Moribundia of Marxists and Communists; because they preach a philosophy of change. Marxists wish 'to turn the whole of Moribundia upside down' (*ibid*: 99).

The technique of 'inversion' is used in the book to reflect back to us a society organised along the lines of capitalist and bourgeois ideology made concrete. This theme of inversion finds a more subtle yet more powerful expression in

Hamilton's later novel *Hangover Square* (1941) to which we now turn.

Hangover Square

Set against the backdrop of the days preceding Britain declaring war on Germany, the main character is George Harvey Bone, a lonely borderline alcoholic who suffers from a split personality. He is obsessed with gaining the affections of Netta, a failed actress and one of George's circle of "friends" with whom he drinks. Netta is repelled by George but being greedy and manipulative, she and a mutual acquaintance, Peter, shamelessly exploit George's advances to extract from him money and drink.

George suffers from 'dead moods' in which he is convinced he must kill Netta for the way she treats him. Upon recovering from these interludes, he cannot remember them. However outside these he embarks on several adventures, trying in vain to win Netta's affections, including a 'romantic' trip to Brighton which goes horribly wrong (Netta brings Peter and a previously unknown man with whom she has sex in the hotel room next to George's).

Apart from being a source of money and alcohol, Netta's other reason for continuing to associate with George is because of Johnnie. He is one of George's long-time friends who works for a theatrical agent, and Netta hopes that through him she will get to meet Eddie Carstairs, a powerful figure in the theatre. However in a final reversal of fortune it is George, not Netta, who ends up attending a party amongst the theatrical great and good whilst Netta is cast aside by Eddie who (unlike George) has immediately seen her for the unpleasant person she is. George suddenly realises what it is like to be surrounded by 'kind' people who are interested in him as a person rather than what he can provide.

This potentially promising turn of events in George's life is, however, dashed, when he suddenly clicks into a dead mood and resumes his murder plans. He executes his murder of Netta (and also of Peter, whom the narrative describes as a 'Fascist' moments before he is murdered) before escaping to Maidenhead. Throughout the novel Maidenhead represents for George a semi-

mythical new beginning, and representing a picture of traditional Englishness in contrast to the seaminess of Earl's Court. However in the closing pages of the novel the stark fallacy of that dream becomes apparent to George. It is the same as everywhere else. Now penniless, he gasses himself in a dingy Maidenhead boarding house (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hangover_Square).

Using the contrivance whereby the central character, Bone, is suffering from a form of schizophrenia, Hamilton produces a series of contrasting inversions of the world around him. The ability of Bone to distinguish what is real and what is an illusion, caused by attacks of his 'dead moods', becomes progressively less certain and eventually the 'alienated' view of the world becomes the rationally accepted one which disastrously guides the character's actions. The question is how to explain this inversion? There are a number of possibilities to explore and Earnshaw perceptively points out that the change in Bone's mental state is overdetermined in the book. Earnshaw argues that Bone's attitude towards, and consumption of, alcohol in the novel can account for his altered mental state without recourse to the 'schizophrenia' device; they both serve the same purpose. Perhaps, it could be argued that Hamilton's own feelings towards his prodigious, and often incapacitating, alcohol consumption prompted him to use an auxiliary device in the novel as a basis for Bone's 'split personality'.

However, there are at least two more possible readings of Bone's mental alterity worth considering. Firstly, a 'Gothic' reading in which Bone's affliction is regarded as a classic case of Gothic 'doubling and, secondly, an 'ideology as inversion' reading which draws upon Hamilton's Marxism and which ties *Hangover Square* intimately to *Impromptu in Moribundia*. Hence, Bone's 'dumb moods' are overdetermined and can be explained from a number of perspectives:

1. As the product of schizophrenia.
2. As the result of excessive alcohol consumption.
3. As an instance of the literary Gothic double.
4. In terms of a Marxist inspired and dialectical account of the individual in history and its ideological perversion.

