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Writing the 1980s

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THE POLITICAL IMAGINATION
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ABSTRACT

The connection between imaginative writing and the political has always been contentious, and whilst many critics see literature as the creation of contemporary mythologies by which we negotiate our lived experience there are others who refute such a politicisation in favour of the singular aesthetic experience. This thesis will argue that the literary and the political are immutably bound in an undeniable relationship: a relationship which encompasses the construction of sexual, cultural and racial identities, questions of censorship and the concept of freedom and the mutual dependence of the individual subject and society.

Like most epochs, the 1980s both invites and repels a tendency to organise its events into a single, understandable and easily internalised diachronic order, an order that will mask or efface the complex contradictions and multiplicity of possibilities that emerge. Through a series of close readings of arbitrarily selected literary and popular fictions, the thesis conducts an examination of the tensions, issues, conflicts and theoretical perspectives of this divisive decade.

This project, however, is not just an attempt to chronicle a vast and fertile period of literature. It seeks to define the political imagination, to counteract the Bloomian claims that literature is a private space of imaginative production and passive aesthetic reflection, insisting that the political imagination is an inexorable part of social and cultural life which can neither be denied nor appropriated by a singular agenda or master code.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The connection between imaginative writing and the political has always been contentious, and whilst many critics see literature as the creation of contemporary mythologies by which we negotiate our lived experience (Doyle 1989; Bromley 1988; Bennett 1990 & O'Hara 1990), there are others who refute such a politicisation in favour of the singular aesthetic experience (Fish 1996; Bloom 1994): all of which seems to confirm that "Literature has always been uneasy about politics, while British political culture has generally been suspicious of Imaginative writing" (Croft 1990 p.340). Yet despite this suspicion and uneasiness, the literary and the political are immutably bound in an undeniable relationship: a relationship which encompasses the construction of sexual, cultural and racial identities, questions of censorship, the concept of freedom and the mutual dependence of the individual subject and society.

Although there will be reference to other literary forms, I will be focusing primarily upon the novel which, it has been argued, provides "a cross-roads between the individual and collective destinies of men and women" (Fuentes 1992 p.245). The novel, in other words, is frequently critical, often contentious and always political - even if unconsciously so. Taking as its working hypothesis, the claim that "politics and literature, like sport and politics, do mix, are inextricably mixed, and that that mixture has consequences" (Rushdie 1992 p.100) this project seeks, through readings of both 'literary' and 'popular' texts of the 1980s, to explore the nature and implications of the 'political imagination'.

There are several important reasons why an investigation into the political imagination coupled with a detailed study of 1980s literature will prove

valuable: first, if the links between the academies and the reading public are to be re-established, then the study of contemporary literature approached from a relatively non-partisan theoretical methodology which eschews the false dichotomy of theory and criticism is a matter of urgency;[1] second, it was a period in which a series of social and economic crises signalled the end of consensus politics thus creating a significant shift towards the right; third, political awareness was heightened, both nationally and internationally, as Cold War politics intensified and the prospect of nuclear engagements became thinkable; fourth, it was a period of immense social and cultural change with distinctions between the private and public spheres collapsing as writers struggled for new modes of representation. Finally, although the 80s signified a significant hegemonic shift in social, political and cultural spheres, there are relatively few comprehensive studies and surveys of the literary production of this era.

Period studies are fraught with difficulties of their own. Although it is sometimes useful as a pedagogic strategy, literature cannot be neatly isolated and divided into periods for several reasons. Most writers, for instance, are inconvenient creatures who not only write for and against each other but, in their quest for as wide a readership as possible, they perversely continue writing even when the 'movement' or school they belonged to has had its day in the sun. Furthermore, inter-textual relations bind works from different periods and it is frequently difficult and counter-productive to try and isolate them. One could also point to the fact that it is only possible to discern and evaluate major trends or contributions with the benefit of hindsight. Works are constantly being rediscovered and revalued by readers and critics and, correlatively, other texts that were regarded as important no longer address the concerns and interests of contemporary readers. Thus, literature exists in a state of constant flux and cannot be frozen to satisfy a desire for literary cartography or a sense of order.

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Like the 1930s, the 1980s appears to be an easily containable period which begins with the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and ends with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 'New World Order' promised by George Bush in 1990. Yet, beneath the surface of the relatively self-defining 80s, lines of continuity and ruptures from previous historical epochs (the Victorian discourse of Englishness, the failure of the post-war consensus, echoes of the 30s, etc.), disturb the seemingly clear waters.

Period studies also raise the problems of canonicity: which texts best represent the era under scrutiny? The texts selected, whether wittingly or not, will automatically frame the ideological agenda of the study to such an extent that only a complete, all-inclusive survey of the texts produced in a specific period could possibly claim impartiality. Although a complete review of both literary and popular texts during the 1980s would undoubtedly be advantageous, I have chosen to adopt a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to the fiction for three important reasons: first, the physical constraints of this project would allow only a cursory glance at the texts considered, second I believe that various detailed textual analysis of some texts is as valuable as a brief but comprehensive survey of many. Finally such an approach, if adopted, would limit the critical engagement between literature and politics which is of utmost importance. The danger of the qualitative approach, however, is that the very act of selection requires a series of value judgements that could undercut the nature of the project. In an attempt to circumvent such bias, so that the primary goal of presenting a representative view of the era was achieved, a random element was introduced and many of the texts were chosen by colleagues, friends and family members whose only guidelines were to choose novels published in the period which were written by British or Commonwealth writers. Furthermore, this project is not just an attempt to chronicle a vast and

fertile period of literature. Its underlying priority is to counteract claims that literature is a private space of imaginative production and passive aesthetic reflection by defining the political imagination as an inexorable part of social and cultural life.

In Chapter 1 I will begin by looking at three important and connected areas: the limits of authority, the importance of the imaginative, and the difference between political writing and writing politically. Having established this broad theoretical framework, subsequent chapters will pay close attention to a variety of texts, investigating areas for self and social construction. Chapter 2, drawing upon psychoanalytical theory will examine how the human subject is constructed. In Chapter 3 I shall discuss how gender roles are constructed and represented. Chapter 4 offers a brief summary of the social and political climate of Britain in the 1980s and shows how, in a time when the political opposition was demoralised, uncertain and unstable, the literary world offered the most effective and lasting opposition to the ideals and aims of Thatcherism. Continuing from this discussion, Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the concepts of time and history. Chapter 7 looks closely at the re-emergence of the condition-of-England novel and how this was represented from the centre and the margins. The thesis will conclude by discussing the 80s in retrospect and, through a discussion of The Satanic Verses (1988) and the "Rushdie Affair", show how literature and politics connect in a meaningful and important dialogue as the world and the text are constructed within the matrix of concerns that connect self and society.

1 - LITERATURE & THE 'POLITICAL' IMAGINATION

The 1980s were a complex and contradictory decade. Politically, the forces of conservatism swung towards an extreme pole of neo-liberalism whilst the Left found itself either as a force of conservatism locked in a struggle to preserve what remained of post-war consensus politics, or embroiled in irrelevant ideological debates regarding its own construction and purpose. The live broadcasting of parliament, first by radio and then by television, served to widen the gap between the public and the political parties. With the aura of mystique shattered as their 'celebrity status' increased, politicians became increasingly vulnerable to a journalistic interest regarding their private lives, a scrutiny that was normally reserved for musicians, movie stars and actors in popular soaps.

Although church attendances dwindled, religion became increasingly politicised with members of the traditionally conservative Anglican Church being denounced as Marxists as they allied themselves with populist causes. New, extreme strains of religious fundamentalism, both Islamic and Christian emerged: the former deposing the Shah of Iran whilst the latter played a major role in electing Ronald Reagan, a former B list actor, to the White House. The election of Reagan and Mrs. Thatcher, coupled with the Soviet expansion into Afghanistan escalated the Cold War creating a sense of international unease and military expansion unseen since the Cuba missile crisis. Yet, by the end of the decade, the Berlin Wall was down, the Soviet Union was dismantled from within and the coalition of forces from within the United Nations against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait seemed to herald a 'New World Order'.

In the field of culture, popular music became increasingly heterogeneous with no definitive sound or direction, the film industry, despite competition from the VCR boom, enjoyed a brief resurgence and the "novel was sexy again, its works increasingly offering a street-wise portrait of changing and divisive times, or providing an escape, into the historical past or to other countries, where the present did not oppress" (Bradbury 1994 p.403). The 80s, in short, were a site of constant conflict and negotiation, a decade in which the established orders and paradigms of authority were subjected to a new, sceptical scrutiny. The traditional boundaries of nation were stretched by moves towards an increasing globalisation, whilst simultaneously being forced to retract by pressures of localisation and regionalism. This culture of uncertainty, and the profound structural crisis within the field of legitimation, created a struggle for identity, for recognition socially, politically and personally: a struggle that crossed and collapsed the boundaries of public and private spheres. It is this conflict which engages and activates the political imagination.

A term such as the 'political imagination' almost immediately creates problems. Before the phrase has acquired any currency whatsoever, it deconstructs and devalues itself. It could, after all, be argued, that if there is such an animal as the 'political imagination' then there must always already be a non-political, or to be more precise, an *apolitical* imagination. Thus, just as the 'political imagination' concerns itself with society, culture and the various ideological problematics concerning authors, readers and critics, the apolitical imagination concerns itself with private contemplation, with escapism and aesthetic appreciation where a thing of beauty remains a joy forever. Throughout the 80s this defence of literature as an exclusively private space found its most vocal advocate in Harold Bloom, culminating in his polemical and popular defence of the canon.

Unlike many of his conservative contemporaries, Bloom's defence of the canon does not rest upon the traditional idea that these works can assist in determining morality and ethical responsibility. The value of the canon, he asserts, is located exclusively within the individual reader: canonical writers help us to speak directly to ourselves The centre of the canon, Bloom asserts, is Shakespeare, an artist whose insight into the human condition and conceptual knowledge exceeds any ontological or epistemological theory that has come after him. The notion that Shakespeare somehow prefigures every philosophical, linguistic psychological and political theory available to us is not unknown. Eagleton, for instance, makes a similar point:

> Though conclusive evidence is hard to come by, it is difficult to
> read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly
> familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud,
> Wittgenstein and Derrida.
> (Eagleton 1993 p.ix-x)

The problem with Bloom is that, unlike Eagleton, he displays no sense of playfulness or irony: he actually seems to believe in Shakespeare's supernatural prescience and, through a series of evasions and pronouncements based upon the personal authority of a "lifetime's reading", he encourages his readers to accept this view unproblematically. Shakespeare's centrality is both self-evident and self-affirming and, to deny this genius who transcends every discourse, is not only to deny the existence of the canon but also to deny ourselves. Thus, like the religious dogmatist who insists that "God is, was and always shall be", Bloom offers no argument or theory to deal with the question of how a poet and playwright from the Renaissance can provide an encyclopaedia of human thought and knowledge for the future centuries and beyond.

In reality, such a position is not only objectionable, it is also ludicrous. If we discount the idea that the birth of Shakespeare was the messiah's second coming, then the most logical answer to Shakespeare's centrality and

immediacy is not that his works are overflowing with meaning, but rather that they have been rendered meaning*less*. This is not to say that they mean nothing at all, but rather to insist that they have been appropriated and misappropriated so many times, for so many different reasons, that any specific ideological or cultural context has become subtracted or obscured, thus rendering them immensely adaptable to all situations. Context, in other words, determines meaning and it is this lack of concrete contextual reference that allows the myth of Shakespeare's transcendence to flourish. (Holderness 1988 p.13)

Drawing upon an enormous reservoir of myth, history and folk tale, Shakespeare successfully appropriated, presented and most importantly *confirmed* the commonplace notions of what was natural and desirable. To understand Shakespeare is to understand the time, the cultural moment and social forces that not only produced, but also value him. This course of action is something Bloom cannot do, because "to challenge the timelessness of the plays is at once to call into question the whole ideology in which they are so deeply embedded" (Margolies 1988 p.51), and ideological discussions have no place within Boom's vision of literary studies. The assumption that writing and reading are solitary acts completely divorced from the praxis of life is Bloom's initial leap of faith, it is the foundation for his theoretical work. To admit a social dimension to the production and reception of literature is, for him, an act of unspeakable heresy.

For Bloom, the meaning of every poem is a precursor text. Writers must free themselves from their poetic precursors through an act of creative *misprision*. In other words, the would-be strong or great poet suffers from an acute anxiety regarding their ability to force open the canon and can only make way for him or herself by revising the precursor poem in such a way that it corrects, amends, improves or offers a significant variation upon it. Although it is frequently

misunderstood as a form of Oedipal rivalry between writers, Bloom insists that his theory is based upon texts rather than personalities:

> The anxiety of influence is not an anxiety about the father, real or literary, but an anxiety achieved by and in the poem, novel or play. Any strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts ... Poems, stories, novels, plays come into being as a response to prior poems, stories, novels and plays, and that response depends upon acts of reading and interpretation by the later writers, acts that are identical with the new works.[2]
> (Bloom 1995 pp.8-9)

The basic idea that each text is bound up in a complex network of ultimately untraceable intertextual relations is, in itself, easily understood and relatively uncontroversial. What Bloom attempts to do, however, is to give this idea a dramatic twist and, wherever possible, he isolates a specific poem, play or story as the focal point of anxiety: Wordsworth, for instance, did not want to write The Prelude (1995), he wanted to write Paradise Lost (2003) and The Prelude is a partially successful attempt to appropriate this poem for himself. Whereas most accounts of intertextuality focus upon a vast array of texts, an encyclopaedia of cultural references and a community of writing, Bloom seeks to individualise the process by reducing the relationships to a personal one-to-one basis. This subtle move not only creates an uneven playing surface which allows him to discriminate between texts easily, it also isolates acts of literary production and reception into an internalised, individualistic conflict. Within this highly personalised system, history, politics, social and inter-personal relations are almost completely erased, and the vacuum is then filled with the idea of the agonistic contest between the poem and the precursor text, the writer and his or her predecessor, the reader and the writer. A potential problem with this approach is that there are many cases in which the writer's identification with political causes is so strong that their work is indissociably bound up with their lives. Bloom, however, attempts to side-step this issue by insisting that writing determines one's political convictions and there is no cause the great

writer will not betray, no ideology or belief they will not forsake, if such activities or philosophies prove to be real or potential impediments to the creative process.[3]

If Bloom's vision of a great writer is an anti-social, cynical, narcissist revelling in his or her solipsistic glory, then the individualised and grossly isolated reader who "does not read for easy pleasure or to expiate social guilt, but to enlarge a solitary existence" (Bloom 1995 p.518) is the perfect companion for them as we shall see when we examine Bloom's hermeneutics. The sole criterion for judging a text (and this idea of neo-biblical judgement dominates Bloom's writing) is aesthetic value. The aesthetic, Bloom tells us, is "an individual rather than a societal concern" (Bloom 1995 p.16) and is validated through the authority of personal experience rather than through the discourses of pseudo-sciences or shamanism. All that matters are the chosen texts and those unique individuals, living in perfect isolation, who can produce or appreciate literature in all of its splendour. Whilst others might find such hysterical elitism embarrassing or objectionable, Bloom revels in this distinction, seeing it as a liberating mark of originality:

> To be a reader is to be uncommon. Reading is a frightfully elitist
> activity. It always has been and it always will be ... Literature
> does not make us better, it does not make us worse ... it cannot
> authentically touch us at all unless we begin by being very greatly
> gifted.
> (Bloom 1987 p.58)

Lawson (1995) suggests that The Western Canon, (1995) "is the literary critical equivalent of the Michael Douglas movie Falling Down: the howl of a man pushed too far" (Lawson 1995) and the analogy is an appropriate one. Like the Douglas character (who is known only by his car number plate D-FENS), Professor Bloom is unable to accept the sterility of his agenda, and his inability to recognise that, to engage in any meaningful dialogue, one must hear as well

as speak leads to a sense of literary fundamentalism and paranoia reminiscent of the Leavises towards the end of their careers: the world is neatly divided between those who are for him or against him: those who are right and those who are wrong; those who are literary critics and thereby able to recognise and confront greatness and those who are merely cultural theorists so intimidated by the prospect of greatness that they resent the possibility of its existence and reduce everything to ideological over-determination.

There is another striking similarity between the outraged Bloom and Douglas' portrayal of D-FENS. Douglas engages our sympathy as a man who is understandably overtaken by rage and violence when confronted with the collective insanity of 'real life', and a similar movement is detectable within Bloom who not only seems to find himself "surrounded by professors of hip-hop; by clones of Gallic-Germanic theory; by multi-culturalists unlimited" but is also forced to concede that "that the Balkanisation of literary studies is irreversible." (Bloom 1995 p.517). Like D-FENS, Bloom has no concrete answers and no alternative propositions, merely a constant feeling of betrayal, wondering how he has become "the bad guy" whilst he obsessively attempts to fold time back on itself, to create a small sphere of influence and stability that cannot be touched by reality. With D-FENS it is the idea of reconciliation with wife and family that spurs him on towards the tragic resolution, with Bloom it is those 'gifted individuals' relatively unsullied by "the School of Resentment" that he hopes to reach by increasing the stakes, escalating the violence and destroying the opposition. Fuelled by the old maxim that the strongest form of defence is attack, Bloom attacks mercilessly, hailing literary criticism as "an ancient art" that is being destroyed by the cancerous growth of cultural criticism, which is little more than "another dismal social science".[4]

Bloom's insistence that the only relation to great texts worth bothering with is their relation to other great texts fails on several levels. To begin with, he is incorrect in his assumption that there is no social aspect to aesthetic reception. To be effective, aesthetic judgement demands consensus, and any appeal to consensus automatically becomes a societal concern. Bennett (1990), for instance, reveals how the universalism of aesthetic discourses is dependent upon the presupposition of a transcendental valuing subject, an existing body of knowledge and an artistic public sphere to provide an object of contemplation. Thus, he argues, although assumption of disinterestedness is an *a priori* condition of universal judgement and taste, such disinterestedness is based upon an idea, or to be more specific, an *ideology* of a common valuing subject, and those who dispute such an ideology, or fail to conform to its judgements, must be persuaded or penalised (Bennett 1990 p.165). Like a stage magician seeking to make an elephant disappear with the aid of mirrors and misdirection, Professor Bloom blatantly ignores such arguments and forces his readers to focus upon the vast display of texts at his disposal. These works exist, he tells us, and because these are the texts that have endured the ravages of time, they are the only authority we should ever need or want. Whilst certain texts currently being championed enjoy a brief and temporary popularity they will undoubtedly fail the ancient test of canonisation, which is compulsion. The canonical work, unlike the politically correct text, exerts an unbearable, almost supernatural influence that draws readers to it, and "unless it demands rereading, the work does not qualify" (Bloom 1995 p.30).

This assumption, whilst superficially compelling, is a facile argument. Bloom is not the only person who has spent a lifetime reading. Many of the critics he castigates have equally impressive credentials and his "ancient claim for canonicity" can easily be dispelled by anyone who cares to study the contents of their bookshelves. For instance, I am aware of one woman who, for as long as I

have known her, reads and re-reads Catherine Cookson's novel <u>The Dwelling</u>
<u>Place</u> (1971) and yet it is unlikely that anyone will bestow canonicity upon this
text. Similarly, amongst the books that I have returned to for several years are
<u>Macbeth</u> (1999), <u>Heart of Darkness</u> (1998), <u>London Fields</u> (1989), <u>The</u>
<u>Handmaid's Tale</u> (1985), <u>Midnight's Children</u> (1982) all of which have some
claim towards canonical status, but I also find myself returning to texts such as
<u>The Godfather</u> (1969) and the thrillers of Robert Ludlum. The area of
commonality indicated by these texts has little to do with greatness, but rather a
fascination with power, power-relations and the oppressive abuse of authority: a
pre-occupation that predetermines not only my reading, but also any product of
that reading.

Another feature of those texts, and there is undoubtedly a strong correlation
between the two, is that the works which hold the greatest fascination for me are
predominantly written by male authors. A logical conclusion therefore, is that in
a subtle act of psychic and political transference, I promote my sense of self and
purpose onto the texts that I support and oppose. Whilst having this surrogate
self praised and acknowledged, however indirectly or discreetly, offers a degree
of narcissistic pleasure, it would be arrogant and delusional for me to assume
that my selection, and the motivations that determine it, can be universalised.
Yet this is the assumption that Bloom makes. Because he is essentially elitist,
elitism becomes "a condition of the spirit, as it is a condition of literature"
(Bloom 1987 p.69). Because his article of faith is the sanctity of the Western
Canon, he declares in all sincerity, that "without the Canon, we cease to think"
(Bloom. 1995 p.41) without pausing to consider the obvious fact that even his
Canon is the product, rather than the originator, of imaginative thought. Indeed,
when we consider his rejection of historicism, philosophy, politics,
psychoanalysis and sociology to name but a few of his targets, it could just as
easily be argued that Bloom's obsession with the canon is a major impediment

to serious thinking in any field, literary or otherwise. Like D-FENS, he is running on empty, working purely on instinct. Substituting passion for reason and elevating a defiant yet naïve empiricism above all else, Professor Bloom celebrates alienation, isolation and the capitalist ethos as unquestionable virtues: seemingly oblivious of the irony that, although it may be construed as private, or indeed anti-social to retreat into the seclusion of one's mind such a strategy is little more than alter-social because the moment one social space is evacuated another is immediately occupied. Despite Professor Bloom's protestations, the human subject is a social animal, albeit one that is constantly torn, constantly negotiating between two specific and contrary desires: the desire *to be* and the desire *to be part of*. It is in this movement, in this simultaneous running to and retreating from both self and society that the political imagination comes into being. It is, in short, the synergy of identity creation and role enforcement which undermines the notion of a unified self at its foundations.

One of the earliest and most potent challenges to the idea of the unified, centred subject that is essential to the Bloomian construction of the reader and the individual genius was launched by Freud, whose theories of the unconscious revealed a split subject: a person divided between the conscious (ego) rational self and the unconscious (id) primal self.[5] Freud was, however, still driven by the humanistic concept of unity and believed that, by bringing the repressed, unconscious thoughts into the conscious mind, it was possible to bolster the strength of the ego and preserve a sense of psychic stability. This conservative aspect of Freud's work became dominant through the ego-psychology practised and promoted within the United States by Anna Freud until the Lacanian revision of Freud recovered the repressed radical elements of his work. For Lacan, any project aimed at restoring and preserving a stable and secure sense of identity is impossible. We are all, the Lacanian argument goes, the products of our unconscious because the ego itself is the creation of the id.[6]

Lacan describes human development, the creation of the self and recognition of the 'I' in three stages: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. The real is the state of nature, the perceived unity of mother and child in which no distinctions are made between the baby and its surroundings. This changes, however, during the pre-Oedipal 'mirror' stage of development which functions "to establish a relationship between the organism and its reality" (Lacan 1980a p.4). During the mirror stage the child, lacking even the most basic motor control and mental functions, sees its reflection in the mirror and recognises the idealised, unified image as itself. But this is a misrecognition, a presumption of unity and coming into being which is vastly different from the fragmented, bodily reality it experiences. Thus begins the dialectic between the real and the social, between the child and the Ideal-I that "situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction" (Lacan 1980a p.2).

From this moment on, the child enters the realm of the imaginary. Although it has very little conception of the self, or the 'I', it is aware of otherness, of difference. The child knows that it lacks something, and this sense of lack creates a desperate need for completion. Lacan writes:

> The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated
> from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for
> the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the
> succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented-body
> image to a form of its totality ... to the assumption of the armour
> of an alienating identity, which will mark its rigid structure of the
> subject's entire mental development.
> (Lacan 1980a p.4)

This drama, to some extents, is concluded when the child enters the symbolic realm of the social through its initiation into language.

Lacan offers his revisionist reading of the Freudian unconscious by drawing heavily upon linguistic theory, particularly Ferdinand de Sausurre's work on the arbitrary nature of the sign (de Saussure 1988). Drawing parallels between the Freudian concepts of condensation and displacement, and Jakobson's analysis of metaphor and metonymy (Jakobsen 1988), Lacan argues "what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language" (Lacan 1980b p.147). Where Lacan departs from the structuralist perspective is in the assumption that the linguistic sign, though arbitrary, is relatively stable. Indeed, Lacan suggests, such stability is impossible because each signifier refers not to a signified, but to yet another signifier, in an unending linguistic chain. This is perhaps best illustrated by the dictionary analogy: we can look up a word in a dictionary and follow that definition to another and another but, although this process is unending and circuitous, it will never bring us any closer to the thing itself. Lacan writes:

> For the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by
> unfolding its dimension before it ... From which we can say that it
> is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning 'insists' but that
> none of its elements 'consists' in the signification of which it is at
> that moment capable. We are forced, then, to accept the notion of
> an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier.
> (Lacan 1980b pp.153-4)

With Lacan the subject is not merely split, as it is in the Freudian scheme, it is completely decentred. The creation of the self is an imaginative act of misrecognition, both a construction and deconstruction of the subject, in which the presence of the subject "can be understood only at a secondary degree of otherness" (Lacan 1980b p.172). There is, in short, a mirroring of discourses, an unstable network of needs and desires that slide into one another without satisfaction or closure. Indeed, the sense of completion, of stability and unity is that very state of nature that we are forced to abandon at an early age. To compensate for this loss, however, we are introduced into the empty symbolic

realm of language, which is constructed though absence. Language, Lacan argues, is not only empty it is also *gendered*:

> A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop.' Look,' says the brother, 'we're at Ladies!'; 'Idiot!' replies his sister, 'Can't you see we're at Gentlemen.'
> (Lacan 1980b p.152)

Both boy and girl recognise not themselves, but their *otherness*. In the Symbolic order, they can only see from the position they themselves occupy, thus the two doors signifying the passing from the real to the symbolic, placing them as gendered subjects, defining the subject in terms of what they are not, rather than what they are.

The unconscious, Lacan tells us, "is the discourse of the Other" (Lacan 1980b p.172) and, like language, it is an endless chain of signification, of a desire that can never be satisfied, only pursued or promised:

> For the unconditional element of demand, desire substitutes the 'absolute' condition: this condition unties the knot of that element in the proof of love that is resistant to the satisfaction of a need. Thus, desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results in the subtraction of the first from the second.
> (Lacan 1980d p.287)

In order for some sense of stability and social coherence to be established, the child must surrender its symbiosis with Nature and accept its gendered social role. The stabilising, intervening force is the mythical figure of the Father. Unlike Freud, who evokes the real figure of the father and the threat of castration through loss of the penis (Freud 1953a), Lacan uses these as abstractions. In the Lacanian scheme, the 'Name of the Father' is evoked both as a repressive figure (the No of the Father), and as a guarantor of meaning (the

Name of the Father). It is "in the *name of the father* that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (Lacan 1980c p.67). The acceptance of identity is thus the acceptance of otherness, an acknowledgement of the law of the signifier (the Law, the giver of names and language) over the signified (the subject).[7]

The political imagination, as we shall see throughout this thesis, exists at the intersection between ideology and desire. Lacan's work allows us to see how this exerts itself in the simultaneous construction and deconstruction of the subject: through an initial misrecognition. An idealised illusion is created through the power of imagination and, by using the only faculty at our disposal – language - a complex series of identifications, negotiations, compromises and repressions are brought into being by this desire to be. The problem here is twofold. By accepting our entry into the Symbolic, we acknowledge the irretrievable splitting or de-centring of ourselves and, conversely, a refusal to enter into the Symbolic exchange creates a sick, disturbed individual unable to function in society. Belsey writes:

> In Lacanian theory entry into language is necessary to the child
> unless he or she is to become 'sick'; at the same time entry into
> language inevitably creates a division between ... the 'I' who
> speaks and the 'I' who is represented in discourse. The subject is
> held in place in the discourse by the use of 'I', but the 'I' of this
> discourse is always a 'stand in' a substitute for the 'I' who speaks.
> (Belsey 1980 p.85)

Imagination, Lacan teaches us, is not a faculty that we possess. Indeed the converse is true: imagination *possesses* us and we attempt to order and control this through the creation of social space and coherent identity. This attempt at control, this irresistible dialectic between unconscious desire and social necessity, is the creative force driving artistic production. What is particularly interesting is that rather than effacing or masking this predicament, a vast canon

of 80s literature, including texts such as Rushdie's <u>Midnight's Children</u> (1982) and <u>The Satanic Verses</u> (1988), Graham Swift's <u>Waterland</u> (1983), Martin Amis' <u>Other People</u> (1981), Beryl Bainbridge's <u>An Awfully Big Adventure</u> (1989), Anita Brookner's <u>Hotel Du Lac</u> (1985), and Angela Carter's <u>Wise Children</u> (1991) critically examine the problems inherent in the creation of identity and subjectivity. Nor was this problematic restricted to literary fiction. The collapsing, fragmented subject also informs the genre fiction of the period and, as we shall see in future chapters, the most dominant forms of popular fiction - horror, thriller, romance and crime - all became more psychological and introspective. The political imagination therefore, is neither a textual effect nor a theoretical approach to the reading and study of literature, it is the simultaneous process of constructing and deconstructing oneself as a human subject and can, perhaps, be best defined as the moment that dichotomies between public and private spheres collapse: as desire and ideology intersect, the political imagination manifests itself in contradistinction to the dominant identity and ideology, challenging its legitimacy through the unlimited potentiality of other identities, other claims, other authorities.

The term authority, which derives initially from the Latin words *auctoritas* and *auctor* carries with it various significations - the power to enforce laws, to exact obedience, to command or judge being the most common. This list could also be amended to include the power to administrate corporate, social, political, or intellectual affairs; a conclusive statement taken as a guide or precedent; the power to influence or persuade through knowledge or experience; the confidence created from experience and practice. Thus, in considering the concept, two things are immediately noticeable: authority cannot exist without power and it is always already dependent upon a previously established security.

From classical antiquity to the Middle Ages the ancients believed that to gain power over a demon, you must first uncover its name (Rappaport 1995 p.88), and a similar task opens up to any inquiry into the nature of authority. If *we* exercise *this* power, appeal to *this* authority and this power is challenged, this authority questioned then *who* or *what* will act as guarantor? The search for authority is, therefore, a search for legitimation: for a way in which the 'other' might be silenced, subjected and marginalised in a socially acceptable way. The degree and methods of such repression are, of course, determined by the strength or weakness of the authority.[8] Thus authority, even in the most enlightened societies, must be seen as a form of socially necessary oppression. To be constituted as a subject is to be *subjected*, to accept that some exterior force has the necessary power to order or influence our lives with, or without, our consent.

Unlike previous epochs where the political imagination emerged and developed in response to a particular and explicit historical-cultural formation and specific ideological matrix, the post-68, post-Vietnam, post-Watergate disillusionment, coupled with a technological explosion unprecedented since the Industrial Revolution, created a new mutation: a deep and overwhelming legitimation crisis diagnosed as 'the postmodern condition': a diagnosis that was embraced by writers attempting to free themselves from the prison house of traditional realism and institutionalised modernism. Rushdie writes:

> The elevation of the quest for the Grail over the Grail itself, the
> acceptance that all that is solid *has* melted into air, that reality and
> morality are not givens but imperfect human constructs, is the
> point where fiction begins. This is what J F Lyotard called, in
> 1979, *La Condition Postmoderne.*
> (Rushdie 1992 p.422)

There are problems with compressing, simplifying and popularising the term postmodern, however. Lyotard's famous claim that "The 19th and 20th centuries

have given us our fill of terror. We have paid dearly for our nostalgia for the all and the one..." (Lyotard 1992b p.24), for instance, was frequently taken as a carte-blanche warrant that 'anything goes' and, implicit within this warrant, is the assumption that 'nothing matters'. If, the argument goes, neither God, nor humanity can be convincingly held up as a final, absolute, legitimating power would it not be better to simply abandon the illusion, to acknowledge that there is no final court of appeal, that even reality isn't what it used to be, (Baudrillard 1983 p.12) and open ourselves up to the multiplicity of possibilities? This embracement of radical heterogeneity in the failure of all homogenising projects was the "postmodern" solution offered by many contemporary intellectuals as they projected aesthetic concerns and preoccupations into "the spheres of the 'cognitive' or scientific and the 'practical' or moral." (Waugh 1992 p.1)

One of the problems with postmodernism, and one of the reasons for its current re-evaluation in a spirit of post-postmodernism, is that it is easy to appropriate and difficult to pin down. Rather than speak of postmodernism, it is better to acknowledge that, at best, the term can be used as a convenient shorthand to describe a constellation of problems and concerns of the post-war world, evolving from a legitimation crisis, a collapse in confidence in the humanist ideal and an insecurity created by a technological and scientific revolution which threatened and reshaped the idea of the human. Bauman writes:

> The most poignant of the post-modern experiences is the *lack* of
> self-confidence. It is perhaps debatable whether the philosophers
> of the modern era ever articulated to everybody's satisfaction the
> foundations of the objective superiority of western rationality ...
> The fact is, however, that they never stopped looking for such an
> articulation and hardly ever ceased to believe that the search
> would bring - must bring - success. The post-modern period is
> distinguished by abandoning the search itself, having convinced
> itself of its futility. Instead, it tries to reconcile itself to a life under
> conditions of permanent and incurable uncertainty
> (Bauman 1993 p.135)

This "abandonment of the search" was taken by some as an outright rejection of the Enlightenment and created a somewhat erroneous impression of postmodernism as a descent into intellectual anarchy and unrestrained relativism. Whilst it is possible to sympathise with opposition to an ideology of indeterminacy which seeks to sustain a moral, ethical and political vacuum, it is by no means conclusive that the "post-modern heretics" are advocating such an ideology in the first place, and attempts to place theorists such as Lyotard firmly in an anti-Enlightenment camp will always encounter difficulties.

A useful starting point in discussing Lyotard and postmodernism in the 1980s is a quotation which is frequently cited used to suggest that post-modern thought is inherently nihilistic and lacks any form of responsibility:

> Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture:
> you listen to reggae, you watch a western, you eat McDonald's at
> midday and local cuisine at night, you wear Paris perfume in
> Tokyo and dress retro in Hong Kong, knowledge is the stuff of TV
> game shows.
> (Lyotard 1992b p.17)

What is frequently overlooked however, is the simple fact that Lyotard is opposing, rather than advocating, this "anything goes" mentality. Indeed, Lyotard argues that "the realism of money", along with any other genre of realism, ought to be treated with constant scepticism because realism is always conservative in as much as it seeks to maintain the status quo, protecting and preserving the existing order of knowledge which, in the computer age when knowledge and information are inexorably linked with power, "is now more than ever a question of government." (Lyotard 1992a p.9).

The post-modern condition, Lyotard suggests, is one of disillusionment. Although it freed humankind from the mythic totality of religion, the emancipatory narrative embodied within the Enlightenment carried its own

totalitarian impulses, constructing the metanarratives of liberty, equality, emancipation and relentless progression and betterment "through the progress of capitalist techno-science" and, like myths, these narratives "have the goal of legitimating social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics, ways of thinking" (Lyotard 1992b p.29). With these two monolithic, homogenising authorities (religion and Enlightenment) staking their claims in particular temporal modes (past and future), post-modern authority seeks to occupy the present: to delegitimise through refuting foundationalist principles and creating a climate of dissensus. From its renunciation of the homogenising and totalitarian impulses of the Enlightenment's grand narratives, to its embracement of heterogeneity and local narratives, Lyotard's version of postmodernism (and there are many other competing versions in the market-place) is always oppositional: it is a fluid series of strategies that resists classification, seeking instead to adopt a spectral form of discontent that counters and haunts all totalising projects "without forming a new "front"." (Lyotard 1992b p.77).[9]

Thus, whilst it is always possible to argue that postmodernism is anti-enlightenment *per se*, it is always advisable to be cautious because there are very few people, or indeed epochs, that can fall naturally into one category or another. There is, Benjamin once stated with remarkable perspicacity, "no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Benjamin 1992b p.248). For the most part, humankind as a race and as individuals, find themselves immersed in an ambiguous grey zone of judgement in which right and wrong, good and evil, civilisation and barbarism cease to exist in tidy binary opposition and distinctions between them become blurred and confused in a series of complex inter-relationships. Levi writes:

> This desire for simplification is justified, but the same does not
> always apply to simplification itself. It is a working hypothesis,
> useful so long as it is recognised as such and not mistaken for

> reality; the greater part of historical and natural phenomena is not
> simple, or not simple with the simplicity that we would like...
> Compassion and brutality can coexist in the same individual and
> in the same moment, despite all logic.
> (Levi 1994a pp.23-39)

Indeed, this rejection of simple, convenient, reductionism lies at the heart of Lyotard's work. He consistently argues that postmodernism is not a departure from the modern, but an integral part of it (Lyotard 1992b p.21). Furthermore, "post-modern intellectuals" such as Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault adopt a position more in keeping with the spirit, if not the letter, of the Enlightenment, whilst recognising the problems immanent within such a project:

> But that does not mean that one has to be "for" or "against" the
> Enlightenment. It even means that one has to refuse everything
> that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and
> authoritarian alternative ... It is true that we have to give up hope
> of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to
> any complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our
> historical limits ... But that does not mean that no work can be
> done except in disorder and contingency. The work in question
> has its generality, its systemacity, its homogeneity, and its stakes.
> (Foucault 1992 pp.103-6)

Finally, many of the problems and conclusions, that Lyotard deals with, such as the totalitarian impulses within the Enlightenment project, the immutable connection between knowledge and power, the growing reliance upon and increasing domination by techno-science, have already been voiced by Adorno and Horkheimer (1992) who state that:

> Explanations of the world as all or nothing are mythologies, and
> guaranteed roads to redemption are sublimated magic practices.
> The self-satisfaction of knowing in advance and the
> transfiguration of negativity into redemption are untrue forms of
> resistance against deception.
> (Adorno & Horkheimer 1992 p.24)

Thus, although it is always possible to appeal to the "post-modern authority" of the present in order to adopt an unyielding anti-Enlightenment position coupled

with an irresponsible relativism, it is by no means inevitable. Indeed, all three authorities (mythic, emancipatory narrative and postmodern), and the temporal modes that govern them, are consistently and continually in play at the same time. The post-modern critique of the Enlightenment grand narratives is placed within a specific context almost immediately by Lyotard when he writes, "the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age and cultures enter what is known as the post-modern age" (Lyotard 1992a p.3). This emphasis on temporality is vital, because it is also true that "the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilised people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection" (Said 1994 p.xiii).

The relationship between the reactionary and radical, the oppressive authority and the liberating "truth", is essential to an understanding of the political imagination and will be discussed later. What is important here is that the question of authority is, inevitably, a question of temporality. If truth is veiled, do we subscribe to mythic beliefs that offer us a vision before the moment of veiling? Do we accept emancipatory projects that hold out the hope of a future unveiling? Or, do we relinquish the prospect of the political, moral and ethical strip-tease altogether for the privilege of remaining in the relative security of an omnipresent now? [10] The true irony of this situation is that none of these authorities can be truly justified by any logical, rational means. We can no more stand at the end of history than we can revisit the origins of the universe and to divorce ourselves from time, to exist solely in the present, is to live a life in which every experience is new, every truth a metaphysical illusion and every minute a fleeting moment soon to be forgotten. Choosing between these three moments is always already an act of faith, an act that recognises and establishes our limits of thought.[11] A more reasonable proposition, and one that Rushdie evokes in his work, and particularly in his children's novel <u>Haroun and the Sea</u>

of Stories, (1990), is that whilst this choice is always possible, it is rarely, if ever, inevitable.

The publication of Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) confounded Rushdie's critics and admirers alike. [12] In direct contrast to his personal circumstances, he had not only continued writing, but had produced a light, immensely funny postmodern spin on the children's classic The Wizard of Oz (1995). The story is a relatively simple quest adventure. Rashid Khalifa is a professional storyteller who is known to his admirers as "The Ocean of Notions", and to his detractors as "The Shah of Blah". When his wife, Soraya absconds with their neighbour, the rather unprepossessing Mr Sengupta, Rashid loses his much acclaimed gift of the gab. Even Rashid's son Haroun, who is stung by his mother's desertion, attacks his father using the very words that he has heard Mr. Sengupta whisper to his mother on numerous occasions: "What's the point of it? *What's the use of stories that aren't even true?*" (Rushdie 1990 p.20).

After drying up at a political rally where he has been hired to sway the crowd towards an unpopular candidate, Rashid cancels his subscription from the mythical sea of stories the night before another big engagement. Haroun, spotting Iff in the process of disconnecting Rashid's supply, forces the Water Genie to take him to the moon of Kahani where he can plead his father's case to the Eggmen and their mysterious controller I M D Walrus. Arriving on Kahani, Haroun discover that a state of war exists between the perpetually light Land of Gup, where stories and freedom of expression are treasured, and the Land of Chup, a place of permanent darkness and silence which is ruled by the cult leader Khattam-Shud. [13] Khattam-Shud, Haroun learns, has managed to separate his shadow from himself, and whilst one of them is busy poisoning the sea of stories in the old zone, another is holding Batcheat, the Guppee Princess, prisoner in a Citadel. Whilst the army of Gup (led by the wise General Kitab,

the gloriously inept and besotted Prince Bolo and Rashid who has also made the journey to Gup) march on Shud's citadel to free the princess, Haroun, who is accompanied by his friends Iff the genie, Butt the mechanical Hoopoe and Mali the gardener, sets off on his quest to save the sea. The novel ends when Haroun, who finally breaks through the eleven minute concentration barrier that has haunted him since his mother left at precisely eleven o clock, defeats the shadow Khattam-Shud and turns the moon's axis so that it is no longer permanent day in Gup and permanent night in Chup. Similarly, the army of Gup liberate the princess and, as a reward, the Eggmen reward Haroun by sending sufficient rain to counteract the Sadness factories in his home city. Rashid regains his gift of the gab and tells the tale of "Haroun and the Sea of Stories" to the oppressed multitude, who immediately turn on the corrupt politicians who hoping to profit from Rashid's skills. When Haroun and Rashid return home they discover that the citizens of the sad city, "a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name" (Rushdie 1990 p.15) have, in their state of artificial bliss, remembered the forgotten name (which is also Kahani) thus regaining a sense of social identity. Soraya, of course, finally comes to her senses and abandons the hapless Mr Sengupta, who bears a striking resemblance to Khattam-Shud, to return to her family.

It is relatively easy to read this novel as "Rushdie's defence": indeed it is almost impossible not to.[14] As Jameson (1981) correctly asserts, we are always embroiled within the matrix of historical forces and, because of this, we are unable to perceive anything exclusively through our own eyes and experience, because the socio-cultural forces insist upon encroaching on what we prefer to perceive as "our private space". Every new experience Jameson opines, every approach to a cultural artefact, is filtered through "sedimented layers of previous interpretations or – if the text is brand new – sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretative traditions"

(Jameson 1981 p.9).[15] It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the path of least resistance, in which Rushdie is cast as Rashid to the Ayatollah Khomeni's Khattum-Shud, is taken time and time again. Cundy (1996) for instance offers this explanation:

> Glossaries aside, one cannot help but make a connection between Khattam-Shud and Rushdie's own chief persecutor, Khomeni; the voice of the fatwa that seeks to impose the most final of silences on Rushdie. The likenesses between Khattam-Shud and Khomeni, and between the Chupwala army and a common image of a fundamentalist Islamic society such as Iran, become more pronounced as the story progresses ... The irony of these images at the heart of a "children's" narrative is that in some respects they surpass in their allegorical literalness the obscurer offences against Islam in The Satanic Verses.
> (Cundy 1996 p.89)

There are problems with such a reductive reading however, and to focus primarily upon Rushdie's personal circumstances, no matter how unique and relevant they might be, would be a serious error of judgement. As we shall see, although Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) does indeed carry strong echoes of the Rushdie Affair, to literally handcuff this text to history would be to perform a grave disservice both to a highly complex text and its author.