The 'schizophrenia reading

This is, of course, the explanation proffered by Hamilton and one whose legitimacy is reinforced via Hamilton's intrusive narrator who provides a history of Bone's condition going back to childhood. Hamilton even offers a medical definition of the term from *Black's Medical Dictionary*. However, it is an explanation of Bone's affliction which finds little admiration or support from those who have commented on the novel. French (1993) regards it as a 'clumsy, unnecessary and unconvincing device... a literary mechanism rather than a medical condition' (167) while for Earnshaw (2001) it detracts from the power of Hamilton's depiction of Bone as addicted to alcohol, '...the novel could probably have worked just as well without the added weight of a mental illness: the schizophrenia functions within the novel as more extreme version of drunkeneess' (250). There is, then, a widespread feeling that the condition stands as a symbol for something else. This ambiguity is somewhat legitimised by the manner in which Hamilton treats the condition himself in the book. While in one of his letters to Bruce he opined that many criminals were 'sonambulists', he does not really explore Bone's condition in any detail. He describes its effects but there is no medical description either physical or mental. Indeed, the dictionary definition offered by Hamilton tends, itself, to undermine the condition as described in the book; 'SCHIZOPHRENIA:... a cleavage of the mental functions, associated with assumption by the affected person of a second personality'. Yet, Bone has no awareness of a second personality. He is aware of his 'dumb moods' but has no recollection of them. It is the unravelling of the demarcation of his two personalities, the gradual and growing awareness of each other and the descent into a state where the 'dumb' state dominates Bone's action that mark the climactic nature of the period during which the book's narrative unfolds.

'Biographical' reading - alcohol, women, accident etc

As with many authors, commentators often rely heavily on Hamilton's biography as the key to understanding his fiction. This is not without merit of course; the morose lonely drinker besotted by indifferent women, frequenter of prostitutes and so on. These biographical details are seen to be the key to many of his works from *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* to *Hangover Square*. There's an assumption of a kind of repetition of the same central male character (Hamilton) plus whatever woman he was obsessed

with at the time of writing. In *Hangover Square* Bone's dead moods are then interpreted as the working out of Hamilton's conscious or unconscious misogyny, cruelty and lust for violent revenge against ungrateful women. French (1993) tends to see the conduit between Hamilton's biography and his character's motivations and actions as especially direct, clear and accessible. This approach not only simplifies Hamilton's more complex relationships to both women in his life and his literary creations but also runs the risk of literary underdetermination.

A more nuanced approach argues that these character traits (both in relation to Hamilton himself and his characters) as being explicable on the basis of Hamilton's, and his characters', attitude to, and use of, alcohol. That Hamilton was an alcoholic and that many of his books are saturated with alcohol gives legitimacy to such an approach. Earnshaw (2001), for example, makes this explicit and argues that Hamilton, through Bone, depicts addiction (to Netta, to social drinking to the 'social scene') as a 'personal moral failing analogous to Britain's own moral shortcomings at Munich' (251). Bone's alcohol addiction allows, and explicitly in the novel accentuates, switches to his 'dumb moods'. Drunkenness also acts on the novel's other main characters in that it loosens their inhibitions and facilitates their Fascist and Nazi sympathies to escape. However, unlike these characters, Bone dislikes his own drinking and perceives it as the root cause of his problems and unhappiness. While arguing that the combination of schizophrenia and alcoholism overdetermines Bone's split personality, Earnshaw allows that,

...it may also be that schizophrenia is the novel's way of showing that drink leads to a mental state akin to schizophrenia, and that this is the psyche of a British nation that could countenance both the shame of Munich and the recklessness of war when it eventually came (2001: 254).