Although a full reading of this novel, one that opens up all of the various strands of play, meaning, allusion, ideology and intertextual references lies well beyond the remit of this current project, it is possible to see how this fable connects with the postmodern condition and the difference between the political imagination and the politics of imagination. The novel begins by echoing the dehumanisation and alienation of the urban individual familiar to any student of modernity:[16]

The sadness spewed out of the factories causes a sense of general apathy and amnesia amongst the population. Indeed, the only people who seem to be immune from this are the Khalifa family, who are protected by Rashid's stories

and Soraya's singing. The imagination, in short, has a liberating, effect and it is only when Mr Sengupta, who breeds discontent in both Soraya and Haroun, undermines the imaginative processes that this immunity evaporates:

> Mr Sengupta ignored Haroun, but was always talking to Soraya, which Haroun didn't like, particularly as the fellow would launch into criticisms of Rashid the storyteller whenever he thought Haroun wasn't listening. 'That husband of yours, excuse me if I mention,' he would start in his thin whiny voice. 'He's got his head stuck in the air and his feet off the ground. What are all these stories? Life is not a storybook or a joke shop. All this fun will come to no good. What's the use of stories that aren't even true?' (Rushdie 1990 pp.19-20)

What's the use of stories that aren't even true? Before dealing with the answer to this pivotal question, it is essential to look closely at the context within which it is framed. Offered from the point of view of a classical scientific pragmatism, the question immediately puts the imaginative on the defensive, although there is nothing particularly new about that. The imaginative, it would seem, has always occupied a paradoxical position. On the one hand society needs and cherishes its storytellers and their tales but, on the level of knowledge, the imaginative is both mistrusted and devalued. Unlike reason and rationality, which are seen as indicative of maturity, the imaginative is, as Mr Serengupta's attitude perfectly illustrates, frequently viewed as immature, childlike and fantastic, thereby setting up a basic, though over-simplistic and erroneous, opposition of Nature and Culture. Within this dichotomy, two primary modes of discourse are constructed: the imaginative is represented through the arts while the instrument of reason is, of course, science.[17] It is interesting to see how Rushdie avoids this opposition within the novel by contrasting both science and the imaginative with the domination of technology and fundamentalism.

The moon of Kahani, Haroun learns, is permanently split between light (Gup) and darkness (Chup) by technological means. The light/dark divide is further developed both by the Guppees' fondness for story-telling, endless debate and

gossip and the Chupwalas' devotion to silence, which is so extreme in some cases that Chupwalas actually sew their lips together. Although the Guppees control the apparatus that keeps this artificial divide in place, both societies are technologically advanced and their approach to technology that is interesting. The Guppees exist with their technology in the background: although there is a slight touch of reverence in their voices when talking about the Walrus or the Eggheads, the general Guppee approach to technology is to treat it with deprecating humour. Their standard answer to any question relating to their command of science is a genial shrug of the shoulders and the answer that it is a P2C2E (Process to complicated to explain). Thus, in Gup, science and the imaginative co-exist. Science, although it is beyond the scope of many of its citizens, is valued in and of itself as well as providing a platform on which the Gup society can build and flourish: the Eggheads conduct their research, which is controlled and moderated by the Walrus and the King, both of whom are accountable to the populace. In Chup, however, the role of both science and the imagination is repressed to enable a neo-religious technological domination. It is this assumption that science is the slave of technology and together they can provide solutions to society and its problems without an independent moral and ethical framework, that creates the tyranny of Chup.[18] Technology thus exposes itself as a physical manifestation of their God, Bezaban, and, as such, it is constantly foregrounded, prioritised and revered.

Rushdie's distinction between science as a search for knowledge and technology as a quest for end product and result, is most noticeable when Khattam-Shud, in the tradition of all great villains, explains at great lengths both his plans and techniques for the artificial synthesising of the anti-stories, the laboratory conditions they are synthesised in and, most importantly, how a plug was created to block the source of all stories forever. When Haroun asks why he hates stories so much, Shud replies with disarming honesty:

> "The world, however, is not for fun," Khattam-Shud replied. "The
> world is for Controlling."
> "Which world?" Haroun made himself ask.
> "Your world, my world, all worlds," came the reply.
> (Rushdie 1990 p.161)

What is at stake here, therefore, is not a question of science or the imaginative
(or indeed science *and* the imaginative): the problem revolves within and
around the concept of authority. The Chupwala cult of silence, legitimised by
Khattam-Shud and the god Bezaban, is easily placed within the sphere of the
mythic. Similarly, the Guppees, with their privileging of endless debate and the
search for consensus, display many of the traits of the Enlightenment discourse,
most notably when they are forced to act rather than talk. Rushdie writes:

> 'How is it possible to fight a battle with all this natter and
> chatter?' Rashid wondered, perplexed.
>   But then the armies rushed at each other; and Rashid saw,
> to his great surprise, that the Chupwalas were quite unable to
> resist the Guppees. The Pages of Gup, now that they had talked
> through everything so fully, fought hard, remained united,
> supported each other when required to do so, and in general
> looked like a force with a common purpose. All those general
> arguments and debates, all that openness, had created powerful
> bonds of fellowship between them. The Chapwalas, on the other
> hand, turned out to be a disunited rabble.
> (Rushdie 1990 pp.184-5)

There are, however, many problems of the Guppees own making. Although
theirs is a much pleasanter and more positive and enlightened society, Rushdie
eschews any possibility of the text being trapped within a simple Manichean
scheme that the Rushdie Defence reading forces upon it. To begin with, there
are transgressive characters on both sides: Prince Bolo is an arrogant, stupid,
self-serving misogynist. Although the Chuppees frequently reduce him to a
figure of fun, and deny that he has any 'real' influence, Bolo frequently acts as
the legislator. It is he who decides that the army must rescue Batcheat, whilst a
motley crew is sent to save the Sea of Stories. Furthermore, Bolo frequently
casts himself in the role of the missionary, the true believer of the mythic god

Romance. On the other hand, the presence of Mudra, the Shadow Warrior who turns against Khattam-Shud thereby ensuing his overthrow, denies the inherent darkness of the Chupwalas. Indeed, Mudra's means of communication reveals that Chupwalas can be as poetic, expressive and imaginative as the Guppees (Rushdie 1990 pp.131-2). Just as Bolo espouses the authority of the mythic, Mudra's position is at one with the enlightenment discourse of freedom. It is also worth noting that both societies suffer from a significant lack: indeed it is common practice for Guppees to journey to the end of their territory to gaze with wistful eyes on the night sky whilst Chupwalas are sometimes driven to gaze in the opposite direction.

Haroun's function is, in many ways, to provide the third, transient 'authority' of the postmodern discourse. His continuing interrogation of common-sense and accepted wisdom both fascinates and irritates all he comes into contact with. His 'solution' to the problem is to drink the wish-water, thus destabilising the established dichotomy by unleashing the elements of each into the other in a deconstructive moment any Derrridean would be proud of:

> All he could see was a golden light, which had wrapped itself
> around him like a shawl...'I wish,' thought Haroun Khalifa,
> squeezing his eyes tightly shut, wishing with every fibre of his
> being. 'I wish this Moon, Kahani, to turn, so that it's no longer in
> half light and half darkness... I wish it to turn, this very instant, in
> such a way that the sun shines down on the Dark Ship, the full,
> hot, Noonday sun.'
> 'That's some wish,' said Butt the Hoopoe's voice admiringly.
> 'This will be pretty interesting. It's your willpower against the
> Processes Too Complicated To Explain.'
> (Rushdie 1990 pp.170-1)

Haroun is successful and night returns to Gup whilst the Chupwalas experience sunlight. What is interesting here is that Haroun not only adopts a postmodern spirit of scepticism and critique, but that he does it from the politically motivated position many detractors of postmodernism deny the possibility of. Armed only with an Iff, a Butt and a capacity to see beyond the limits or

restrictions of perceived reality, Haroun quite literally shifts the world on its axis by clashing the past (Kahani has always been divided) and the future (the old order will be replaced by the new) in the moment of the present (Haroun's desire to change things). In doing so, Haroun instinctively grasps the fact that we cannot divorce ourselves from our pasts and forget everything any more than we can successfully repress our desires and ambitions for the future. We exist, simultaneously in all three temporal modes, and therefore must acknowledge the authority, claims and limitations of each.

By rejecting the line of least resistance, by sacrificing the possibility of absolute certainty or convenient relativism in favour of a more democratic and enlightened spirit of dissensus, it is possible to work towards a system of inclusiveness: a system which recognises that although a degree of stability and consensus is essential for intelligent and responsible debate, we must also be aware that these ground rules are not holy writ to be defended at all costs, but merely, as the Guppee King Chattergy observes, a stepping stone towards a new beginning and a deeper, more progressive understanding of our reality:

> 'A great victory has been won,' old King Chattergy was saying to the crowd, 'a victory for our Ocean over its Enemy, but also a victory for the new Friendship and Openness between Chup and Gup, over our old Hostility and Suspicion. A dialogue has been opened; and to celebrate that, as well as this wedding, let all the people sing.'
> (Rushdie 1990 p.193)

It is this new beginning, this potentiality for dialogue, that provides the answer to Sengupta's question, the question that has plagued Haroun since he first heard it uttered: *what's the use of stories that aren't even true?*

The answer to this question is both simple and complex. The simple answer is that storytelling is one of the basic needs of human society along with food, water, warmth, shelter and sex. Stories affect people emotionally, intellectually

and socially. Indeed this pragmatic use of storytelling is asserted throughout the novel. Snooty Buttoo, the corrupt and immensely unpopular politician seeking re-election in the Valley of K, hires Rashid in the hope of swaying popular opinion with upbeat, feel-good stories: a strategy that backfires when Rashid's story serves as a focal point for their resentment and drives him out of office. Similarly, like most dictators, Khattam-Shud recognises the power of storytelling as a mode of critique and subversion. Before discussing the difference between those stories aimed at creating specific political effects and the political effects of writing however, we should first examine why and how literature affects us in these ways, and the starting point, as always, is the potency of language.

There can be little doubt that language is an active and dynamic social force, or that the imaginative use of language can, and does, structure social relations through various hierarchically distinguished discourses in which "the sets of ideas encoded in language are constantly affirmed and checked." (Fowler 1996 p.40).[19] Indeed, as Doyle (1989) correctly asserts, narrative is an essential component of the social contract, and one of the fundamental features of any culture or society is its capacity for creating and circulating fictions.

Such fiction making is not, however, restricted to purely imaginative literature. It permeates every mode of codification and everything, from a Weetabix commercial to the policy of nuclear deterrence, can be regarded as a social fiction.[20] When this line of thought is taken to an extreme limit, however, reality itself becomes just another narrative - a strategy that reduces the possibility of political resistance whilst simultaneously allowing right-wing revisionists such as Faurisson to question the authenticity of the holocaust.[21] The difficulty here is that if we accept, as we must, the immanent instability of a linguistic system, then the possibility of ever truly *knowing* or *proving* anything

in any concrete manner becomes extremely problematic. Fortunately, however, as Bennett suggests, this is not the case:

> This is not to deny that there exists a real world external to the
> signifying mantle which language casts upon it. But it is to
> maintain that our knowledge or appropriation of that world is
> always mediated through and influenced by the organising
> structure which language inevitably places between it and
> ourselves ... The difficulty is that, although bestowing a
> signification, a particular conceptual organisation on reality,
> language constantly generates the illusion that it reflects reality
> instead of signifying it.
> (Bennett 1989 p.5)

Thus, whilst it is certainly true that language structures reality through a process of hierarchical classifications, and that "without any categorisation, it is doubtful whether we could think or communicate at all - we would be overwhelmed by individual impressions unclassifiable and therefore incomprehensible" (Fowler 1996 p.26), it is also clear that even without such classifications, certain experiences would still be *real*. [22]

A similar stance is adopted by Magee (1997) who, by stressing the logical difference between empirical knowledge and linguistic representation, attempts to show how language acts as a limiter, reducing the myriad of impressions, thoughts, sensations, etc. into a more manageable order. Language in this sense abstracts, condenses, reduces and represses the real, sacrificing truth for social representation. What we have, in other words, is a clear distinction between living as a sensuous immediate being existing in a real, material world, and our ability to recreate ourselves as an idealised social being. Whilst the latter is almost totally dependent upon the former, it is theoretically possible for the former to exist (albeit a very strange, alienated and limited existence) without evolving to the latter stage. [23]

Reality becomes a question of representation rather than one of truth or falsehood, but of representation: it is the selective reflection and misrecognition of the real and if one model of social idealisation is possible, then all of the alternative strategies are also theoretically realisable. It is the function of fiction making, in all of its various forms, to attempt to resolve the tensions between the real experiential world and the constructed reality that allows us to project order onto chaos. The refusal of Khattam-Shud's followers to speak therefore (a sacrifice that does not extend to Shud himself) is a complete abrogation of their social roles. In sewing up their lips and deliberately declining to participate in any form of discourse, they perform the ultimate anti-social and deviant act – they reject participation in the ordered reality for the domination of the chaotic real. Thus, we have the basic opposition - language/silence around which all other oppositions true/false, right/wrong, weak/strong, master/slave, sanity/madness evolve - and it is only by participating, struggling and interrogating the potent discourses that counter-hegemonic strategies can be adopted.[24]

The problem with accepting this opposition, however, is that it creates violent hierarchies and valuing systems which are both overly simplistic and unsustainable as we can see when we examine how, within the field of literary studies the hierarchy of Art and Popular Culture, Literature and Formula Fiction, Classics and Trash, is repeatedly reinforced.[25] Even when we acknowledge that the study of popular fictions is important, we must first stress the value and obviousness of this dichotomy. Hawkins (1990) for instance, is content to promote the study of popular cultural forms without attempting to destabilise 'high culture' in any serious way, asserting that "a recognition of the continuing cross fertilisation between 'high' literature and popular genres inevitably enhances our understanding and appreciation of both." (Hawkins 1990 p.xiv). Similarly, Knights (1995) argues:

> Jackie Collins traps the mind, where George Eliot liberates.
> Criticism of Jackie Collins can and ought to be written. One might
> speak of the debasement of women, the commodification of
> relationships.
> (Knights 1995 p.29)[26]

This particularly illuminating statement clearly suggests that the literary text exists in its own right, whereas the popular, baser text speaks on a more generic level. Whilst the popular text is a type, one of Khattam-Shud's *anti*-stories, the literary text is, in some way, unique and beneficial. We can, as critics, address the 'Art of Shakespeare' quite comfortably but not the 'Art of Jeffrey Archer', unless, of course, we place the word art in inverted commas to allow the audience to participate in the joke. At this point, however, we encounter a considerable difficulty - a difficulty that clearly manifests itself in the convention of discussing both Literature and literature, with the latter term referring simply to all forms of fictional writing whereas the former, capitalised version, signifies "the specificity of Literature as a privileged and specifying category" (Bennett 1989 p.171).

The hallmark of Literature is, it appears, both omnipresent and invisible. Yet, beneath the deceptively simple term we find a complex nexus of meanings and value judgements (Williams 1988 p.183). In a witty introduction, Eagleton simultaneously sets up and knocks down popular definitions of Literature as imaginative writing, defamiliarised writing, non-pragmatic discourse, excellent writing and socially valued writing before concluding that literature is "a functional rather than an ontological" term, and that the function it performs, the value judgements that create literature bear an incredibly "close relation to social ideologies" (Eagleton 1983 pp.1-16). This literature-as-construction theory is partially supported by Bennett who argues that "Written texts do not organise themselves into the 'literary' and 'non-literary'. They are so organised only by the operations of criticism upon them" (Bennett 1989 p.7). Bennett's

solution to the problem of literature is to retain the term "Literature" but to remove it from the realms of the aesthetic and recognise it as "a *specific practice of writing*, bound, circumscribed and conditioned by the historical, material and ideological conditions of its production" (Bennett 1989 p.15). Literary value, in this sense of *Literature* as a genre of *literature*, becomes something that exists outside of, and independently of, the text.[27]

It has also been argued that the relationship between Literature and Popular fiction is parasitic but, if this is the case, which of them is the parasite? Publishing companies are in the business of making profits and it is only through the income generated by the best-sellers and fast-sellers that many minority 'literary' texts are published at all. Similarly, the basic ingredients of many literary texts emerge, first and foremost, in popular novels. Worpole (1984 p.38), for instance, draws attention to the intertextual dependence of both D. H. Lawrence and Thomas Mann to an earlier romance. Another conceivable argument is that Literature offers a deeper and more profound insight into ourselves, and the world around us, but again this argument is based upon the common fallacy that popular fictions have nothing to say. Albrecht's sociological survey suggests the opposite, drawing attention to the fact that popular fictions highlight those social values that are under strain (*cited in* Hall 1979 p.96). Similarly, Davies (19890 shows how a study of stereotypical characters "are engaged in an unceasing intertextual transaction between the already constituted genre and the historically shifting registers of class, masculinity and Englishness." (Davies 1989 p.131); Waldman (1982) reveals how popular fictions and films of the 1940s conducted a political campaign against avant-garde art in favour of an illusionist-Realist aesthetic; Bromley (1986) discloses how popular fictions 'say' as much as literary texts although on a different level of discourse, articulating hegemonic crises "exclusively in personal terms." (Bromley 1986 p.152) whilst Margolies' (1982) analysis

demonstrates how Mills & Boon romances not only offer a temporary "escape from an oppressive reality" but also how this oppressive patriarchal structure can be resisted on a personal level by the texts' "potential to encourage their readers to think more positively about themselves" (Margolies 1982 pp.12-13). Greenwood's study of mass market romances challenges the portrayal of women as "inadequate handlers of language" by illuminating how language itself is incapable of expressing "their ideas and feelings" thus forcing them into the "stereotyped sex behaviour" that underlines "the distinction between the aggressor and desired" (Greenwood 1983 p.168).

Any distinction between literary and non literary forms is both provisional and limited and, despite the fact that the "literary establishment thrives on the principle of separation ", Worpole is probably correct in suggesting that distinctions on the level of generic and non-generic literary forms are "philosophically untenable." (Worpole 1984 p.20)[28] This does not automatically assume that, although all texts are equal on a theoretical level, there is not a world of difference between Jeffrey Archer on the one hand and Salman Rushdie on the other. Some texts are more densely codified than others; some texts foreground formalistic features at the expense of story; some texts allow abstraction whilst others focus upon concretisation, and so on. Such differences occur, however, on the level of representation, and any attempt to justify the privileging of one mode of discourse above another must always be made at an ideological level.[29] What I would like to suggest here is that we adopt a less confrontational model of categorisation. Rather than speak of literary and formula fictions, or authentic and inauthentic forms of art, we can expand on the categories of sacred and profane offered by Milan Kundera and Salman Rushdie in their defences of the novel and the rights to write.

The sacred works upon a principle of exclusion. Unlike the profane which is open, unprotected, inclusive and, most importantly, taken out of the temple and made *accessible to all*, the sacred operates like Kafka's law: its door is guarded, access to it is barred and those privileged few initiated into its mysteries jealously guard and protect the aura that surrounds it. The sacred text, or literary Chup, addresses the individual, it assumes a positive, cerebral attitude towards life and a wide range of knowledge and interest. The function of the sacred text is to achieve 'immortality' through educating and rewarding the reader by illuminating 'eternal truths' about the human condition and 'life as it truly is'. This desire for immortality renders it impotent to a greater or lesser degree, because to make something sacred is to remove it from dialogue, from debate, from history. Rushdie writes:

> To respect the sacred is to be paralysed by it. The idea of the
> sacred is quite simply one of the most conservative notions in any
> culture, because it seeks to turn other ideas – Uncertainty,
> Progress, Change – into crimes.
> (Rushdie 1992 p.416)

The profane text, on the other hand, appeals not to an isolated individual but to one who is fully integrated into a community of readers. It is also more concerned with material and practical, rather than abstract, issues. The function of the profane text is to provide pleasure, to delight and amuse, to allow a temporary escape from life as it is. Furthermore, the profane text is primarily located in prose whereas the sacred text is principally poetic. At first glance such a distinction merely seems to reinforce the positive/negative binaries suggested earlier. But there are several important reasons why this is not the case. First, profanity has its own positive dimension. In placing pleasure before duty, entertainment before education, accessibility before elitism, the profane text regains a capacity to shock, to distance us from the ideologically idealised selves that we normally seek to reinforce, thus creating a potential critical gap between the I of reality and the eye of the reader. Whereas the reader

approaches the sacred text with a degree of seriousness, resolution and frequently, uncritical awe, the profane text invites active participation, ridicule and good humour. Indeed, it has been argued, that the profane *invented* such a concept (Kundera 1996 p.34). The profane text not only acknowledges its alterity from the sacred text - it positively revels in it, holding up high moral values and didacticism as pretentious bubbles begging to be burst.[30]

A second important element of the profane text is its moral ambiguity. The profane is "a realm where moral judgement is suspended" (Kundera 1996 p.35) and the creation of this realm allows us to identify with, and be excited by, characters who are either condemned or erased by the more sacred works. Whereas the sacred text frequently requires some gesture towards the restoration of stability and 'natural' order, the profane text finds such gesticulations unnecessary. Indeed, Kundera states from the offset, that "the contract between the novelist and the reader must be established from the outset; it must be clear: the story being told here is not serious, even though it is about the most dreadful things" (Kundera 1996 p.31).

The act of profanity is humorous, it is a joke against the Gods and their representatives, the high-browed Ayatollahs who inhabit not only the mosques and the temples, but also the academies and halls of power. The sacristy of the text as inherently valuable is undercut by the playful relationship between author and reader. The profane text exposes the ideologies and myths that centre our lives, not by resisting them, but by accepting them wholeheartedly, by obeying their internal logic to the nth degree until they are fully opened to ridicule.

A third important point to make about this distinction is that it is an obviously unnatural opposition: it does not revolve around the speech/silence opposition,

nor does it work on an either/or basis. *Both the sacred and the profane control their own mode of discourse.* They are inclusive rather than exclusive, and it is almost impossible to speak of one without recognising and acknowledging the other. Throughout the course of this thesis, the political imagination, (which can, temporarily at least, be defined as the dialectic tensions between the sacred and profane), will be investigated in many diverse texts that would otherwise be excluded on the grounds of 'literary value'. Thus, to talk of the sacred and profane is not to talk of separate essences but of the schizophrenic nature of the text: it is to acknowledge that these two modes are bound intertextually and, as the film industry has proved on countless occasions, it requires very little effort to bring out the 'worst' in the 'best' possible text, or vice-versa.

What we have then, are two distinct modes of writing which are immutably interdependent upon each other, playfully engaging in an unnatural opposition for the reader's delight and edification. Problems arise only when the code-switching between the two is almost totally restricted, or either partner in the exchange - the author or reader (critic) - lacks sufficient humour to understand the exchange.[31] Examined in this light, those texts which emphasise the tensions between the sacred and profane not only make up the bulk of literature, they bear an uncommon resemblance to the transhistorical value suggested by Easthope (1995), although by discussing them in this way, we have no need to distinguish between literary and popular fictions. One distinction we do have to examine, however, is the important difference between political writing and writing politically and Rushdie's novel offers us examples of both.

In Alfibay, the country in which Haroun and the Sea of Stories is set, it is commonplace for politicians and power groups to employ storytellers for political or propaganda purposes. "My enemies hire cheap fellows to stuff the people's ears with bad stories about me, and the ignorant people lap it up like

milk" (Rushdie 1990 p.47) Snooty Buttoo complains to Rashid when they meet. Buttoo then makes his agenda perfectly clear: all he wants from Rashid are happy upbeat tales so that the temporary 'feel good' factor inspired will have a positive effect on the polls. "None of your gloompuss yarns," Buttoo insists, "if you want pay be gay" (Rushdie 199049). In that statement, the core of political writing is revealed. Political writing aims for a *singular effect*: rather than promoting or encouraging thought or debate, it seeks to silence it by commanding one dominant, over-riding response. In this case, it is the feel good factor, although it is important to stress that upbeat stories are not the sole, or even dominant mode, of the political text. In The Satanic Verses (1992) ridicule becomes the programmed response as Baal, the satirist is employed by Abu Simbel, the Grandee of Jahlia to undermine Mahound's preaching in this case. In what is arguably one of the most popular examples of political writing in the 1980s, Alan Bleasdale's The Boys From The Blackstuff (1986), the over-riding response is anger.

The Boys From The Blackstuff (1986) was a popular and critically acclaimed series of five plays dealing with the lives of five Liverpool workers and the effect of unemployment on their lives. The opening montage, where all of the 'boys' are seen in the dole office sets the tone for the entire series:

> Clerk: Dependents, Mr Dean?
> Dixie: Yeah, a wife and four kids. Two at school and two on the dole.
> Clerk: Ah yes, but unfortunately the two on the dole count for –
> Dixie: No one on the dole counts friend.
> (Bleasdale 1986 p.27)

The entire series can perhaps be encapsulated in this one small scene, and everything that follows from the destruction of Chrissie's family, the corruption of Dixie, Yosser Hughes' frightening descent into insanity and the deaths of Snowy and George Malone all reinforce and emphasise one simple message: *no*

one on the dole counts. Chrissie, powerless and impotent as his marriage collapses, his electricity is cut off and his children go to bed hungry, locates all of his problems in his lack of employment. When his wife, Angie, berates him for eating the last of the bread he is unable to accept the criticism as anything other than a metaphor:

> Angie: You ate them and it was the kids' breakfast.
> Chrissie: Oh don't. Just don't. How much guilt can I take, eh girl?
> Go on, where d'you go from bread – how about breadwinner?
> Hey, hey? That's what y' really sayin', isn't it? Bread … winner
> (Bleasdale 1986 p.135).

Whilst it is undeniable that life on the dole exacerbates their problems, it is doubtful whether all of their issues and conflicts would be so easily resolved should Chrissie find a job. Angie, who married Chrissie as a pregnant teen, is a seething mass of frustrated ambition and resentment for the future she never had, while Chrissie's lack of purpose and his willing passivity are always going to cause problems whether he is employed or not. Nevertheless, there is a degree of veracity in Chrissie's story that is lamentably lacking in the tale of Yosser.

Yosser Hughes is a hard, frightening figure whose sanity collapses quicker than the ramshackle walls he tries to build. Struggling to keep his children from the social services as he retreats deeper into a paranoid nightmare, Yosser haunts a desolate and decaying city moaning his litany "Gissa job" at every available opportunity. The problem with Yosser's story, however, lies in the way in which Bleasdale never allows his audience to view his fractured hero from any other perspective. Chrissie declares that Yosser's been "off his cake" since he lost his job; Maureen, Yosser's estranged wife, offers the same excuse and, even at the very end, when he is properly medicated and starting to recover, the root of Yosser's madness is located in his lack of a job. As an anti-governmental polemic, the Blackstuff plays had an immediate effect upon the public

consciousness and the characters became folk heroes. Despite this initial impact, however, the plays failed to effect any serious social or political change. Furthermore, like most political writing, the plays are fossilised within the 80s, and viewing them almost twenty years later, one comes away feeling disappointed and frustrated. Disappointed because the plays no longer have the visceral impact that one remembers, and frustrated because Bleasdale consistently skirts round or effaces a rich minefield of material (gender, race, inner city decay, the death of socialism, the yuppie revolution) in order to focus on his single issue. Bleasdale's hectoring insistence on stating the obvious and simplistic message that 'unemployment destroys lives' is so intense many of the plays become unintentionally comical. The scene, for instance, where Yosser watches the eviction men board up his home ought to be moving, but his strange plea for a job "I could do that", is hyper-tragic. Hyper-tragedy, the constant stimulation and over emphasis of a single strand to the point where the tragic becomes involuntarily comic and risible, is the fate of most texts when they become so fixated with the message, with the ideological point they seek to make or emotive impact they try to evoke, that all sense of proportion is evaporated. Like most political writing, four out of the five Blackstuff plays, despite one or two outstanding scenes, are reduced to the level of an archaeological artefact: they are of interest within a specific historical context but fail to survive outside of that historicity because the strident didacticism of the work fails to connect to contemporary needs, desires or experiences.[32]

If political writing is anchored to a specific moment of history through its desire for immediate effect, then it is reasonable to assume that to write politically, a text must always carry within it a degree of contemporaneity, an ability to be relevant and readable not just in the present moment of production, but also in the future. Whereas political writing talks *to* or *at* the reader, those texts in

which the political imagination is dominant, encourages participation and dialogism. Rushdie writes:

> What does the novel dissent from? Certainly not the people's right
> to faith, though I have none. It dissents most clearly from imposed
> orthodoxies *of all types*, from the view that the world is quite
> clearly This and not That. It dissents from the end of debate, of
> dispute, of dissent.
> (Rushdie 1992 p.396)

Although he is speaking specifically about <u>The Satanic Verses</u> (1992), this offers a wonderful contrast between the two modes of writing under discussion. Within a text such as the Blackstuff plays, everything is projected onto the public forum of dissent: Thatcherism is clearly not right, and therefore democratic socialism, the alternative that she displaced, is the answer. The effect of this is that Bleasdale's work allows only a reactive response. The over-dominant prescriptive elements within the plays leave the reader with only three options: agreement, disagreement or apathy. When one writes politically, however, a whole different strategy of reading opens itself up, as we see when Rashid ignores his orders and begins to tell the tale of Haroun's adventures:

> Whenever Rashid was talking about Khattam-Shud and his
> henchmen from the Union of the Zipped Lips, the whole audience
> stared very hard at Snooty Buttoo and *his* henchmen, who were
> sitting behind Rashid on the stage, looking less and less happy as
> the story unfolded. And when Rashid told the audience how
> almost all the Chupwalas had hated the Cultmaster all along, but
> had been afraid to say so, well then a loud murmur of sympathy
> for the Chupwalas ran through the crowd, *yes,* people muttered,
> *we know exactly how they felt.* And after the two falls of the two
> Khattam-Shuds, somebody started up a chant of, 'Mr Buttoo – go
> for good; Mister Buttoo – *Khattam-Shud*' and the entire audience
> joined in.
> (Rushdie 1990 p.206)

What Rushdie illustrates here is the triumph of the political imagination over imaginative politics. The political imagination, is proactive rather than reactive. Rather than carrying a singular ideological message which can be assimilated,

resisted or ignored, *the political imagination opens itself and the readers to the multiplicity of possibilities.* Thus, whereas political writing, or imaginative politics, is essentially monologic, the political imagination is dialogic and retains its transhistorical features by not only appealing emotionally and/or intellectually, but also *experientially.* This dialogue, this tension between the sacred and the profane, is one that we are all familiar with: like the Twilight Strip in the novel, it is that peculiar grey zone, the intersection that prevents any clear distinction between public and private spheres, between ideology and desire.

Although our investigation of Rushdie's fable has been all too brief, it is possible here to use the text to open up certain strands of the political imagination, certain textual features and formalistic preoccupations which help define it. There are, as we have seen, strong metafictional elements to the story; Princess Batcheat, complete with "that nose, those teeth" etc., is one of many manifestations of the physical grotesque (particularly feminine) that challenge conceptions of the aesthetic and the beautiful; the construction of gender roles and the limits of sexual identity are brought to the fore with the over-bearingly masculine stereotype Prince Bolo and the androgynous Blabbermouth; the creation and instability of identity through recognition and denial is reflected in Rashid's loss of self and potency when his centre, 'Storyteller extraodinaire' is challenged; the critique of the dominant modes of government, particularly Caesarism in the 1980s; technology and the capacity for mass destruction; a dynamic approach and interaction with history; concepts of race and nationalism; a high degree of linguistic promiscuity - all of these elements and more are available to the reader of <u>Haroun and the Sea of Stories</u> (1990) and ,through readings of a varied, and somewhat eclectic selection of texts, future chapters will examine each of these theoretical and textual constructs carefully, beginning with the construction of the self in the post-human era.

2 - THE SUBJECTIVE PHALLUSY: IDENTITY IN CRISIS AND MISREPRESENTATIONS OF THE SELF

In the previous chapter we saw how one of the problems with using the term the political imagination is that it assumes, however indirectly, that there are other forms of *non*-political imaginations. This reasoning, however, is based on the flawed and faulty assumption that there is an objective, neutral platform on which to stand, whereas the fictitious space of aesthetics is inexorably embroiled within the matrix of cultural, social and ideological discourses.[33] The first line of defence for those who promote the idea of objective neutrality and impersonality is the creation of the individual subject or, to be more precise, the creation of two subjects: first, the author-poet-dramatist figure of genius and, secondly, the reader, a solitary, cultured being who grows and develops through his wish to confront greatness (Bloom 1994 p.524). Both the author and reader idealised by this school of thought are, out of necessity, strong, stable, open-minded, coherent human beings with clearly defined identities. On a superficial level this is a highly persuasive argument because the vast majority of people see themselves in a similar light, thus making identification with these figures a relatively easy process.[34] Indeed, from the Renaissance onwards, and certainly since the 18th Century, the view of a complete, autonomous self had been the overriding belief in human thought. The idea that 'we' are all unique, self-determining 'individuals' is so commonplace as to be almost unassailable: the advice given to Laertes by Polonius, "This above all else: to thine own self be true" (Hamlet I.3 78); Descartes' famous maxim "I think, therefore I am" and the opening lines of the judicial swearing in, "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" all confirm and reinforce this notion of a centred subjectivity. This coherent and knowable 'I' who can assume

responsibility and be held accountable for their actions has dominated the philosophic, material, economic and creative production of humankind.

Problems with such a construction provided a focal point for the fiction and the theory of the 80s. Anthropocentrism was challenged through close-examinations and critiques of the liberal humanist ideological assumption that we exist in "a world of non-contradictory (and therefore fundamentally unalterable) individuals, whose unfettered consciousness in the origin of meaning, knowledge and action" (Belsey 1980 p.67). These challenges occurred simultaneously, and on several fronts, from linguistic models to advances in science and genetics, anthropology, neo-Darwinism, and mathematics. Within the field of literary and cultural studies, there were two dominant discourses: first, there was the Marxian analysis of the cultural, economic and social interpellation of the subject from the early theories of alienation and ideology as 'false consciousness' to a more complex and relevant Marxism developed through the works of Gramsci and Althusser to current post-Marxian political theorists; second, the subjective fallacy was challenged by a psychoanalytic discourse which supplanted the subject engineering model established by Anna Freud and Diane Burlington with the Lacanian notion of a split, or decentred self (Mitchell 1974).

Just as theory responded to the changing historical, cultural and economic conditions, a prevailing scepticism, a determination to interrogate and contest the commonplace, to collapse distinctions and deconstruct totalities, was a key feature found in 1980s literature. In later chapters we shall see how this radical critique approached the vast and diverse array of problematics that were being theorised within the universities. If, however, the political imagination is indeed located at the intersection of desire and ideology, then the perfect place to begin this investigation is with the source of both: the human subject. This chapter

will begin that investigation by showing how, in order to create the illusion of coherence and stability that is frequently taken for granted, identity was perceived to be always provisional and dependent upon certain acts of private imagination and *socially directed* fantasies. This displacing of the subject, the construction and fragility of identity and the psychological and scientific perversion of the created self, forms the framework of Fay Weldon's novel <u>The Cloning of Joanna May</u> (1989).

Weldon established her reputation as a feminist writer in the 70s, but by the 80s her works began to move in a different direction. Her hopeful, consciousness-raising fictions became darker, trawling the realms of the unconscious and the ethics of science as she examined the possibilities of personal liberation within the constricting confines of collectively enforced social roles. Far from the stable, individual subject the Bloomian model depends upon and tries to reassert through concepts of genius and the solitary, asocial, apolitical individual, Weldon offers us characters who are only allowed to exist through the thoughts, desires and recognitions of others. The Cartesian subject is not split but shattered, lost in a maze of mirrors reflecting back other selves, other possibilities, other potentialities.[35] Weldon writes:

> 'Love' I could understand, but what did he mean by this 'you'?
> Small children (so I'm told) start out by confusing 'me' with
> 'you'. Addressed so frequently as 'you' their clever little minds
> work out that this must be their name. 'You cold,' they say,
> shivering as the wind blows through the window. 'Not you',
> comes the response, 'me'. 'Me cold' says the child obligingly.
> Presently the little thing progresses to the gracious 'I am cold.'
> But is the 'me', the 'I' really the same as that initial you with
> which we all begin; the sudden bright consciousness of the self as
> something defined by others? Perhaps we did better in our initial
> belief, that the shivering cold is jointly experienced, something
> shared, I wonder.
> (Weldon 1989 p.6)

This passage opens up an interesting avenue of exploration. Joanna's response to her lover's seemingly reassuring and tender endearment, 'I love you', is not one of fulfilment but of existential panic. Oliver, who is considerably younger than Joanna, has brushed aside all of the surface trappings of physicality. He has denied her body, her age, her wealth and life experience, in order to stake claim to that which is essentially Joanna. In doing so, he makes the implicit statement that he has a deep and profound knowledge of her. "Who is this you?" Joanna is forced to respond, and in formulating that question, she acknowledges that our existence, our identity, is based almost exclusively upon the perceptions of others. Through his intimation that he loves not one facet, or even a constellation of her features, but the true totality of her, Oliver immediately, if unwittingly, places himself in a position of power. The "I love you" is not merely a declaration of emotion, it creates a hierarchical boundary between subject and object in which authority and power rest almost exclusively within the province of the observer. He is the one who performs an action, who creates a sense of momentum by seeing, knowing and loving. His words are concrete, they are spoken and heard, whereas Joanna occupies a much more passive role: she is known, she hears, she is loved, and she responds introspectively with both confusion and a nostalgic yearning for a distant and more comforting past when knowledge, power, and experience were shared. Interestingly, shortly before Oliver's appearance, Joanna temporarily finds herself as both subject and object:

> And that evening when preparing for bed I looked into my mirror
> and saw the face of an old woman looking back at me, and this
> was very strange and terrible. I attended to this apparition at once
> with astringent masks, moisturising creams and makeup, and by
> the time Oliver padded into my bedroom on bare young feet with
> earthy nails, I, Joanna May, looked almost myself again.
> (Weldon 1989 p.5)

Joanna performs a double function of recognition and denial. She sees herself in the mirror and instinctively reaches for the cosmetics in a desire to mask or veil that knowledge. She then re-establishes, or to be more precise, *recreates* her sense of self, interpolating herself through a doubled act of naming. 'I, Joanna May' confirms both the social being identified by name and the private, unacknowledged phantasy self, the 'I' which denies the evidence of the other's eye. Joanna, in short, creates and imposes a false sense of unity on the split, schizophrenic image of what is perceived and what is imagined. In both examples, the exposure of subjectivity is instinctively rebutted by an attempt at concealment. The act of seeing and knowing which would, theoretically at least, create a sense of stability, is immediately undercut by denial of physicality by both Oliver and Joanna. In reality, Joanna is the old woman reflected in the glass, but like the murderer in a classic detective novel, both she and Oliver have to obscure, deny and cover up this knowledge that would, inevitably, destroy them.

This analogy between the detective novel and the acts of unconscious denial and duplicitous erasure practised by these characters is one that is certainly worth pursuing. The move from the traditional realist towards the early C20 modernist novel in the 1920s was, Zizek opines, accompanied by the transition from the detective story to the detective novel. This, he argues, was a significant change in the *Zeitgeist*. Although comparisons between Virginia Woolf and Agatha Christie are not instantly apparent, Zizek's contention that there is a striking similarity inasmuch as "both the modern novel and the detective story are centred around the same formal problem – the *impossibility of telling a story in a linear, consistent way,* of rendering the realistic continuity of events" (Zizek. 1994 p.107) does have some merit. The traditional detective novel is a struggle for narrative, a quest for closure and the restoration of a lost order. A crime, most frequently though not exclusively murder, is committed, and the

narrative follows the detective's struggle to construct the 'true' sequence of events, achieving closure only "when the detective is finally able to tell the 'real story in the form of a linear narrative" (Zizek. 1994 p.107).

Comparisons between the detective and the psychoanalyst are, Zizek suggests, inevitable. Like the analyst, the detective sifts her way through a myriad of clues, false trails and solutions in a painstaking act of recreation by "placing in parenthesis the field of meaning imposed on us by the deceitful first impression [and devoting] all our attention to the details abstracted from their inclusion in the imposed field of meaning" (Zizek. 1994 pp.113-4). The detective/analyst occupies a privileged position of guarantor: their very presence promises a solution, a sense of closure. In both, the therapist and the traditional detective fiction extract a fee for the work performed. Although this fee is sometimes provisional, it is the seemingly mercenary action that accords the detective their privileged position as The Subject Presumed To Know:

> After solving the case, the classical detective accepts with
> accentuated pleasure payment for the services he has rendered ...
> what is at stake here is not the classical detective's simple greed or
> his callousness towards human suffering and injustice – the point
> is much finer: the payment enables him to avoid getting mixed up
> in the libidinal circuit of (symbolic) debt and its restitution. The
> symbolic value of payment is the same in psychoanalysis: the fees
> of the analyst allow him to stay out of the 'sacred' domain of
> exchange and sacrifice.
> (Zizek. 1994 p.119)

The uncertainty, doubt and fear about the quintessential being who is 'loved' by Oliver is perhaps more understandable in this light. Because *she* does not know, and this uncertainty is exacerbated by the existence of her 'clones' who share all of her characteristic traits, mannerisms and emotions, Joanna reacts strongly against anyone else possessing that knowledge, preferring instead a mythical homogenous state of inter-changeability and ignorance. To be known is to be

dominated. Bethany, her ex-husband Carl's new mistress, offers an interesting contrast with Joanna:

> Her red hair had been untidily pinned up with a Spanish amber
> comb: she wore emerald-green contact lenses in her eyes. The
> look of wanton was intentional, and as fake as her orgasms: she
> could do student, or executive wife or lady doctor just as well. The
> only school exam she'd ever taken was Drama and she'd got a
> credit for that. But she could think of easier and livelier ways of
> making a living than being an actress, and recognised it as folly to
> waste her father's training in being what men wanted.
> (Weldon 1989 pp.16-7)

Unlike Joanna, Bethany is a woman who is confident of her identity, primarily because she has constructed herself as a site of complete lack, an intense vacuum waiting to be filled by the plenitude of her lovers, providing they pay her price. Bethany thus subscribes to the laws of utility and economic exchange that protects the analyst and detective and rises above the circulation of desire, exchange and sacrifice. This is particularly noticeable at the end of the novel: Carl self-destructs in a Chernobyl of his own making, Joanna and her clones form a gestalt, exchanging identities and responsibilities for mutual convenience, each, in their own way, achieving some form of closure while Bethany finds herself back at the beginning, returning to the media magnate, Hughie Scotland, significantly unaltered by the tragicomedy that has unfolded (Weldon 1989 p.260).

Bethany's over-reliance on value and reward causes her some problems. Unlike the detective/analyst, Bethany fails dismally in the role of the Subject Presumed To Know. Because she has deliberately created herself as nothingness, because she has emptied herself of all substance, she has nothing to offer or give but the void she believes men desire. Thus, when Carl, a self-made millionaire, takes her back to the lowly origins where he was raised by abusive parents in an attempt to have his greatness and sense of self recognised and re-established, Bethany fails to deliver and is instantly devalued under Carl's intense gaze:

> And Carl knew he had been deceived in her; she was not after all
> what he hoped. He was disappointed in her, hurt; he had forgotten
> what it was to be disappointed, hurt. Bethany did not begin to
> understand the significance of his achievement. She belonged to
> the TV age: nothing surprised, nothing impressed: real life rolled
> off a scriptwriter's pen. To have started here, yet come to this!
> Magnificent, but she couldn't see it.
> (Weldon 1989 p.39)

Unable to offer him the recognition and subsequent sense of self-fulfilment that he desires more than anything else, Carl experiences the disappointment and pain of rebuttal. Like most people, his instinctive act is to protect the fragile ego, to defend his tenuous sense of self and self-worth through an act of transference: *she* is at fault because she cannot see, *she* betrayed *him*, falsely raising his expectations by promising everything yet delivering nothing.