The 'Gothic' reading

Little has been made of the affinities between *Hangover Square* and the Gothic literary genre. This seems somewhat surprising as there are a number of superficial resonances, quite apart from considering the conceit of Bone's schizophrenia from the perspective of Gothic 'doubling'. For example, the

book has appeared in print with a number of different titles, the fullest one of which '*Hangover Square; or the Man with Two Minds, a Story of Darkest Earl's Court in the Year 1939*' certainly has a flavour of the Gothic about it. Moreover, the novel has both a theatrical and claustrophobic feel, much of the action feels contrived or staged (and we are left in no doubt from the first chapter as to the outcome of the story; nonetheless the tension is maintained across one or repeated readings) and there is no real sense of London as a large, expansive city, rather, characters are cocooned -in taxis, rooms, pubs, their own thoughts- in a kind of claustrophobic, Gothic melodrama. The use of light and dark both literally and figuratively features strongly in the book, another commonplace Gothic trope.

None of this should be surprising given Hamilton's credentials and success as a playwright. Certainly *Rope* has a strong flavour of the 'Grand Guignol' while *Gas Light* is easy to apprehend as an out and out Gothic thriller. Moreover, before commencing upon a career as a writer, Hamilton worked in repertory theatre at the Grand Theatre, Brighton for an actor-manager who had made a success of staging plays including 'Dracula', 'Jack the Ripper' and 'Sweeney Todd'. That Hamilton learnt much of the stagecraft of theatre during this period is often reaffirmed, he may also have recognised the possibilities of Gothic melodrama during this formative period.

Certainly, *Hangover Square* reflects the 'schism' of the modern city and urban life, especially London life, that is redolent of the Gothic genre. And, while the Gothic and the double are not synonymous, 'doubling' is one common theme within Gothic fiction. As Drden argues 'Gothic fiction is often a literature of transformations where identity is unstable and sanity a debatable state of being' (2003: 19), and, 'The emotion versus reason opposition of the Gothic is present throughout, not least in the 'irrational' division of an individual into two distinct entities' (2003: 31). In this regard, Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 1886, comes closest as the paradigm of Gothic explanation for *Hangover Square*. Certainly, Hamilton knew of the book from his theatrical days and *Hangover Square* uses Bone's divided self as an expression of the social fragmentation (pro and anti-war, pro and anti-Nazi, etc) as Stevenson had done with 'Jekyll and Hyde'. There are also one or two superficial resemblances, for example, after drowning Netta, Bone murders Peter with his golf club in a manner

reminiscent of Hyde's murder of Sir Danvers Carew with his cane even down to Peter adopting an expression of surprised indignation similar to the one seen by a witness on the face of Sir Danvers Carew as he is struck.

The 'inversion' reading

This overdetermined novel can also be interpreted from the perspective of ideology, inversion and alienation, ideas, it is argued, that were previously worked out in *Impromptu in Moribundia*. This is an interpretation that could take in Bone's schizophrenia as a pathology that reflects wider social conditions, its inverted arrangement of material forces and its ideological worldview (which was clearly being pushed to breaking point by the coming war).

Moreover, while those who see *Hangover Square* as a crime novel or murder mystery, focus on the explosive violence of Netta's murder as a misogynistic and brutal act, from the inversion perspective it can be seen as the explosive overcoming of a powerful contradiction, a tragic one based on a alienated comprehension of the contradiction in question. Bone is himself a personification of wider social forces and so too are Netta, the passive Fascist fellow traveller and Peter, the active Fascist .

Larrain (1970) sets out the pertinent issues relating to the concept of ideology

On the one hand, ideology may be conceived in eminently negative terms as a critical concept which means a form of false consciousness or necessary deception which somehow distorts men's understanding of social reality: the cognitive value of ideas affected by ideology is called into question. On the other hand, the concept of ideology may be conceived in positive terms as the expression of the world-view of a class...Secondly, the question can be raised as to whether ideology has an eminently subjective and psychological character or is, on the contrary, entirely dependent upon objective factors. If subjective, ideology is conceived of as a deformation of consciousness, which somehow is unable to grasp reality as it is. If objective, ideology appears as a deception induced by reality itself: it is not the subject that distorts reality

but reality itself which deceives the subject. While the subjective view emphasizes the role of individuals, classes and parties in the production of ideology, the objective view sees ideology as impregnating the basis structure of society (1979: 14-15).