Bethany's assumption that "the sheer surprise, the sudden joyful restoration of self-esteem as conferred by the sexual act when performed with the right (even though unlikely – especially the unlikely) person", (Weldon 1989 p.30), though initially correct, is too simplistic and overlooks the fact that the sexual act, like love, money or power, is at best only a partial substitution for a desire that can never be fulfilled: the desire for completion, for a unity of self that is both elusive and illusory. At best, each character is determined by their assets: Carl is defined by his wealth, power and the distance from his past; Bethany by her youth, sexual expertise and ability to become the object men desire; and Joanna creates herself as an extension of a specified other:

> Who is she? Oh, Carl May's wife? What does she do? Nothing.
> She is Carl May's wife. What does she think? Nothing. She is Carl
> May's wife. What does she feel? Nothing. She is Carl May's wife.
> (Weldon 1989 p.102)

Thus, although nostalgic and desirous of a sense of one-ness, Carl's desire, like Joanna's, can only be satisfied by other people, confirming and asserting what

they believed would be taken for granted. Imagining oneself has become a political act, an act of negotiation, diplomacy, conflict and trade-off in which a part of the self is bartered or sacrificed in order to exist. The unconscious was not only structured like language, it was policed like one as well, and the only escape from this politicisation is Bethany's passive non-existence.

Perhaps the most crucial moment in the novel occurs during the confrontation between Carl, Bethany and Joanna. Joanna, made aware that Carl has broken his celibacy, leaves her lover to confront him over this betrayal. Joanna journeys to the heart of Carl's empire and, during the subsequent row, she learns of the existence of the clones (Weldon 1989 pp.104-12). Previously, both Carl and Joanna have been masked, either by physical absence or the past, but in this scene both elements are brought together by the existence of Bethany as they erupt in a psychic meltdown.[36] What follows, is a powerfully compelling dance of transference, recognition and denial in which each seeks to obliterate and absorb the other. "Old women have husbands by the skin of their teeth and there is no skin left to your teeth, Joanna May" Carl tells her. "Your yellow discoloured teeth." (Weldon 1989 p.106) Joanna counters immediately, refusing the exchange by pointing out that hers are white and it is Carl who has the yellow teeth. She then retaliates by impugning Carl's sexual prowess and boasts of her younger lover, but just as she did a moment ago, Carl refuses this recognition of himself and tells her that as far as he is concerned she is irrelevant: who she sleeps with, whether she lives or dies holds no significance for him.

At this point Carl is temporarily triumphant and Joanna's unstable centre collapses. Having defined herself as belonging to him since the moment she read the newspaper accounts about his abuse as a child, the core of her identity is removed. "Oh flesh of my flesh, love of my soul, husband of my heart," she

cries as she tries to hold onto her vanishing sense of self without success. Carl,
however, driven by both his excessive nature and his own desire to be
recognised by Joanna in this, his greatest triumph, sows the seed of his own
destruction by revealing the existence of the clones. Revelling in his position of
power, he declares that he can make and remake her for his own amusement. In
doing so, he provides Joanna with another, tentative centre. She is not isolated.
There are other, external selves who hold the promise of fulfilment, and this
new-found knowledge empowers her. Although it will be some time before she
fully accepts her loss of singularity and makes the transition towards
heterogeneity, towards acknowledging her split selves, Joanna assumes another
identity, the spokesperson for her fragments, and attacks with devastating
effect:

> Multiply me and multiply my soul: divide me, split me; you just
> make more of me, not less. I will look out from more and different
> windows, that's all you have done, and I will watch the world go
> by in its multifarious forms, and there will be no end to my seeing.
> I will lift up my heart to the hills, that's all, to glorify a maker who
> is not you.
> (Weldon 1989 p.110)

Although this scene occurs approximately halfway through the novel, Carl's
destruction is inevitable as soon as Joanna denies him her recognition.

Joanna and Carl exist in their purest and most singular form through a system of
exchange: in seeing and acknowledging each other, they define the other,
policing the boundaries between an ordered subjectivity and chaos,
guaranteeing the other's existence and autonomy. Through the clones, Joanna
can redefine and realign herself, but from this point Carl is isolated. His power
and money are recognised, but as a social being, he is invisible. The only
person, other than Joanna, who could perform this function is Bethany and she
has already failed. Left with nothing, Carl embarks on a failed and futile quest

to both destroy and possess Joanna by plotting to kill two of the clones whilst possessing the other two.

Weldon's exploration of coherent unity as a tentative, provisional thing at best, reveals itself in the form as well as the content of the novel. Like the characters, the text offers a false impression of unity, but this rapidly deconstructs itself. Rather than a coherent, relatively linear narrative that takes place over a short period of time, The Cloning of Joanna May is a composite of presence and absence, of gaps, erasures, misdirection and intertextuality. Ford, (1992) suggests that Weldon's novel is a revisionist re-writing of Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1961):

> Weldon makes repeated allusions to "The Waste Land". The pattern she creates triggers a reassessment of the Pound-engineered monomyth of modernism and suggests not a cloning, but a remaking. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot claims that art reorders art; in The Cloning of Joanna May, Weldon uses it to do just that. Her reordering depends mainly upon the unleashing of women's voices, a source of power blocked and chained by the fragmentation in "The Waste Land." Weldon's female characters are clones, yet not even their genetic identicality can make them identical. Eliot's "Waste Land" women, as he claims in the much-discussed notes to the poem, are "all one woman," and although they speak in many voices, they are clones, revealing a limited range of concerns.
> (Ford 1992 p.322)

Although there are undoubtedly strong parallels between these texts, the novel cannot be reduced to a single source anymore than Joanna or Carl can depend upon the permanence of the other's recognition. Throughout the novel echoes of traditional science fiction B movies, the Frankenstein myth, George Formby songs, Tennyson's poetry and the works of Shakespeare are fore-grounded. Indeed the confrontation scene that we have just been examining reads at times like a schizophrenic production of The Tempest (1999) with Carl and Joanna switching roles (one minute Caliban the next Prospero), Dr Holly becomes Ariel, the clones a shattered Miranda and Bethany is cast as the uninvolved

spectator, the audience. What is important here is that any assumption of internal coherence, of a unified subject/object is exposed as a myth. Irrespective of all other considerations to be a subject is always already to be trapped within the irresistible dialectic of power and subservience: one is *subjected* by the power others have over our basic self (mis)recognition, whilst simultaneously attaining power over those who rely upon our ability to confirm their inner coherence. Lapsey & Westlake write:

> To be a subject is to be looked at from somewhere other than the
> position from which one sees. What is desired in love is to be seen
> by the Other as one wishes to be seen, to overcome this split
> between the eye of the subject and the gaze of the Other.
> (Lapsey & Westlake 1993 pp.182-3)

Weldon, however, is not content to merely explore the dislocated subjectivity and identity myths which help define the period she also placed her fictions at the cutting edge of the debates regarding scientific breakthroughs; particularly in the areas of biology and genetic engineering.

Although the relationship between literature and science has a history of antagonism, with literature providing several potent myths and images that are frequently used to create an anti-science backlash (Wolpert 1992 p.6), this attitude changed somewhat in the 1980s. In her novel The Life and Loves of a She Devil (1982) Weldon expropriated the Frankenstein mythos with rejected wife Ruth availing herself of medical breakthroughs to reinvent herself and, as we have seen in The Cloning of Joanna May (1989), science again offers a positive escape from the existential crises her eponymous heroine finds herself in. Although science has a positive effect on both women, the ethical problems with such advances, and their effect on the 'human' create certain problems; problems that are frequently rebutted by an insistence that "the applications of science are not necessarily the responsibility of scientists" (Wolpert 1992 p.152). Science, Wolpert argues, is neither moral nor immoral, it is merely a

quest for knowledge "and it is with technology and politics that the real responsibility lies" (Wolpert 1992 p.171). The Wolpert defence is offered to an outraged Joanna confronts the scientist responsible for the cloning:

> "It must have been fun," said Joanna May, "to clone me and see how that turned out."
> "Our major concern at the time," said Dr Holly benignly, "was in the successful implanting of fertilised eggs in stranger wombs, and testing the efficacy of certain immuno-suppressive drugs, rather than in personality studies, or making any contribution to the nurture-nature debate"
> (Weldon 1989 p.197)

Weldon's novel suggests that the cloning was a positive act, although one is still left uneasy and disturbed by the knowledge that, although science is promoted as a totally disinterested party, it is always already embroiled within the matrix of capitalism. Dr Holly's research, and the act of cloning, was only made possible through Carl May's funds. This area remains relatively unexplored because Carl loses interest in the clones until it is too late for him to affect the outcome, but neither Jolly nor Wolpert seriously consider the potential consequences of the experimentation they promote. Like Jolly, Wolpert stresses only the positive arguing, "Individual responsibility and choice, provided the results harm no one else, is fundamental to a democratic society. We might find it distasteful that someone might use gene therapy to change themselves in a particular way, but perhaps it is something we have to live with" (Wolpert 1992 p.167). Minsky takes the case even further arguing that "we must imagine ways in which future replacements for worn body parts might solve most problems of failing health. We must then invent strategies to augment our brains and gain greater wisdom. Eventually we will entirely replace our brains -- using nanotechnology" (Minsky 1994 p.86). Like Wolpert, Minsky's view of science and genetic engineering is essentially utopian in which the robots of the future will be our "desired and designed" genetically modified children (Minsky 1994 p.91). Indeed, Wolpert assures us, genetic engineering doesn't really raise any

new ethical issues because organ transplants and chemotherapy already alter the genetic makeup (Wolpert 1992 p.166). What both of these fail to fully comprehend is that within every scientific and technological dream a nightmare is waiting to be born: one only has to examine the enthusiasm for eugenics at the beginning of the twentieth century to see the potential for damage offered by the scramble to be post-human. It is one thing to accept the possibility that we are decentred subjects, that our identity is not a given but a series of negotiations, struggles and revisions, but it is something else entirely to view ourselves as just so much raw material. The problem with the post-human scenario is not just moral and ethical, it is also profoundly psychological. Thus, when Joanna May conjectures that "Perhaps what Dr Holly took away from me at the Bulstrode Clinic was not so much my identity, as my universality. He made me particular, different from other women" (Weldon 1989 p.202) she is only partially correct. Dr Holly not only robbed her of her universality and made her particular, he also erased her singularity. She is both replicated and a replicant, and this is why she can only discover peace in the company and security of her reproductions. In his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin (1992d) argued that each reproduction significantly altered and fragmented the meaning of the 'original' work until the very concept of the original lost any significant meaning. With its aura of uniqueness shattered by the various contexts and associations of the reproductions, the original's claim to originality lies exclusively as being the source of the reproductions. Thus, the pervading scepticism of the postmodern condition coupled with the breakthroughs in genetics, computer sciences and virtual reality in the 1980s, not only redefined the human experience, they contained the potentiality to strip away the last vestiges of subjectivity and reshape the very original experience of being human. With the always fragile border between identity and non-identity threatened and collapsing on all sides, it is little wonder that the horror genre moved into new and innovative

directions. The emergence of Clive Barker and Ramsey Campbell helped reframe the genre: the horrific was no longer a deviation from normality, but an essential and uncontrollable part of it.

Stephen King has argued that all "tales of horror can be divided into two groups: those in which the horror results from an act of free and conscious will – a conscious decision to do evil – and those in which the horror is predestinate, coming from outside like a stroke of lightning" (King 1982 p.62). King's rationalisation assumes that horror is always motivated: evil people do evil things, or demons and monsters arise to reveal the power of good over evil.[37] In the 1980s, this false and enforced opposition, which has its roots in Christian humanism, was subjected to intense pressure. Barker writes:

> After Poe, the thrust of *fantastique* fiction would never for me be a matter of conventional folks setting their Christian values against some fretful, haunted darkness, but a celebration, however perverse, of that darkness; a call to enter a territory where no image or act is so damnable it cannot be explored, turned over in the mind's eye, kissed and courted; finally - why whisper it? - *embraced.*
> (Barker 1991)

Just as Lacan's revisionist approach to Freud reveals that the subject is always already fragmented, that there is no real possibility of closure, or reunification, Barker opens up the traditional horror story to its unconscious, to its radical otherness and the sinister sensuality of ensuing chaos. In Barker's work, the self is always on the verge of destruction whilst normality is something we build and construct to protect ourselves from those libidinous forces, impulses, and drives that are omnipresent in our minds, bodies and social spheres.

Barker's short story, "The Body Politic" is a nightmarish tale of the collapse of unity. While the relatively normal and unimportant Charlie George sleeps, his hands secretly communicate with each other. The right hand, revealing its

messianic vision of a new world, a liberation from the tyrannical whole, coerces the cautious, conservative left along with its desires and together they conspire against the body politic. Charlie's wife prematurely discovers their clandestine conferences and a theoretical revolution becomes a real, physical insurgency. Despite his attempts to resist them, Charlie's hands throttle his wife, they frustrate his attempts to seek psychiatric help, and he is powerless to prevent the right from severing the left. Liberated, the left hand journeys into the world, raising an incredible and terrifying army. A nightmare of dismemberment and confusion ensues, which is only resolved when, in an heroic self-sacrificing act, Charlie betrays the right hand and leads the mutinous appendages into a leap of death. At this point closure is possible. The disaster has been averted through the noble sacrifice of the individual an a sense of order could be restored, but Barker eschews such a convenient ending. Boswell, a man whose legs were severed by a train as he tried to escape from the frenzied involuntarily dismemberment occurring at the YMCA, is lying in an intensive care ward and suddenly sees his severed legs rise up and walk away:

> He looked up, and they were *his* legs, standing there severed
> between the groin and knee, but still alive and kicking ... And did
> his eyes envy their liberty, he wondered, and was his tongue eager
> to be out of his mouth and away, and was every part of him, in
> some subtle way, preparing to forsake him? He was an alliance
> only held together by the most tenuous of truces. Now, with the
> precedent set, how long before the next uprising? Minutes? Years?
> He waited, heart in mouth, for the fall of Empire.
> (Barker 1985 p.33)

Like so many narratives of the 80s, Barker's story reveals a crisis in confidence: a complete lack of coherence and identity as the fragile "alliance only held together by the most tenuous of truces" begins to crack and fracture. Indeed, a central theme of Barker's story revolves around the impotence of psychoanalysis to heal and restore the alienated self to an idealised normality. Dr. Jeudwine, the therapist who ostensibly 'cured' Charlie of his delusions that his body was in revolt, is forced to concede that rationalising the human mind is

a contradiction in terms, that the comforting reason and rationality promised by the illusion of homogeneity and centrism offers very little in the way of compensation when the house of cards begins to collapse:

> 'Oh Charlie…' he said, gently, chiding the absent maniac. 'What have you done?'
> His eyes began to swell with tears; not for Charlie, but for the generations that would come when he, Jeudwine, was silenced. Simple-minded, trusting generations, who would put their faith in the efficacy of Freud and the Holy Writ of Reason. He felt his knees beginning to tremble, and he sank to the dining room carpet, his eyes to full now to see clearly the rebels that were gathering around him.
> (Barker 1985 p.23)

Even at the very last Jeudwine tries to allocate responsibility, to place authority with someone, but this is only possible because the veil comes down to prevent him from *seeing* the unrepresentable. Through the protection of the blindsight offered by his tears, Jeudwine retains some sense of self, even as that self is extinguished. The problem, however, is that that the text contradicts Jeudwine's dying analysis. Neither Charlie, Boswell or even the punk in the YMCA screaming for help as he strangles himself (Barker 1985 p.18) has even the illusion of control because the lack of coherence, this collapsing of the centre, occurs not in an individual but in the very concept of *the* individual.

As the Symbolic realm is torn free from the chain of referentiality and responsibility, the subjective fallacy fails to position the subject within a stable and secure frame of orientation, and an obsessional fear of losing coherence and self-identity develops which manifests itself as *le corps morcele*, a sense of disintegration or chopping up of the body. Saleem Sinai, the narrator of Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1982) experiences a similar dissolution of the self:

> Please believe that I am falling apart.
> I am not speaking metaphorically; nor is this the opening gambit
> of some melodramatic, riddling, grubby appeal for pity. I mean
> quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug –
> that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much
> history, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I literally
> am disintegrating, slowly for the moment although there are signs
> of acceleration.
> (Rushdie 1982 p.37)

What is striking about these texts is the sheer physicality of this splitting, severing or disintegration. Joanna May is a woman who is split into four alternative identities, the body itself splits and rebels in Barker's story and Saleem refutes metaphor with what he perceives as concrete reality. What is happening in all of these texts is that the previous and self-confirming distinctions between private and public spheres, between the subject and the state dissipates as the centre fails to hold. Things fall apart, selves unravel, myths are exposed and the Emperor of the Cartesian subject is revealed in all of his nakedness. Nor, as we shall see in later chapters, was this sense of disintegration restricted to the realm of the personal. The 1980s were a crucial period of upheaval, uncertainty and aggressivity in political, social, military, intellectual and economic spheres: a period when the dichotomy between reality and fiction was almost unsustainable. The fictionality of identity and a growing, pessimistic awareness that reality is only as real as our shaken belief in it provides the thrust for P.D. James' novel Innocent Blood (1980).

Innocent Blood tells the story of Philippa Palfrey, a woman who has had a life of privilege with wealthy (though emotionally repressed) parents since she was adopted at the age of eight. Shortly after her eighteenth birthday she embarks upon a journey of self-discovery, only to realise that the quest for her natural parents exposes the carefully constructed and over elaborate fantasy she has created for herself as a sham. Mary Ducton, her real mother, is not only alive, but is due to be released from prison after serving a life sentence for the murder

of a girl who had been raped by her father. Acting against the advice of her adoptive father, Maurice, Philippa abandons her plans to visit Europe and sets up home with Mary Ducton, where they begin to rediscover and redefine themselves.

Philippa, like Bethany in Weldon's novel, is an emotional vacuum. She rebuffs intimacy, continually denying herself essential emotional contact. Her choice of lover is determined by social and economic value, and even the decision to locate her birth mother is based on pragmatic, rather than personal reasons. Unlike Bethany, who consciously adopts roles, identities and masks in exchange for materialistic rewards, Philippa is a more complex and disturbed character. She is the Lacanian subject who has only partially entered the Symbolic: for her, the interior world of fantasy, desire and false memory is the real reality. Even when she is forced to confront the sheer fictionality of these illusions, she finds it difficult to let go (James 1980 pp.40-4). Trapped in a psychic limbo by her incestuous desires for her adoptive father and an acute lack of purpose, direction or self, Philippa textualises everything:

> Naked in the bathroom just now, who was I? I can be described,
> measured, weighed, my physical processes recorded, given a
> name, real or unreal, for the convenient documentation of a life.
> But who am I? Whoever I am, nothing of me comes from Maurice
> or Hilda. How could it? They've done nothing but provide the
> props for this charade, the clothes, the artefacts. Even this
> soliloquy is contrived.
> (James 1980 p.50)

In many ways Philippa is the Lacanian child who looks in the mirror and sees nothing reflected back with which she can identify. Thus, unable to internalise or function adequately, she projects herself onto those around her, floundering helplessly with each failed identification. Though preferring her "fantasies at least tenuously rooted in reality" (James 1980 p.10), the list of her prematurely aborted identities is exhaustive: 19th Century orphan; poor child made good;

morally outraged victim of deceit; sociological experiment; organic doll; sexual object; both writer and assorted fictional characters; bastard; hustler; murderess; extortionist and thief, to name just a few of the performance roles she plays out. Her feelings towards Maurice, are incredibly complex, and his potential as a role model, though encouraged, is negated by her sexual desire for him. Her adoptive mother, Hilda, is similarly unavailable.

Hilda, though more centred, is a woman without real identity or purpose. Unable to secure a role for herself, she is a text written by her husband. Weighed down and haunted by her husband's overbearing determination and the constant presence in absence of his deceased first wife, Helena, Hilda is condescended to by all and sundry. Yet despite her acute passivity and her inability to protect herself from the overbearing egos that surround her, events show Hilda to be exceptionally perceptive and strong. There are indications of this hidden strength and resolve early in the text: her comments to Philippa, her part time occupation as a magistrate and her awareness of Maurice's real source of grief (the loss of his 'son' Orlando) all offer some sign of potential, but this potential is raw and undeveloped. The guilt she feels for her failure to conceive, which Hilda views as the primary cause for the failure of her marriage and loss of love, is only expatiated when Maurice confesses his infertility. This liberates Hilda in two distinct ways: first, she no longer feels like a 'failed' woman and, most significantly, the knowledge that the seemingly omnipotent Maurice was cuckolded gives her the strength to break free of his debilitating influence. This transformation, as sudden and startling as it is, however, comes too late for Philippa who has already tried and failed to bond with her (James 1980 p.56). Thus, by ignoring her social worker's warning at the beginning of the novel that confrontation with truth and the subsequent abandonment of fantasies frequently leads "not to a rebirth into something exciting and new, but a kind of death" (James 1980 p.19), Philippa begins to seek out and identify with Mary

Ducton, her child murdering mother. From the moment they come face to face, Philippa begins to create a coherent, stable and homogeneous identity:

> At first she looked so ordinary; a slight, attractive figure in a grey,
> pleated skirt with a paler cotton shirt blouse and a green scarf
> knotted at the neck. All her grotesque imaginings fled like
> shrieking demons before a relic. It was like recognising oneself, It
> was the beginning of identity.
> (James 1980 pp.87-8)

As we have seen from Lacan's work, this initial misrecognition provides a catalyst, an opening rather than a resolution to the drama. Having created a discernible sense of being through identification with her mother, Philippa's idyllic state of oneness and unity must be disturbed by the Name of the Father. When Philippa attempts to steal Maurice's silver spoon collection, the Law, in the form of Maurice, intervenes and Philippa is forced to confront the dimension of truth she was warned about at the beginning of the novel. Having disturbed Maurice with his young lover, Philippa feels for the first time in her life, as though she is immune: although it is at this moment of absolute confidence that she is at her most vulnerable:

> There was nothing he could say now which could harm her or her
> mother. Her eyes followed his careful pacing. Never before had
> she been so aware of his physical presence, of every breath he
> drew, of every bone in his head and hands, of every contraction of
> muscle; the air between them drummed with his heartbeat. And
> because of this intensity of awareness there was something else
> she knew, something that she couldn't explain.
> (James 1980 p.305)

The importance of Maurice being caught partially dressed after the act, rather than with his pants down, is significant. Absolute nakedness, as Philippa observes, both reveals and diminishes identity (James 1980 p.295). It is unlikely that, had he been fully exposed to her gaze, Maurice would appear before her as a being bristling with kinetic energy and incredibly phallic potency. It is

because she both senses and acknowledges this concealed power, that her belief that there was "nothing he could say now which could harm her or her mother" is undercut.

As we have seen, Lacan places language and the Name of the Father or Law in the same location, suggesting that, "it is with the appearance of language the dimension of truth appears" (Lacan 1980b p.172). As the symbolic guardian and giver of language, Maurice's ability to destroy Philippa's illusions, to split her and force her away from the idealised and unhealthy union with her mother, is unquestionable. The truth, repressed for so long, erupts into her existence, radically tearing her away from the real. Maurice informs her that she was adopted before the child murder. Realising that everything Mary has told her is a lie, that prior to her adoption, that Philippa had been hospitalised on several occasions due to severe child abuse, and that the 'false' memories that she had so willingly abandoned when she discovered her birth mother's identity were in fact the only 'true' memories she had, Philippa hurries back to confront Mary. She discovers, however, that there is no ground for consolation, no hope of a reprieve. There are no fragments she can shore against this ruin and, momentarily at least, Philippa loses the last vestiges of sanity and coherence as she enters the realm of the Other (James 1980 pp.319-20). Some form of order is restored when she returns to find Mary has committed suicide and the novel concludes with all of the surviving characters attempting to relocate themselves in the new reality, with Maurice pulling strings as he reasserts authority and control.

What these texts reveal is the fictionality of identity. There is no deep central core or predetermined hidden depths that we can appeal to: there is only a partial and imaginary misrecognition of ourselves in an idealised form that masks an immense lack of being. As uncomfortable and as threatening as it is to

acknowledge, "man cannot aim at being whole ... while ever at the play of displacement and condensation to which he is doomed" (Lacan 1980d p.287), there is no escaping the fact that we are, ultimately, little more than imaginative creations, fictional narratives centred and stabilised through language and specific social/ideological contexts. Giddens also offered this notion of the self as a work in progress, as an ever-revisable script:

> A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.
> (Giddens 1991 p.54).

This correlation between the society and subjectivity is an important one. The Cloning of Joanna May (1989) is set against the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster and the splitting of Joanna and the destructive power of Carl and his subsequent cataclysmic breakdown are mirrored against the historical inevitability of nuclear technology from the splitting of the atom to the Chernobyl meltdown; "The Body Politic" written at the height of Thatcherism, reflects a society torn apart by the divisive ideology of personal need and gratification over the well-being of the whole, and a similar doubling act occurs in Innocent Blood (1980). The novel is very clearly set in 1978 when Britain was ruled by a minority Labour government, presiding over the collapse of the post-war consensus while the new Right, dominated by Thatcherist agenda, prepare for power. The text is littered with deictic pointers to its historical context. The story takes place three years after the 1975 Children Act which, although it didn't grant automatic rights, it did make it possible for adopted children to find their biological parents. The contexts of the novel also embrace the political chasm, the impending general election, the law and order debate, social decay, mugging and the campaign to release Myra Hindley, the Moors

murderess. Subjectivity is, in other words, always partial and culturally determined. Because the subject is internally and externally subjected, the illusion of individuality is always already dependent upon society. Thus, there is no real clear-cut division between self and society. Within these texts, the individual is revealed as a symptom of the body politic, internalising ideology and projecting desire in an effort to maintain and support the illusion of stability whilst attempting to remain human. Before discussing these wider issues however, it is necessary to examine some of these compensatory identities, those social roles or mask plays that position us as subjects. The following chapter, therefore, will discuss the most basic and universal subject position that we occupy – gender and sexual identity.

3 - PREMATURE EMASCULATIONS: FEMINIST FICTIONS AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE MASCULINE IDEAL

In the previous chapter we saw how, rather than being an immutable given, our sense of identity "is an ever provisional, mobile effect of specific rhetorical acts – taken in the largest sense as discursive practices – a multiple, composite construction that a selected personal style or set of styles unifies – if at all – moment by moment" (O'Hara 1990 p.131). The human subject, contrary to popular belief, is not a stable entity but a psycho-socio construction based upon a primary act of misrecognition with an idealised image: an uneasy gestalt created through the unstable combination of speech and memory. What we remember of ourselves, which may or may not be true, and how we represent those memories both to others and ourselves determines who, at that precise moment of time, we are.

The sociological turn in the 60s, particularly the rise of Interactionism (which attempted to reconcile the idea of the subject as an actor responding and improvising according to specific social roles and contexts with a macro-theory of society) seemed to offer a point of balance, a way of dealing with the uncertainty and instability of the individual without surrendering the comforting solace of coherence and unity. Thus, within Goffman's 'dramaturgical approach' the individual established various social roles shaped and influenced by society, although this interaction was controlled by the notion of a 'team' which organised and authorised the limits and goals of such performance. By the 1980s, however, the concept of the 'team', of a controlling homogenising force which encouraged conformity to specific goals and desires, was breaking down. The legitimation crisis, and the threat to the unique aura of the human

offered by science, collapsed the distinctions between audience and actors, performance and reality, leaving only a disturbing array of contradictory masks.

O'Hara (1990) argues that within society certain dominant masks, or processes of self-identification, will emerge (man, husband, student, feminist, Boro supporter, reader of a specific newspaper, Labour voter - each and all of these are the masks we wear). Although there are several mask plays (the production of masks and creation of roles) in circulation, these are not bound to a single project: on the contrary the past is projected into unlimited potential futures through an act of revisionary exegesis. Thus, although we attempt to order our lives, our experiences and our cultures in a relatively unproblematic diachronic line of continuity, such a project is always disturbed by the synchronic slippage of the self. The past, in short, changes with us as we change masks, alter perceptions, rewrite and revise our ideals and perspectives in the light of our lived relations, always aware (even if only on an unconscious level) that "each moment is potentially a new birth of self, a new production of desire, another mask play, another body to be. All that one *is* depends on all that one has been, as one meets the future by becoming other than oneself once more" (O'Hara 1990 p.139). Within this matrix or reinvention and re-determination, literature plays an important role. O'Hara writes:

> Literature... offers a wide and ever changing range of possible
> selves not so much for one to become as for one to recall as
> inspirational or cautionary tales when faced with the inevitable
> everyday choices of living a life, pursuing a career, and
> understanding others and, one hopes, oneself
> (O'Hara 1990 p.131)

Although it is undeniably convenient to erect a dichotomy between the text and the world, the imaginative and reality, such an opposition is unsustainable in practice. The world itself is made up of various texts (religion, history, philosophy, law, science) all confirming that there is no safe, purely objective,

transcendental spot from which we can observe without in someway interacting. Reality is constructed through a network of codes, signs (language) that speak *to* us as they speak *through* us. To cite Derrida's now famous and frequently misquoted maxim, "There is no outside text"; the human subject is caught in an unrelenting series of negotiations, compromises, revisions and imaginative re-writings of themselves whilst "literature is the space in which questions about the nature of personal identity are most provocatively articulated' (Bennett & Royle 1995 p.104).

One of the primary models of identity construction and self-recognition is that of sexual difference. Although the interrogation of and interventions with sexual identity provided a major focal point in both 60s and 70s literature and literary criticism, by the 1980s feminist interventions were beginning to create significant hegemonic shifts in sexual and textual politics. There can be little doubt, for instance, that it revolutionised all aspects of the humanities, particularly within the then fledgling discipline of Cultural Studies. The feminist intervention in Cultural Studies was, Hall suggests "specific and divisive. It was ruptural. It reorganised the field in quite concrete ways." (Hall 1992 p.282). Whilst the predominantly male cultural theorists were making discreet overtures, feminist critics, as Hall wittily recounts, staged their own revolution:

> We know it was, but its not known generally how and where
> feminism first broke in. I use the metaphor deliberately. As a thief
> in the night, it broke in; interrupted, made an unseemly noise,
> seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies.
> (Hall 1992 p.282)

The feminist intervention, according to Hall, had five significant effects: recognition of the personal as political revolutionised theory and practice; the expansion of the idea of power created a need for new terminology; the focus of cultural studies was multiplied because of the need to address the issues of

gender and sexuality; questions about the subject and subjectivity that had been previously 'resolved' were reopened and the dialogue between social theory and psychoanalysis re-emerged. Both within and without the academic and literary spheres, the feminist interventions caused significant disruptions and debates.[38]

Throughout the 1960s and 70s feminist criticism was a relatively homogeneous project, focusing on recovering women's writing, offering images of women and revisionary accounts of male texts. In the mid 80s, with the proliferation of the new 'French' feminisms the focus was shifted towards collapsing, challenging, and deconstructing gender assumptions based upon the supposition of sexual difference to the point where any comfortable definition of what feminist criticism is, has become difficult, if not impossible. Rivkin and Ryan write:

> If the student of literature in the early 1970s was moved to ask
> why there is not a *feminist* criticism, the student of literary theory
> in the late 1990s might well be moved to shift the emphasis and
> ask why there is not *a* feminist criticism.
> (Rivkin & Ryan 1998 p.527)

One useful, though problematic, attempt at classification is the distinction between Anglo-American and French Feminism. It is important, however, to remember that "the terms 'Anglo-American' and 'French' must not be taken to represent purely national demarcations: they do not signal the critics' birthplace but the intellectual traditions within which they work" (Moi 1985 p.xlv). Although within the broad demarcations of these terms, there are debates, disputes and dialogues, it is possible to suggest that the Anglo-American lineage is primarily literary, rooted both in the institutional traditions of New Criticism and Marxism, and the grass roots activism of Second Wave feminism, whereas the French Feminist discourse is primarily philosophical, drawing upon and expanding the work of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. Although institutionally popular, it would be a mistake to assume that these two modes

dominated the whole sphere of feminist activity. Certainly, as interventions on local, national and even international stages revealed, feminisms born of Marxism, post-colonialism, or even those allied ethically rather than centred around a specific theoretical or ideological agenda, also made significant contributions: perhaps the most potent being the anti-nuclear Greenham Common protests.[39]

However it may manifest itself, feminism has not only represented and vocalised the importance and centrality of women, it has also by realigning and destabilising the biological essentialism that underpins the ideology of sexual difference acted as a liberating force for men. This chapter will examine, through readings of several texts, how the roles of both masculinity and femininity were challenged and altered in all spheres of fiction during the 80s, starting with Booker Prize winning novelist Pat Barker.

Born in Thornaby-on-Tees and still living in the North East of England, Barker began her career writing romantic fiction until she was advised by Angela Carter at a writer's workshop to write about what she knew. Taking this advice to heart, Barker's early works focused on the lives of working class women in her native Teesside. The first of these novels Union Street was published in 1982. By the time her second novel, Blow Your House Down (1984), went into print, her name featured on the Book Marketing Council's list of Best Young British Novelists.

Union Street (1982) is dominated by images of poverty, squalor, domestic violence and sacrifice, as it focuses on the lives of several women living on a dilapidated row of slum terrace houses. The novel is loosely structured, with characters floating in and out of each other's tales, creating a fragmented, rather than coherent narrative. Barker's women, from Kelly, the 11 year old street

urchin who is sexually assaulted to Alice, an old woman who drags herself from her home to die, if not in peace then at least on her own terms, are caught in the same trap of taking their poverty, abuse and inferiority for granted. "It is not enough," Eagleton has argued, "for a woman or colonial subject to be defined as a lower form of life: they must be actively *taught* this definition" (Eagleton 1991 p.xiv) and, for the most part, Barker's characters have graduated with honours. Years of conditioning, of accepting that when times are hard men get the meat and women settle for gravy (Barker 1982 p.250) have instilled a stoic, defeatist attitude that can rarely be broken. Iris, the fierce matriarch of the street, reveals this when she tries to fight back:

> 'Course she knew about Ted's temper. He thought he had a right
> to hit you. His father had always belted hell out of his mother, so
> why not? It was just like God bless you to him. But he was
> making a big mistake. She wasn't his sodding mother.
> When he came back she was waiting for him behind the door with
> the meat chopper in her hand. The blow glanced off him, though
> there was enough blood around to scare the pair of them stiff. It
> didn't stop him hitting her again, but it did free her from fear. She
> never lost her self-respect.
> (Barker 1982 p.190)

Although Iris attempted to break free from the law of the patriarchal fist, Ted's attitude to her rarely changes. Whenever Iris is pregnant or recovering from her operation, when she is at her most defenceless, his treatment of her becomes increasingly savage (Barker 1982 p.190). Ted's casual contempt for Iris, his natural assumption that she is his to dispose of as he wishes, is revealed when he expects Iris to have sex with two drunken strangers he has brought home. Iris defends herself again, but the outcome of this incident is chilling. Barker writes:

> She never willingly had sex with him again. Perhaps once or twice
> a year when he got to bad, to shut him up; never more than that.
> As for other men, well, the bairns came first.
> (Barker 1982 p.194)

The key word here is "willingly". Within that one telling phrase the reader is offered a history of domestic rape and abuse. In this novel, marriage is synonymous with loss. The moment a woman marries, she loses all rights and privileges to both her body and her mind. The lives of Barker's women are one of public appearance and private disintegration: their skin permanently tainted with the signs of their impoverished existence. Iris has "the dull eyes and permanently grey skin of somebody who keeps going on cups of tea, cigarettes and adrenalin" (Barker 1982 p.180) and we are introduced to Lisa Goddard with the description, "Tiredness and desperation were written across her face" (Barker 1982 p.107. Lisa, already with two children and heavily pregnant with a third, is burdened with a drunken, unemployed and abusive husband. Trapped within the walls of silence, Lisa like many of the other women in the novel, finds herself friendless, and without hope:

> Worse than the row was the day after, when he would sit walled
> up in silence, trying to pretend that nothing had happened. He
> would not by any word or gesture acknowledge that he felt
> remorse ... He'd never talked about his job again. Or anything
> else. There were the morning silences. The evening drinking.
> Rows. Occasionally violence. Nothing else.
> (Barker 1982 pp.119-21)

If the women within Barker's novel bear a striking similarity to one another then this is doubled in the case of the men. In and out of work, spending housekeeping money on drink and lashing out with their fists and feet, the men of Union Street are equally trapped in the negative, Andy Capp stereotyping of the Northern male. It would be easy to equate this with a lack of perception but the way Barker handles crucial moments (Lisa's gradual acceptance of her child, Brenda's abortion, the coming together of Muriel and her son as they share the bereavement) negates this argument. Barker, it has been argued, "is able to make us see her characters fully from within, as they see themselves, and thereby reveals the full individuality and humanity of women who have got

short shrift both in literature and in life" (Pollitt 1984), but there is one area that she strategically avoids – the sphere of female desire.

To be a woman, in Barker's world, is to be either an object of desire or a sexual commodity. In this text, sex within a relationship is almost always associated with violence. Kelly is raped by a stranger, Iris is raped by her husband and offered to strangers, Lisa is on the same path of sexualised violence as Iris while Joanne, who thus far has been treated with a modicum of respect by her boyfriend Ken, is initiated into the reality of human relationships once she reveals her pregnancy. From the moment Ken realises that he is going to have to marry her, his attitude changes. First he tries to persuade her to sit in the Bluebell snug with prostitutes and 'loose' women and, when she refuses, he attempts to rape her under the railway tunnel:

> Ken was panting, thrusting into her as though he hated her,
> grinding and screwing and banging hard enough to hurt. She was
> afraid for the baby and immediately knew what he was trying to
> do: he was trying to screw it out of her. She went cold, pressing
> herself back against the wall, but he fastened on to her with a
> terrible monotonous power.
>   There was something exciting in being used like this, in
> giving way to the impersonal, machine-like passion. For a moment
> she let herself relax, and his flesh bit into her like steel ... With
> deadly corrosive hatred she began to move against him, imposing
> upon him the rhythm of the train, which was at first exciting, and
> then terrible and then, abruptly, ridiculous, so that he lost his
> erection and slid ignobly out of her.
> (Barker 1982 pp.100-1)

What is particularly interesting is that from the moment Joanne adopts an active, rather than a passive role, the threat to her is diminished. Ken, like Carl May suddenly finds that his potency and power is peripheral. It is, Barker suggests, through indirect and unpredictable actions which side-step the vicious male/female possessor/possessed dichotomies, that hope is found. In an earlier section, Kelly turns the tables on her rapist by refusing to leave him, and this unexpected action creates a temporary reversal of power:

> The more he hesitated, the more obviously afraid he became, the
> greater was her rage, until in the end she seemed to be borne along
> on a huge wave of anger that curved and foamed and never broke.
> She pushed him into the shop in front of her ... Their eyes met for
> a moment, and again he admitted defeat. He was too easily
> defeated.
> (Barker 1982 p.31)

Because she cannot cope with seeing the final collapse of her assailant, Kelly's victory is temporary. When the rapist weeps openly, as the last vestiges of his masculinity collapse, Kelly runs away. These victories, though provisional, have more relevance than Iris' direct and bloody confrontations. Iris may have kept her self-respect but she never really shifted the balance of power. Significantly, it is the younger women who break down and deflate the masculine threat through a refusal to acknowledge their power whilst the older women adopt a more aggressive, though ultimately less successful, posture.

Union Street and its inhabitants live by strict cultural codes which reinforce the naturalisation of certain standards and norms. This cultural conditioning creates victims amongst both genders: Ken, Brian and Ted are as confined by their socially enforced roles as 'the man of the house' and 'the dominant male', as Joanne, Lisa and Iris are. For most of the novel, however, the men are sidelined and are rarely developed beyond the level of symbolic oppression. Thus, most responses to the text prefer to remain within the 'images of women' framework advocated by the field of inquiry known as Anglo-American criticism[40]

Within the field of Anglo-American criticism, Showalter (1989) suggests, there were two distinct areas of investigation. On the one hand there was a feminist critique of existing work, a field of "historically grounded inquiry, which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. Its subjects included the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed

literary history" (Showalter 1989 p.92). The purpose of feminist critique, Showalter argued, was to challenge the patriarchal canon and traditional representations of women, normally by classic male authors. The second field of investigation, gynocriticism, "begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture" (Showalter 1989 p.95). What was immediately noticeable about this particular brand of feminism is that it was both confrontational and exclusive; there was no room for the male apart from as the oppressive force. Within gynocriticism, which strategically accepts the speech/silence opposition, the recovered voice of woman is privileged. Barker's novel, seems particularly vulnerable to this enforced antagonism; so much so that one critic commented that Barker in <u>Union Street</u> (1982) offered her readers "everything George Orwell's Wigan landlady might have told him had he not been so intent on recording her dirty thumbprint in the bread-and-marge" (Pollitt 1984).[41]

Despite its good intentions, and the valuable groundwork already achieved by such an approach, gynocriticism suffered from the same limitations as any canon-forming project. Those limitations, it has been argued, "become particularly clear when it is confronted with a woman's work that refuses to conform to the humanistic expectations of an authentic, realistic, expression of 'human' experience (Moi 1985 p.79)[42] Gynocriticism, with its emphasis on the concrete over the abstract and experience over theory continually ran the risk of complicity with the patriarchal system it proposed to abolish. Mary Eagleton writes:

> What disturbs the pro-theorists is the refusal of the anti-theorists
> to analyse their own theoretical position ... From this perspective
> to value the experiential over the theoretical is not fundamentally
> to challenge the binary opposition, merely to reverse it. The
> oppositional structures of patriarchal thinking remain firmly in

> place and hierarchical modes of categorisation are sustained.
> (Eagleton 1991 p.6)

Even if the problem of complicity, canon-formation and the ghettoisation of feminism into a literary sub-culture of women's studies did not exist, there was another difficulty. In seeking to promote the voice and experience of women, gynocriticism made the assumption that those experiences, these voices were, in fact, concrete and knowable. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, however, the human subject, irrespective of gender, was far from unified and stable. Thus, this strand of feminism which emerged from the cultural politics of the late 60s and 70s found itself caught in an impossible position: to privilege 'women's experience' was to risk reproducing the discourse of the feminine they set out to oppose. It was suggested that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1984 p.110), and if feminism was to progress further than establishing a voice and space within the established system it needed to find a new way of theorising the feminine outside of the existing paradigms of representation.

French feminism approached the question of gender from a radically different direction, drawing upon post-structuralist, psychoanalytical and postmodern theoretical debates as it moved from the concrete realm of 'lived' experience and self-discovery into the more abstract domains of language, the unconscious and desire.[43] This shift towards a much more complex paradigm in the 1980s can best be summarised as a determination to uncover the construction of gender as a textual effect. Rivkin and Ryan write:

> If language carries worlds within it, assumptions and values that
> lie embedded in the simplest of utterances, then how can women
> take up such language, the language of patriarchy, and hope to use
> it to forge a better world for women?"
> (Rivkin & Ryan 1998 p.531)

This idea of woman's space, woman as a writing effect, is taken up by Helene Cixous (1981), who argues that not only is language logo-centric it is also phallo-centric, organising itself in a relentless and destructive system of binary oppositions in which the passive, negative traits are always depicted as feminine. Throughout her work, Cixous continually emphasises that "we can no more talk about 'woman; than about 'man' without getting caught up in an ideological theatre where the multiplication of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications constantly transforms, deforms, alters each person's imaginary order and in advance, renders all conceptualisation null and void" (Cixous 1981 p.96). The way out of the impasse, she suggests, is for women to acknowledge their bisexually charged bodies, to escape the rigorous restrictions of phallogocentrism by celebrating their capacity for endless sexual pleasure (*jouissance*) thus liberating their sex and celebrating their difference or 'otherness'. Such an act, she suggests, changes the stale and oppressive rules of the old game, which defines femininity as lack or negativity.[44]

The idea of *ecriture feminine*, or gendered texts was, even then, regarded as highly debatable. Rochefort, (1981) for instance, argued that it is erroneous to assert that literature has a sex, whether masculine or feminine, is erroneous. The problem is that the 'literary gatekeepers' force women to function within a limited imaginative sphere. Women, Rochefort argues, are culturally conditioned to repress and limit their imaginative explorations of their experiences, and it is this restriction which is inscribed within the hermeneutics of reading.[45] Cixous acknowledged that the project she proposed was, to a certain extent, utopian and fraught with difficulties:

> There is no such thing as 'destiny', 'nature', or essence, but living
> structures, caught up, sometimes frozen within historicocultural
> limits which intermingle with the historical scene to such a degree
> that it has long been impossible and is still difficult to think or
> even to imagine something else.
> (Cixous 1981 p.96)

This renunciation of a natural female experience, and her insistence that she is not a feminist in the traditional sense of the word, caused some disturbance and was echoed by another influential theorist, Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's relationship to feminism, like Cixous' and many others, was at best problematic.[46] Feminist practice, she asserts "can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it'" but to attempt to unify and stage resistance around a concept of woman or femininity is a futile project because "The belief that 'one is a woman' is almost as absurd and obscurantist as the belief that 'one is a man'." (Kristeva 1981 p.137). The important focal point of resistance, Kristeva argued, ought to concentrate on our existence as subjects and upon "our relationship to social constraints, to pleasure and more deeply, to language" because, irrespective of Right/Left political affiliations, the struggle against repression is the same.