An initial reaction to the above definition would be to argue that Bone in *Hangover Square* can be seen to be suffering from such a mental pathology and Hamilton would not be the first Marxist to suggest that conditions such as schizophrenia are manifestations of 'false consciousness' and are the direct result of the operations of capitalism on the mind. Ideology here is of the subjective, individual kind. In *Impromptu in Moribundia* the second, positive conception is clearly to the fore. Moribundia is saturated objectively with this kind of ideology. In neither case, however, especially from a Marxist conception, is ideology seen to be independent of material conditions. In both *Hangover Square* and *Impromptu in Moribundia* Hamilton links the ideological distortion of events to the material conditions of life. Marx comments that

the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness'(1970: 181).

Hamilton was clearly aware of this conception of Marx as he directly and explicitly inverts it in *Impromptu in Moribundia*

Moribundia is the land in which ideals and ideas are made concrete; that is to say, ideas are not brought into being by things; on the contrary, things are brought into being by ideas...Morals and legislation, for instance, in Moribundia, are not the result of economic and social facts; economic and social facts are the result of morals and legislation. Mind precedes matter; the idea comes first and the reality is made to obey it (P. Hamilton 1939/1999: 99).

Moribundia is significant because, while there is clearly the prospect of

internal dissent, tension and antagonism, the society as a whole is not contradictory in the way that capitalist society is regarded to be by Marxists. It is not simply the Moribundian bourgeois worldview of 'unchange' that predominates rather, the whole of society itself agrees with and corresponds to this ideology. Ideas and material conditions largely coincide such that the Moribundian bourgeois ideology of 'unchange' is not ideology in the strict sense of distortion or inversion. Rather, it is science itself and Hamilton makes Moribundian science the foundation of this broader set of ideas.

Larrain continues

Marx does not really analyse the relationship which exists between the inversion of real relations and the fact of their being contradictory. There is no doubt that inversion and contradiction are closely related. Yet there seems to be no relationship of causality between them. In principle there is no compelling reason why the inversion of real relations should determine there being contradictory or why contradictory relations should determine there being inverted (1979: 222).

In *Impromptu in Moribundia* the relations are both inverted and contradictory while in *Hangover Square* the contradiction exists between the 'real' and the 'inverted' relations.

Furthermore,

As conditions emerge and reach consciousness before men can solve them in practice, they are given distorted solutions in the mind...Ideology is, therefore, a solution in the mind to the contradictions which cannot be solved in practice (1979: 46).

In *Hangover Square*, Bone is prey to just such ideological distortions, he imagines a course of action that he would never consider in his non-dead moods. The tragedy occurs when the ideological worldview and its promised solution comes to overwhelm his existence and assume the character of an authentic viewpoint. Ideology wins as the power of the imaginary solution comes to dominate his actions. To this extent his schizophrenia can be seen as

a vehicle by which Hamilton transports the subconscious, ideological solution to the world of action.

Furthermore, Larrain argues that '...ideology is neither a mere subjective creation of the subject's imagination, nor a mere imposition of reality upon the subject's passive consciousness' (1979: 60). Bone's schizophrenia operates in this manner; he is not imagining the persecution that he suffers at the hands of Netta and her fascist cronies. His conscious self certainly denies this as his many internal dialogues of self-deception illustrate yet his far from passive consciousness, split into two as it is, constantly struggles against the inert acceptance of reality.