On a first encounter with these ideas, one could be forgiven for assuming that French Feminism was actually a strange form of anti-feminism. True, the new theorists focussed on issues of male power and searched for spaces where women could exist and produce without being complicit with the hierarchical patriarchal structures of society, but most of their propositions were seemingly unrecognisable to the traditional view of the feminist struggling for equality. This raised another significant problem: if language was phallogocentric, and social reality was structured through language then how could women speak as women?

"Female sexuality" Irigaray asserted, "has always been theorised within masculine parameters" (Irigaray 1981 p.99). These parameters, constantly negate and repress femininity because male sexuality is singular, focused always on the phallic, whilst feminine sexuality is plural and heterogeneous. Whilst male pleasure is primarily visual, women, she declared, respond to

touch. A woman's sexuality is everywhere, Irigaray argued, "the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined – in an imaginary centred a bit too much on one and the same." The solution Irigaray offered was, however, both fanciful and impractical – a temporary though universal renunciation by women of their heterosexuality, a withdrawal from the sexual economy determined by the phallocratic order (Irigaray 1981a p.106).

Almost immediately, one becomes aware of the utopian desire within French Feminism for something Other, for the realm of the Imaginary to be opened up for 'feminine' writers, but this Imaginary is inaccessible – there is no Other of Other. Irigaray's definition of a woman's essence as two lips constantly touching in an act of homo-eroticism (Irigaray 1981a p.100), relying as it does on a revisited biologic essentialism coupled with an impossible desire to seek an unmediated mode of expression, was difficult to take seriously. Similarly, Moi offered this critique of Cixous:

> In her eagerness to appropriate imagination and the pleasure
> principle for women, Cixous seems in danger of playing directly
> into the hands of the patriarchal ideology she denounces. It is,
> after all, patriarchy, not feminism, that insists on labelling women
> as emotional, intuitive, and imaginative, while jealously
> converting reason and rationality into an exclusively male
> preserve.
> (Moi 1985 p.123)

It was at this point that feminism began to consider other elements of the equation and, unlike the gynocritics who sought to exclude the masculine to make visible the feminine, many French Feminists began to interact with and theorise the masculine. However undesirable such a perspective may be, Forrester (1981) argued, the world is always already viewed through masculine eyes and "this blindness to women's vision, which in fact prohibits any global vision of the world, any vision of the human species, has been fashioned by

men for our mutual impoverishment" (Forrester 1981 p.181). This omission offered only a perverted, marginal, castrated limited world view, a perspective that would remain half blind and impotent until it was complimented by the secret, silenced, woman's view; a view which is "the source where no one has been." (Forrester 1981 p.182).[47] Thus, as a further discussion of Barker's work illustrates, questions of sexual equality and gender differences were no longer isolated, they were woven within the matrix of other issues.

Written in the wake of the infamous Yorkshire Ripper murders, Pat Barker's second novel, <u>Blow Your House Down</u> (1984) reintroduces the reader to the squalid, poverty-stricken world of the industrial North: a world where there is high male unemployment, where the nuclear family is breaking down and where women are forced to choose between two equally demeaning careers; working in the chicken factory or prostitution (Barker 1984 p.112). The plot of the novel seems relatively conventional: there is a serial killer roaming the streets, stalking prostitutes. Unlike many conventional thrillers, Barker avoids the police-procedural narrative and takes her readers into the world and the minds of the victims. The police, when they are present, use the prostitutes as live bait, rather than protecting them. Within the framework of this plot Barker extends and develops themes from her earlier novel, although her style and treatment of the subject shows a growing confidence and willingness to experiment. Three of the four parts are non I narrated and the sudden switch to allow Jean's narration is a little disorientating. This switch of focus is immensely important and is something I shall return to shortly.

Jean, like Iris in <u>Union Street</u> (1982) decides to fight back and avenge the murder of Carol, her lover. Her behaviour becomes more obsessive with each passing day and she becomes more and more convinced not only that the killer is somebody's regular but that the prime suspect is Steve:

> He took a long time to come, but he always paid up without any
> trouble, and sometimes he paid extra. A bit over the odds. No
> violence. No threats. No bother. She just didn't like him. He used
> to keep a packet of little purple sweets in his pocket and slip one
> into his mouth, so that by the time he finally managed to get it up,
> his breath smelled of violets.
> (Barker 1984 p.120)

Although Jean is guessing, working solely on instinct, the reader instinctively

realises that she is correct in her assumptions as they recall this earlier passage

that introduces the killer:

> He slipped a sweet into his mouth and sucked it. His breath
> smelled bad because all his life he'd been afraid of dentists, and he
> always carried with him little purple, violet scented sweets if he
> was going to be close to anyone.
> (Barker 1984 p.59)

With consummate ease Barker builds up the tension as Jean lures the regular

into the car and, in a moment of panic-stricken clarity, she kills him. At this

point the narrative should stop, the Big Bad Wolf has been slain and normality

can return. Barker, however, turns the screw one more time and has Jean offer

another, alternative, reality:

> You see, that was only one way of telling it. I could tell you
> another story about a fat, middle aged man who went to see a
> prostitute and parked in the deep shadow next to the houses
> because he was afraid of being seen, and sweated a lot because he
> was nervous, and started to take off his tie, and ... I don't like that
> story very much.
> *There was no knife.* I scoured every inch of the car, and there was
> no knife ... Oh, but you say the smell. His breath smelled of
> violets. Yes, it did, and I killed him for it. Does that seem
> reasonable to you?
> (Barker 1984 pp.134-5)

Suddenly, the fixed reality that the reader has been presented with is

destabilised and what had, until this moment, been regarded as an immutable

certainty, is thrown into confusion. The code switch from non I to I narrative

suddenly begins to make sense because the reader's identification with Jean, the transition from observer to participant, creates a complicity in the murder of a potentially innocent victim. The distinctions between a reasonable demand for justice and the blood lust of the lynch mob are thus collapsed as Barker reveals that perception creates truth rather than passively reflecting it.

The novel returns to its non-I narrative and continues to develop this theme as the mystery assailant attacks Maggie, an employee of the chicken farm, and an aura of guilt and suspicion is formed around her husband, Bill. The certainties offered by the non I narrative are, however, unstable and problematic. Once more, as Maggie's story unfolds, the reader is lured into a degree of complicity, assuming that the 'villain' will be unmasked by the end of the book but simultaneously troubled by the potential for injustice immanent within any desire for closure; a problematic that is amplified when Bill is exonerated and reveals himself as a loving and caring spouse. In Blow Your House Down (1984), and also in the very short 'Blonde Dinah' section of Union Street (Barker 1982 pp.221-31), Barker reminds us perception is relational to context, and any attempt to enforce a singular perception over the multiplicity of possibilities is dangerously suspect and potentially tragic. Thus, whereas most novels would conclude with the unmasking and capture of the murderer, Barker presents us with an enigmatic ending that has perplexed many of her readers:[48]

> There is a moment in every evening where the streets of the city are dark although the sky is still light, almost as if the darkness is exhaled as a vapour from the pavements and cannot reach the sky.
> At this very moment the starlings come. At first a solitary black dot against clear translucent turquoise, then later, as the sun sinks beneath the level of the bridges, in a great black wave swelling and breaking over the city. They swarm above its streets, they descend on its buildings, covering every ledge and gutter thickly, wing to wing. But however many come down the sky remains full and the people of the city walk home through air that tingles with the starlings' cries.
> The sky flames, Then, gradually, as the birds continue to descend, the red gentles through purple and gold to rose, until at last every bird is lodged, and the singing dies away.

> Above the hurrying people, above the sodium orange of
> the street lamps, they hump, black and silent; unnoticed, unless
> some stranger to the city should look up, and be amazed.
> (Barker 1994 pp.169-70)

It is not only the transition from the prosaic, gritty realism of her prose to this lyrical and richly textured ending that provides a shock to the readers; it is the seeming irrelevance of the piece and the complete absence of closure. The mind immediately tries to shape the ending into a logical coherence with what has gone before, and the easy option here is to see the starlings as a metaphor for the women who work both in the chicken factories and on the streets. Like the starlings, these women have the illusion of freedom, the illusion of choice, but at a pre-determined time they too must flock together, drawn irresistibly by the centripetal forces of culture and necessity. Although this reading offers some degree of cohesion, it is extremely limited for two reasons. First, it ignores the structure of the novel, which reverses the normal process of narrative; rather than moving *towards* closure, <u>Blow Your House Down</u> (1984) moves *away* from it. The novel begins within the framework of a comfortable genre, it offers overly familiar if not stereotypical characters and slowly progresses towards the expected ending – the slaying of the beast. From the moment Jean opens herself, and the reader, to the possibility that she killed an innocent man, the text spirals away; it is no longer a novel about prostitution, women or the working classes, but an exploration of how perception and the imagination reconstructs, and realigns reality. Two specific modes are activated; the sacred mode of authority, accountability singularity and control in the first two parts of the book and the profane mode of instability, critique, multiplicity and indeterminacy within the third and fourth parts which insist that reality is always already relational to perception and, for the most part, people prefer *not to see* because denial is always more acceptable, and significantly less painful than the truths that exist in the unstable grey zone which exists between day and night, right and wrong, question and answer. Whereas <u>Union Street</u> (1982)

offered a realistic, if somewhat fragmented, romanticised and exclusive, representation of Northern women, <u>Blow Your House Down</u> (1984) goes one step further by questioning and problematising the implicit assumptions that allow such representations to be made; it is not only a realist novel, but also a translation of realism and thus enacts and contributes, within the pages of the novel, many of the key theoretical feminist discourses of its period without being inexorably bound to them. Although Barker's exploration of economic and cultural determinants on gender and identity is valuable, her focus on the very marginalised and impoverished women from the industrial North East prevents any active engagement with the other important issue which emerged within identity and gender politics in the 1980s: the engagements and negotiations with the new sciences which, as we saw in the previous chapter, radically challenge the very concept of the human.

Sullerot (1981) offered a radical new spin on the culture v nature gender debate. Although cultural resistance can only go so far, it is, Sullerot suggested, more effective to alter nature than culture. The progress of science, she asserted, has done more to liberate women from the dominance of nature than any cultural or political movement. From the discovery of the ovum in female mammals at the end of the seventeenth century, to the invention of the pill and formula foods, science has separated the previously inexorably linked domains of sexuality, procreation, motherhood and child rearing and the obvious result of such a separation is that to "separate domains and act on each of them individually gives multiple choices and creates freedom" (Sullerot 1981 p.155). Fay Weldon examines this uneasy partnership between science, identity and emancipation in what is arguably her most popular novel, <u>The Life and Loves of a She Devil</u> (1981).

The Life and Loves of a She Devil (1983) is a watershed novel for Weldon. Having aligned her earlier work firmly with the feminist movement, she now acknowledges that sexual identity and gender construction are too deeply embroiled within the matrix of power relations and cultural politics to be successfully separated. The novel tells the story of Ruth, a hulking, overweight, misshapen figure who is clumsy, wart ridden and intensely overweight. Indeed, even when she cries, her grotesque form manifests itself, making her tears seem "bigger and more watery than other people's" (Weldon 1983 p.23). Having fallen pregnant she marries her employer's son Bobbo, but the marriage is always one of convenience. Bobbo insists on being free to pursue affairs with other women, attempting to console Ruth with the knowledge that she is his wife and thus irreplaceable. Just as Joanna May's sense of identity was located around her husband, Carl, Ruth exists only as Bobbo's spouse and in moments of anxiety and despair reaffirms her role by reciting the Litany of the Good Wife. Bobbo's relationship with Mary Fisher, who plays Ariel to Ruth's Caliban, stretches her capacity to cope beyond all limits and her hatred for her extreme opposite brings home the dread realisation that "I have fallen out of love with Bobbo!"

After being deserted by her husband, Ruth burns down the family home, making certain that any insurance claim will be rejected, before depositing the children and dog with Bobbo, thus threatening his and Mary's idyllic romantic existence with a brutal injection of reality. With no physical, material or emotional ties other than her hatred of Mary Fisher and desire for revenge on Bobbo, Ruth begins to make her way in the world. She is, at this moment, doubly handicapped. Not only has she lost her identity, her physical appearance will always isolate and marginalise her in a world centred around the mystique of beauty. Weldon writes:

> I am frightened. I belong nowhere, neither to the ranks of the

respectable nor the damned. Even whores, these days, must be
beautiful. As a woman my physical match is an old, epileptic,
half-witted man. And I accept it, and in the accepting have lost my
place, my chair at the edge of the great ballroom where the
million, million wallflowers sit, and have done since the beginning
of time, watching and admiring, never joining the dance, never
making claims, avoiding humiliation, but always hoping.
(Weldon 1983 p.56)

Like Carl May, Ruth declares war on nature and God as she embarks on a
bizarre odyssey of transformation from the 'good wife' to the 'she devil' – an
epithet hurled at her by Bobbo and one she seizes gratefully as a substitute
identity in much the same way Joanna drew strength and purpose from the
clones in her moment of despair. Although Ruth has a positive, liberating effect
on many of the people she encounters (Mrs. Fisher, Geoffrey Tufton, Nurse
Hopkins, the innumerable women who work for her Amber Rose agency) these
are accidental by products of her actions rather than aims. Ruth is motivated by
revenge rather than any emancipatory ideology, feminist or otherwise. Indeed,
nowhere is this renunciation of exclusive feminism made clearer than when
Ruth fails to find happiness and fulfilment in the feminist commune, much to
the chagrin of the others:

"How can you turn your back," they exclaimed, on love and
peace, and the creative joy of pure womanhood?"
But Ruth thought she could, very easily. They made her pay $27
for her laundry and confiscated her few small belongings,
including alarm clock and leather gardening gloves, in lieu of
notice, and declined to drive her to the station, three miles away.
(Weldon 1983 p.210)

What Ruth wants, however, is not love and peace but revenge on Mary Fisher,
the beautiful romantic novelist who seduced and stole her husband and, as we
can see through their final actions, the desire for revenge, for some form of
payback also manifests itself with the utopian idealism of the feminist
commune.

"Since I cannot change the world, I will change myself," Ruth asserts early in the novel (Weldon 1983 p.54) and she is true to her word. After secreting his clients' funds (including most of Mary Fisher's money) and framing Bobbo for embezzlement, Ruth absorbs the Frankenstein legend by becoming both Victor and the Creature as she embarks on a remarkable and painful series of medical procedures to transform herself into a Mary Fisher facsimile. Liberation in this text is always a perversion; the Judge's family are liberated through Ruth's exploration of his dark sexuality, the ascetic priest is lured by the temptations of materialism and, of course, Ruth's body is transformed through advancement of medical science.

Thus, although the personal may be political it is also and always personal, and the proposition that there can be no political solution without some resolution of personal issues was prominent in the literature of the period to the point where any real distinction between the two became blurred and unrecognisable. In the Barker novels, as we have seen, some form of harmony, of balance is only possible when the antagonistic, confrontational posturing correlative with perceptions of superiority or inferiority are rejected, and this move from the 'battle of the sexes' to a deeper understanding of gender problematics is also the subject of Terry Pratchett's novel Equal Rites (1987).

Although he published his first novel in the late 70s, Terry Pratchett became a publishing phenomenon in the 80s and 90s. Prolific and immensely popular, the unique blend of fantasy, satire and knockabout farce found in his *Discworld* series has guaranteed him a place on almost every annual fastsellers list. Equal Rites (1987) is the third in this series and deals with the invasion of the feminine into masculine and misogynistic world of wizardry. The novel begins with Drum Billet, a wizard with death on his shoulder, ceremoniously handing over his staff and knowledge of magic to the eighth son of blacksmith Gordo

Smith, who is himself an eighth son. This is, we are informed, a timeless ceremony of continuity although on this occasion the problems are manifest almost immediately when the eighth 'son' of Gordo Smith is actually a girl. The ideology of sexual difference and each sex's use and access to magic is clearly delineated by Granny Weatherwax who asserts "Female wizards aren't right either! It's the wrong kind of magic for women, is wizard magic, its books and stars and jommetry. She'd never grasp it. Whoever heard of a female wizard?" (Pratchett 1987 p.19). Granny's contempt for the brutal, direct and imperialistic masculine magic knows no bounds and she expresses these views both publicly and privately throughout the novel. Pratchett writes:

> This was the sort of thing wizards could never know. If it occurred
> to them to enter a creature's mind they'd do it like a thief, not out
> of wickedness but because it simply wouldn't occur to do it any
> other way, the daft buggers. And what good would it do to take
> over an owl's body? You couldn't fly, you needed to spend a
> lifetime learning. But the gentle way was to ride in its mind,
> steering it as gently as a breeze stirs a leaf."
> (Pratchett 1987 p.45)

From the beginning, then, there is a strong distinction between natural (witch/woman) and scientific (wizard/male) magic, a theme also explored by Weldon in her novel Puffball (1980). Certainly when one considers that the witches are confined primarily to rural areas, or selling love potions in the city markets, it could be argued that witchcraft is marginalised throughout Pratchett's novel as a mixture of indirect bending to one's will and pure headology whereas wizardry is strong, direct and incredibly potent. Indeed this is the point of view firmly stated by the Arch Chancellor of the Unseen University when he declares that a female wizard is unthinkable because "High Magic requires great clarity of thought, you see, and women's talents do not lie in that direction. Their brains tend to overheat" (Pratchett 1987 p.150).

At this point, the feminist reader is on relatively safe ground, irrespective of her theoretical leanings. On the one hand, the Anglo American critic can unpick the male ideology and recover the strong tradition of women's voices inherent in the Wiccan discourses while the French feminist, following the lead of Cixous and Irigaray can show how Granny Weatherwax and the other witches deconstruct the patriarchal system and exist outside of its restrictions in a realm of positive silence and bodily theorotics, communicating "in a kind of feminine code, full of eye contact and unspoken adjectives" (Pratchett 1987 p.98). Certainly there is sufficient scope within the novel to satisfy both approaches, particularly during the battle of magic between Granny Weatherwax and Arch-Chancellor Cutangle, which highlights the fundamental difference between direct aggressive masculine action and indirect passive feminine reaction:

> Cutangle vanished. Where he had been standing a huge snake
> coiled, poised to strike, Granny vanished. Where she had been
> standing was a large wicker basket. The snake became a giant
> reptile from the mists of time. The basket became the snow wind
> of the Ice Giants coating the struggling monster with ice. The
> reptile became a sabre toothed tiger, crouched to spring. The gale
> became a bubbling tar pit. The tiger managed to become an eagle,
> stooping. The tar pits became a tufted hood. Then the images
> began to flicker as shape replaced shape.
> (Pratchett 1987 p.225)

The result is a stalemate which, had it continued, would have resulted in a path of mutually assured destruction: a lesson that is also mirrored in Esk's defeating of the Dungeon Realm things. Simon is an outstanding apprentice whose grasp of higher theory amazes even the most astute wizards to the point where one declares "He's really pushed back the boundaries of ignorance" (Pratchett 1987 p.216). When Simon is seized by phantoms, all of his attempts to regain his freedom further imprison him. Esk journeys to the Dungeon Realm to rescue him whilst Granny Weatherwax and Cutangle are forced to overlook their animosity, suspicion and ideas of which is the 'right' magic to co-operate. Ancient rules and assumptions are overthrown as Esk is made a wizard and is

reunited with her staff of power. The Things, seeing the staff retreat but Esk refuses to use it, passing it to Simon instead:

> "*Right,*" he said, and raised it in the classical revengeful wizard's
> pose. "I'll show them."
> "No, wrong."
> "What do you mean, wrong? I've got the power!"
> "They're sort of reflections of us," said Esk. "You can't beat your
> reflections, they'll always be as strong as you are ... They feed off
> magic, so you can't beat them with magic. No, the thing is ...
> well, not using magic because you can't, that's no use at all. But
> not using magic because you *can*, that really upsets them. They
> hate the idea. If people stopped using magic, they'd die."
> (Pratchett 1987 p.273)

Esk's anti-confrontational approach to the problem is successful, and not only do Esk and Simon escape the Things, Simon's debilitating stutter vanishes and Cutangle, a little wiser, agrees to a co-ed experiment within the Unseen University. Esk is important inasmuch as she is a catalyst: she is the space where sexual difference breaks down, exposing the distinctions of magic based on gender as myth, as her ability to use both witchcraft and wizardry blurs and collapses the previously strong dichotomy. The main protagonists, however, are Cutangle and Granny Weatherwax and it is their ability to learn from each other that is most significant. In storming the Unseen University, Granny Weatherwax begins to overcome some of her reluctance towards the direct, 'hands on' methodology of the wizards and when the two journey together in search of Esk's lost staff, Cutangle soon realises the limitations of his focused vision and knowledge and he begins to learn the value of silence.