As a Marxist, Hamilton was aware that the prescribed antidote to ideology was revolutionary action and *Hangover Square* can be read as containing the revolutionary overcoming of contradiction in two senses. Firstly, the background context of the approaching war clearly runs from distant glimmer of unrest through increasingly nervy anticipation of conflagration to a feeling of historical necessity and inevitability. Likewise, in his 'dead' moods Bone moves from a distant, confused yet persistent glimpse of the requirement to kill Netta through an increasingly unrelenting though still mystified desire to do so until it becomes a similarly enlightened inevitability and necessity. Bone's murder of Netta could, then, distasteful though it is, be interpreted as the exercise of a kind of revolutionary practice. As Marx argued 'Once the interconnection is grasped, all theoretical belief in the permanent necessity of existing conditions collapses before their collapse in practice' (Marx quoted in Larraine 1979: 61).

Of course, having the force which drives this murder emanate in Bone's unconscious 'dead' moods allows Hamilton to somewhat absolve himself and his character from direct condemnation. We are supposed to feel sympathy for Bone as he is not consciously aware of what he is doing and, moreover, in his fully conscious state would not dream of acting this way. Lovesick, resigned and docile, Bone would seem to be condemned to endlessly repeat the same mistakes were it not for this contradictory energy that originates in Bone's 'other' self. It is hard to see how Hamilton could have generated the sympathy for Bone that many readers share were it not for the use of some such device. Bone's schizophrenia then could be seen as a contrivance,

clumsy in some respects, ingenious in others, by which both a compassionate depiction of Bone and ideas of ideological inversion, contradiction and resolution could be developed by Hamilton.

The resolution of explosive contradictions was a pressing matter for Hamilton in *Hangover Square*, after all the coming war promised the defeat of Fascism, if not the victory of Marxism. Certainly, Hamilton hoped and initially felt that there would be a sweeping away of all that he saw as vile, a fresh beginning. However the book is coloured by Hamilton's knowledge of the prosecution of the war up until the book was finished. *Hangover Square* opens on Christmas Day 1938 and closes as the war starts, however, it was started almost exactly a year after the opening of the novel and finished in early-mid 1941. The characters in *Hangover Square* do not know for sure that war is coming although it appears increasingly apparent. But Hamilton knows that war is coming to these characters and it is his narrator's voice that builds up in the reader the sense of inevitability. There is a tension between the characters views concerning the approaching war and Hamilton's knowledge of its 'inevitability'. Indeed, we could almost say that while in his dead moods Bone becomes at one with Hamilton the misogynist and anti-fascist Marxist. Action for Bone in his dead moods becomes inevitable, a historical force which he cannot evade just as Hamilton when writing the book knows that war was coming and did come to these characters.

There is a further sense in which Hamilton's knowledge of the opening years of the war saturates the feel of *Hangover Square*. Practically welcoming the war as a force which would result in the transformation of society Hamilton had become thoroughly downhearted within a couple of years of its start and for several reasons. Firstly, Hamilton does exceedingly well to keep out of the narrative his sense of frustration and distaste for the results of war on the everyday social fabric; the rationing, strike waves, petty and serious crime and so on. This drove him crazy as his letters to Bruce reveal. However, in the novel this knowledge is not allowed to seep back, indeed, there is a certain sanguineness concerning the shadow of war. Hamilton would give unbridled expression to these feelings in his next novel *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947) set after the American entry into the war and written between 1942 and 1946. More importantly as a Marxist, Hamilton the

author had regarded with distaste the events of Munich in September 1938 and had seen the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939. The knowledge of these events and their disappointment to Hamilton do pervade the book's build-up to war atmosphere, explicitly in the case of Munich, less so in the case of the Nazi-Soviet pact but perhaps more powerfully as was the case for many Marxist writers. The disappointment, frustration and despair was overwhelming for many Communists. Orwell scathingly captured something of this

Consider, for example, the various attitudes, completely incompatible with one another, which an English Communist or 'fellow-traveler' has had to adopt toward the war between Britain and Germany. For years before September, 1939, he was expected to be in a continuous stew about 'the horrors of Nazism' and to twist everything he wrote into a denunciation of Hitler: after September, 1939, for twenty months, he had to believe that Germany was more sinned against than sinning, and the word 'Nazi', at least as far as print went, had to drop right out of his vocabulary (Orwell 1946/2008: 32).

The sense of hopeless inevitability that pervades much of *Hangover Square* resonates with Hamilton's own feelings. Of course, the characters do not express this as explicitly as Hamilton's knowledge of the actual prosecution of the war could have licensed. Only Bone, with the special access his 'dumb' moods allow to a as yet unknown but inevitable future, hints at this. The book was finished in early to mid 1941, a couple of months before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, another mind-boggling inversion for many Marxists and Communists. Orwell continues

Immediately after hearing the 8 o'clock news bulletin on the morning of June 22, 1941, he had to start believing once again that Nazism was the most hideous evil the world had ever seen. Now, it is easy for the politician to make such changes: for a writer the case is somewhat different. If he is to switch his allegiance at exactly the right moment, he must either tell lies about his subjective feelings, or else suppress them altogether (1946/2008: 32).

It may well be the case that the feelings provoked by these events had a profound effect on Hamilton. Certainly he laboured to produce his next novel *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947) and in it he gives full vent to his feelings concerning both the effects of the war on daily life and his anti-Fascism. The war presented in this post-War novel is, however, different; clear cut, obvious, more of an inconvenience than epoch changing upheaval.

In terms of the Utopian aspect of the two books discussed here, we can also see a change which resonates with Orwell's charge. *Impromptu in Moribundia* is not a straightforward critique of Utopia but, rather, the depiction of a Dystopia. Hamilton sets up capitalist society of the 1930s as a Utopia which slowly unravels into the Dystopia that he believed it to actually be. There is a sense in which the book captures both Hamilton's personal and political hope for, and belief in, the radical transformation of society. Only two years later this Utopian sensibility has been transformed into an anti-Utopian sensibility. *Hangover Square* is saturated with Hamilton's despondency and pessimism concerning the possibilities of such radical societal and personal transformation; war comes, Bone kills others and himself, Hamilton struggles to write afterwards, becomes increasingly dependent on alcohol and adopts a Tory outlook on life.

Conclusion

It would be misplaced to argue that either *Impromptu in Moribundia* or *Hangover Square* are somehow simply conscious literary applications of Hamilton's Marxism. It is more complicated than that. Hamilton must have been attracted to something in Marxism that resonated with views he already held. After all he took his Marxism seriously; it may have worked as an inspiration and spur to certain literary devices worked out first in *Impromptu in Moribundia* and then in *Hangover Square*. In both novels his approach to ideology as inversion is both clumsy and subtle. In *Impromptu in Moribundia* it is generally crude while being subtle in certain areas, for example, his discussion of the state of physics. In *Hangover Square* it is generally subtle but with some crudity, for example, Bone's 'schizophrenia' and Netta's murder as the necessary overcoming of the 'historical' contradiction of his condition.

In one sense, Marxism certainly already contained something of appeal to Hamilton, its opposition to Fascism for one thing and Hamilton's anti-Fascism predates his adoption of Marxism, especially when rendered in terms of his opposition to domestic tyranny. In Marxism he found both an analysis of Fascism and the justification for supporting its opposition. His enthusiasm for his friendship with Claud Cockburn can be seen in this light. Cockburn had been in Spain during the Civil War and in him Hamilton found both Marxism and active anti-Fascism together (as well as drinker, convivial, embellisher and anti-authoritarian rabble-rouser and one of the few defenders of Hamilton's Marxism).

In such an overdetermined novel as *Hangover Square* it is difficult to really say how one should 'read' Bone's 'schizophrenia'. The Gothic interpretation, though it has not been applied before, seems to sit well with the novel's subject, content and structure. It deserves further attention. Given the affinities between the Gothic and parts of Marx's oeuvre, much of which Hamilton was thoroughly familiar with, it may be that 'Gothic-Marxism' would best describe the book.

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