The move from a restrictive, monologic and potentially utopian discourse to a more open dialogic process is, Clement (1981) argues, an important one. Contrary to many of her contemporaries who sought a way out, an escape or flight from the phallocratic order, Clement argued convincingly for feminist action to engage in the ideological and intellectual arenas with it. "Even if

somewhere it is true," she asserted, "that rhetoric and vocabulary are formed by centuries of male cultural domination, to renounce the exercise of thought, to give it to them, is to *perpetuate*, as always when it is a matter of 'not being part of the system'. 'Be a feminist and shout'; an unchanged variant of 'Be beautiful and keep your tongue'." (Clement 1981 p.135). To succeed, Clement opined, feminism had to participate and challenge the phallocratic order on the level of the imaginary, because it is only by securing a strong beachhead on the imagination, on the way we unconsciously think and respond, that significant changes in the real social, cultural and material world could emerge. Success, however, does not automatically assume equality.[49]

Thus, although taken in isolation, these two different modes of feminist practice were limited and ran risks of complicity with the patriarchal system, or reverting to a new essentialism, when the two are brought together, they provide tools and insights for discussing the political and psychological implications of gender construction.[50] Certainly one of the greatest successes of feminism was in teaching men that they are partners in inequality. In her survey of gender roles in culture and society Margaret Levy (1997) discovered that although men are theoretically powerful, most men feel anything but empowered and are caught in the trap of trying to conform to ever restrictive and increasingly ridiculous patterns of behaviour. Levy writes:

> Our ideas about what constitutes masculinity are changing fast.
> With our new sophistication about gender, old-style machismo
> starts to look a bit like the behaviour of the knights in John
> Boorman's film, *Excalibur* – who clatter around in massive iron
> suits, looking awkward and clumsy and funny, yet somehow
> touchingly heroic too.
> (Levy 1997 p.90)

For centuries, Levy contends, the mystique of women, culturally embraced in folk lore, fairy tales and religion has had as detrimental an effect on men as it has on women. In courtship rituals men must impress, show off their virility,

their ability to provide security and comfort and these pressures are beginning to tell. Levy suggests that hers, and similar surveys, reveal that men are growing as tired, disillusioned and as oppressed by the gendered bi-polar division of society as women are. They want out, and women need out. Thus, there is a consanguinity of desire and by reasonably persuading men that if they take the time and the trouble to be silent and listen for a while, a dialogue with women might, as the Pratchett novel shows, teach men how to get out of the hole they have painstakingly been digging for over two thousand years. The gift of feminism to the male reader, theorist, critic or author is the destabilising of the sanguine, heroic, masculine norm. [51]

Heath's suggestion that "instead of begging on our knees for women to prove their phallic otherness, we can listen to what they are effectively saying about *us*, about male sexuality, about the male operation of the sexual in our societies" (Heath 1991 p.206) is becoming more and more a reality. So much so that by the mid 90s a new genre 'lads literature' became a popular and profitable source of entertainment and, as the new millennium approached it became increasingly obvious that "its not just acceptable to talk about how hard it is to be a male: it's fashionable and lucrative" (Levy 1997 p.90).

This new, vulnerable masculinity however has its roots both in the feminist theory and the literary practice of the 1980s. Indeed, considering the success of the various feminist projects, particularly those which challenged the cultural construction of gender in the broader sense rather than focusing specifically and exclusively on women's issues, it would be surprising if masculinity remained unscathed by such an encounter. Schwenger accurately suggests that a "redefinition of themselves by women always necessitates some kind of readjustment by men: either a redefinition of manhood or else a reassertion of the old definition. No longer is there an assumed understanding about

manhood" (Schwenger 1984 p.8) and, as we have already seen, there was a growing awareness of the trapped, confined male whose culturally predetermined mode of expression is rage, anger, violence, arrogant assumption of superiority or a combination of some and, occasionally, all of these traits when the naturalised dichotomy of sexual difference is challenged. Like Barker's men and women, or Granny Weatherwax and Cutangle in Pratchett's novel, to oppose or dispute this habitualised world view is initially unthinkable; a biological distinction between the sexes is as obvious as the splendour as the Emperor's new suit. It is only when the unthinkable is thought, when the profane enters the realm of the sacred, when authority is subverted sufficiently for dialogue to begin that the potential to be liberated from such oppressive and restrictive mythologies is unleashed.

Yet conformity to a social identity based primarily upon anatomical distinction is not only untenable, it is uniformly illogical. Freud, for instance, was continually forced to revise and rewrite his theories, abandoning the notion of 'normal' or stable sexuality to concede that "all human individuals, as a result of their bi-sexual disposition and of cross-inheritance, combine in themselves both masculine and feminine characteristics, so that pure masculinity and pure femininity remain constructions of uncertain contents" (Freud 1953b p.342). Schwenger's (1984) study of masculinity shows not only how perceptions of masculinity change from culture to culture but also how they are also historically constructed discourses moving, in England from the 18th Century 'Man of Feeling' through the 'stiff upper lip' of the 19th Century towards the tough, working class norm of the mid to late 20th century. Indeed the "lad's literature" of the 90s, particularly in the work of writer's such as Nick Hornby, offers a parodic return to the man of feeling.[52] Femininity follows a similar pattern of historical and cultural construction as Riviere suggests:

> Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask,

> both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals if she was found to possess it - much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing
> (Riviere 1986 p.38)

Gender, De Lauretis correctly asserts, "represents not an individual but a relation, and a social relation; in other words, it represents an individual for a class" (De Lauretis 1998 p.716). Thus, rather than being an ontological certainty, sexual identity is based around epistemological concerns; whenever gender roles are perceived, taught, inferred, second-guessed, imagined or constructed, a masquerade is being performed. We have already seen various mask plays in production, particularly from the female performers such as Granny Weatherwax, Ruth – the unlikely chameleon and Barker's women, so it would be undoubtedly advantageous to examine how the authoritative and dominant masks of masculinity were transformed in the 1980s.

The concept of authority underpins any discourse of masculinity. It is, Schwenger (1984) suggests "as much a male preserve as ever. It is only that new forms to express it have evolved" (Schwenger 1984 p.7). It is, therefore, safe to assume that any inquiry into a paradigmatic shift in the construction of masculinity should focus on those masks that have traditionally borne a sense of authority and empowerment. Within the field of fiction, three primary roles immediately offer themselves: soldier, jetsetter, and spy. Of all of these roles, perhaps the latter one, the spy, is most associated with the British paradigm of masculinity. Indeed, the phrase 'secret agent' is almost synonymous with Ian Fleming's James Bond; a cool, wealthy, debonair sophisticate at home, an impressively resourceful military hero in the field facing dangerous adversaries,

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a jetsetter who travels the world unproblematically, the expert and instructor in the world's gaming rooms and, of course, in the bedroom.

Bond's virility is seemingly unquestionable, and a host of women from Tiffany Case and Pussy Galore through the psychic Solitaire and the doomed Vesper have switched allegiance after one night with him. Educated in public schools and serving in the army, Bond's pedigree is immaculate. He emerges as a post-war descendant of a particular *genus*; the adventurer. In the intense period of Empire building this particular icon of masculinity was defined by writers such as Kipling and Haggard and, although the stiff lipped man of action adjusted historically from Empire builder to Empire defender (the most notable transitions in the early 20th century include Buchan's Richard Hannay novels) and from amateur to professional, the stereotype remained relatively stable until the 1980s. Even when the counter-culture anti-heroic realities of the 60s attempted to redraw the role and background of the spy with novels such as The Ipcress File (1968) in which Deighton's anonymous hero came from a lower class background and was coerced into service or the disillusioned and burnt out hero of The Spy Who Came in From The Cold (1963) their masculinity was never brought into question. These men, like Bond, were cold, resourceful, intelligent, deadly and, of course sexually virile. They offered a specific model of identification for men and an object of desire for women or, as Raymond Mortimer, the Sunday Times reviewer cited on the cover of Fleming's On Her Majesty's Secret Service, aptly explains "Bond is what every man would like to be, and what every woman would like to have between her sheets" (Fleming 1963).

It is, of course relatively easy to unmask the myth of Bond's virility. Bond is given the same cultural and political background of many of his 'real life' contemporaries (such as Burgess and MacLean) and, if we are to assume the

reality of his constructed biography for a moment, he will almost certainly have been subjected to homosexual advances by his peers in his public school environment. This 'silenced' aspect of his erotic life manifests itself as a source of confusion within the Bond novels and yet it does offer some explanation of Bond's attitude towards women and the way he continually represses his bi-sexual urges through negation. Fleming writes:

> Pansies of both sexes were everywhere, not yet completely homosexual, but confused, not knowing what they were. The result was a herd of unhappy misfits – barren and full of frustrations, the women wanting to dominate and the men to be nannied. He was sorry for them, but had no time for them."
> (Fleming 1959 p.189)

Bond's display of classic military homophobia reveals, through its sheer vehemence, the very thing he desires to repress – *the reason that he can empathise so strongly with these figures is because he is one of them.* The women he meets, the ones over whom he can assert his masculinity, are as confused and as dysfunctional as himself; a fact noted both by Denning who states that "Bond's mission is to rescue these women, to re-establish order in a world of gender" (Denning 1993 p.224) and Eco (1989) who offers the following schematic:

> Dominated by the Villain, however, Fleming's woman has already been previously conditioned to domination, life for her having assumed the role of the villain. The general scheme is (1) the girl is beautiful and good; (2) has been made frigid and unhappy by severe trials suffered in adolescence; (3) this has conditioned her to the service of the villain; (4) through meeting Bond she appreciates human nature in all its richness; (5) Bond possesses her but in the end loses her
> (Eco 1989 pp.127-8)

This latter is particularly interesting in the fact that Bond is unable to sustain a normalised heterosexual relationship. The closest he comes to one – discounting Tracy who dies on their wedding day – is with the ex diamond smuggler Tiffany Case. Unlike most of Bond's encounters, this relationship spanned two

books and lasted a time-span of several months before Bond, the paragon of masculinity, was jilted in favour of a black Marine officer – an act that could be seen as an affront to his national, sexual and racial identity. In the face of this 'triple-whammy' to his confidence, Bond eventually runs out of excuses and is forced to acknowledge that the disintegration of the relationship was, primarily, his fault:

> "Well, sir, we did get on well. But then she met some chap in the American Embassy. On the Military Attaché's staff. Marine Corps major. They've both gone back to the States, as a matter of fact. Probably better that way. Mixed marriages aren't often a success. I gather he's a nice enough fellow. Probably suit her better than living in London. She couldn't really settle down here. Fine girl, but she's a bit neurotic. We had too many rows. Probably my fault."
> (Fleming 1965 p.85)

Interestingly, the one woman with whom Bond has frequent contact throughout the novels is M's attractive, well-adjusted and career-orientated secretary, Miss Moneypenny. Yet despite a constant barrage of banter, sexual innuendo, double entendres and irresistibly open invitations, Bond, like a Sunday tabloid journalist, always makes his excuses and leaves. Thus, what this brief examination of Bond reveals is that masculinity, like all cultural constructions, carries within it the seeds of its own critique. What was unusual about the masculine roles of the 80s however is that rather than being hidden, these problems were foregrounded as more realistic and vulnerable masks of masculinity were offered. Indeed, if Bond provided the model of the spy for the 50s, 60s and 70s, it was his antithesis, George Smiley who dominated the 80s, both with Le Carrè's novels and, of course the award winning BBC productions which gripped the nation.

Of retirement age, constantly cuckolded by his wife Ann, bookish, short, balding, and portly Smiley is the unlikely hero. Although he had appeared in several of Le Carrè's earlier novels, Smiley was part of the backroom staff, the

support network which, Palmer argues, not only provide a moral compass but also "demonstrate, by their own deficiencies the hero's superiority" (Palmer 1989 p.191). Whilst he was undoubtedly a dominant force in the two earlier volumes, Smiley finally came to the fore in <u>Smiley's People</u> (1980), the final instalment of the Karla trilogy.[53] In the previous novels, Smiley had been the puppet master, pulling the strings as his various legmen (Peter Guillam, Ricky Tarr and Jerry Westerby) found themselves in harm's way as Soviet conspiracies were exposed and countered. This time, however, Smiley himself is the spy out in the cold.

Approached to do a simple cleaning up job after the murder of an ex defector on Hampstead Heath, forced to play by the now archaic 'Moscow Rules' of espionage, Smiley steps outside of the chain of command, flagrantly disobeys orders and pursues Karla, the Soviet spymaster, across Europe, breaking the very rules he insisted upon, as his old protégé Toby Esterhase reminds him:

> You remember the first rule of retirement, George? No
> moonlighting. No fooling with loose ends? No private enterprise
> ever? You remember who preached this rule? At Sarrat? In the
> corridors? George Smiley did. When it's over, it's over. Pull down
> the shutters, go home!
> (Le Carrè 1980 p.152)

Smiley's obsession with Karla is, however too strong. Karla has penetrated every level of Smiley's existence: Smiley failed to turn Karla in the 50s, Karla recruited the mole Bill Haydon who was the best and the brightest of Smiley's generation and, when Smiley began to suspect treachery it was Karla who insisted Haydon have an affair with Smiley's wife so that any potential witch-hunt would appear as an act of personal vindictiveness. In a quest that moves from the dusty libraries of London through the brothels of Hamburg to a sanatorium in Switzerland, Smiley follows a trail of scattered clues, whispers and rumours until he has sufficient leverage to coerce Karla to defect.

Although the plot of the novel is relatively conventional for a Cold War thriller, Smiley's People (1980) is notable primarily as a parade of fractured masculinity. Whereas masculine archetypes such as Bond and Quatermain, emphasise the strengths and qualities of their gender roles, the men in Smiley's People are constantly demystified. Sam Collins, who was once a tough and resourceful field agent, is now "the poacher turned gamekeeper, nurturing his own pension and security in the way he had once nurtured his networks" (Le Carrè 1980 p.235); the reckless Guillam is now a balding family man contentedly flying a desk; the suave and sinister Esterhase runs a second string and dubious art gallery; Karla, the omnipotent manipulator, is unmasked as a diminutive monkish figure and Grigoriev, the Soviet field agent who holds the keys to the secret kingdom is a blustering, hen-picked academic. Irrespective of where you look, the text offers no dynamic role models: machismo, like espionage, is yesterday's discourse. In a direct contravention of the genre, the triumphalism of the virile lone wolf is deposed by the banality of the bureaucrats occupying a grey, emasculated world where heroism and villainy are redundant; where, rather than the barrel of a Walther PPK semi-automatic, one is threatened by paperclips and bank statements. [54]

Interestingly, the dearth of masculine norms is explained and understood by Smiley as the absence of women. Le Carrè writes:

> We men who cook for ourselves are half creatures, he thought as
> he scanned the two shelves, tugged out the saucepan and the
> frying pan, poked among the cayenne and paprika. Anywhere else
> in the house – even in bed – you can cut yourself off, read your
> books, deceive yourself that solitude is best. But in the kitchen the
> signs of incompleteness are too strident. Half of one black loaf.
> Half of one coarse sausage. Half an onion. Half a pint of milk.
> Half a lemon. Half a packet of black tea. Half a life.
> (Le Carrè 1980 p.78)

Thus, because these neutered agents exist in purely masculine environments, they are all plagued by a sense of lack; a deficiency that unravels and deconstructs their sense of identity and resolve. Karla risks his life, his nation's security and the idealism of a fanatic for his schizophrenic daughter – a physical testimony to his 'lost love'; Smiley's crusade is an attempt to recover Ann by purging the memory of her countless lovers in a single act of vengeful vindication; the minister Lacon struggles to find form and substance in his life after his wife deserts him and Grigoriev betrays everything for the dream of a secret tryst with his secretary. Women, the text suggests, provide the masks of masculinity and without them, when one gender is excluded, the other becomes a formless, directionless being; an incomplete, aborted entity. This interdependence, this acknowledgement that masculinity can only be defined in contrast and in context with the feminine dominates countless texts of the period, as we shall see when we examine the next mask play in sequence, the military Commander.

In her novel The Handmaid's Tale (1985) Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood offers a text as complex and as ambiguous as gender itself. The novel, Feuer argues "both participates in and extends the dystopian genre" making comparisons between this and Orwell's 1984 (1949) almost inevitable: both novels deal with totalitarianism, constant surveillance, public spectacle as social control and "the loss of identity as an ever-present threat" (Feuer 1997 p.84). Just as Orwell projected the historical conditions of Stalinism and Fascism onto his future, Atwood uses as her source the New Right and the growing political strength of evangelism and religious fundamentalism. Feuer writes:

> Part of Atwood's contribution is to show costs at both ends of the
> spectrum in the essentialist debate: the "woman's culture" that
> Offred's mother envisioned has eventuated in the oppression she
> thought she was fighting in burning pornographic magazines.
> Atwood looks explicitly at the thesis that we are our own enemies;
> the fundamentalist conservatives who create Gilead by
> overthrowing American democracy use as a guide a CIA pamphlet

on destabilising foreign governments produced by that very democracy.
(Feuer 1997 p.89)

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) takes place at some indeterminate point in our near future. After a backlash against the sexual revolution, promiscuity and declining moral standards, coupled with alarming infertility rates in Caucasian societies, there is a military coup in North America and a totalitarian state is established on the principles of the Old Testament. In Gilead, fertile young woman are recruited, abducted and coerced into roles of Handmaidens; they are trained and then sent to the homes of the elite where a bizarre sexual ritual, based upon Genesis 30:1-3, takes place. Atwood writes:

> Above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either side of me. She too is fully clothed.
> My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control of the process and thus of the product. If any ... My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body.
> (Atwood 1985 p.104)

Although has frequently been assumed that "Atwood presents the reader with the limited perspective of a woman trapped in the oppressive patriarchal society of the Republic of Gilead", a Republic in which women "become non-persons – individuals who lack the rights and opportunities that might enable them to counter openly society's construction of them as Martha, Wife and Handmaid" (Hogsette 1997 p.264) such a reading overlooks the fact that true power within Gilead lies with the wives. As Offred remarks, it is Serena who controls the ritual, Serena who will bask in the glory and social prestige of any offspring: the Commander, like Offred, knows that his is a passive, subordinate role:

> Serena Joy grips my hands as if it is she, not I, who's being fucked, as if she finds it pleasurable or painful, and the

> Commander fucks, with a regular two-four marching stroke, on
> and on like a tap dripping. He is preoccupied, like a man humming
> to himself in the shower without knowing he's humming; like a
> man who has other things on his mind.
> (Atwood 1985 p.105)

Although they have created what they hoped would be the perfect patriarchal society, the Commanders find themselves as trapped and confined as anyone. Having elevated marriage to the position of absolute authority they are then forced to comply with its dictates: they must make themselves available for the passionless, de-eroticised and emasculating ceremony; they must knock before entering the sitting room; they must romanticise and pamper their wives and, should they take a mistress or seek pleasure outside of the marriage they are quickly confronted with the wrath of the wives whose authority and influence is always greater.

An example of this authority and influence can be seen in the methods and rewards both use to coerce Offred. Whilst the Commander offers Offred small tokens (creams, magazines, etc.) he is unable to directly challenge or undermine his wife. Serena, on the other hand, achieves the impossible by procuring a photograph of Offred's child and blatantly acknowledges her husband's sterility when she asks Offred to take Luke as a lover. Similarly, in direct contrast to the Commanders, the wives not only retain their names and social identities (the men are known only by rank, it is only through the handmaids identity that their names are acknowledged). It is also worth noting that whilst the Commanders leave things to chance and opportunistically pay furtive visits to a secret brothel, the wives are organised, arranging group visits that allow one or more to have secret assignations with lovers. Thus, despite the aura of power and virility suggested by male position and rank, despite the pretences of male domination, Atwood's world is, in reality, a perverse matriarchy: a world created and dominated by militant Woman's Weekly readers. These women manipulate

both the system and their social realities so effectively that the ultimate price the Commanders pay for their patriarchal system is an emotional, intellectual and sexual emasculation.

Perhaps the most telling scenes in the novel are the clandestine meetings between Offred and the Commander. When the Commander, through the intermediary of Luke, summons Offred into his inner sanctum, she approaches fearfully wondering "What secrets, what male totems are kept in here" (Atwood 1985 p.147), only to be greeted by a shy, sad, lonely man in his den. Rather than demanding bizarre kinky sex, the Commander invites her to play a game of Scrabble. During these meetings, the Commander's mask slips completely. His answer to Offred, "Who else could I show them too?" (Atwood 1985 p.166) when she asks why she is showing him old magazines speaks volumes, as does *Jezebels*, the recreation of a Playboy club. In creating a supposedly masculine world the middle aged and frequently ineffectual Commanders lose any semblance of self. The Glens and Freds of Gilead discover too late the same lessons Levy's research subjects acknowledge - that attempts to enforce, legislate or even live up to socially determined gender roles disempower rather than empower. The role of the military ruler, like the spy is simply that; a role, a masquerade, a chimera and, to accept it as a reality, is to accept one's one failure to live up to it. They are caught in the grip of tragic nostalgia and inadequacy; their attempts to attain and appropriate the trappings of the masculine hero have proved, as they inevitably must, self-destructive.[55] The Commander and Smiley are both at an advantage because the authority of their positions protects them from destruction but, as we shall see with our next two mask plays, complete disintegration follows those men who try to adhere to the masculine paradigm once the safety net of state authority is removed.

Of the characters and mask plays we have thus far examined we have seen how masculinity undermines the core of selfhood. Although buttressed by their positions as master-spy or military commander, both Smiley and the Commander are wearing the ill fitting clothes of the male ideal and, like old men driving red Porsches, there is something more than a little pathetic in their attempts at strength and heroism. In his novel <u>Money</u> (1984) Martin Amis offers us a character whose lifestyle is curiously akin to the off duty Bond. Like Bond, John Self has a seemingly unending supply of money, influence and friends. He is successful, he drinks and smokes heavily, he has a beautiful girlfriend and he is a seasoned jetsetter. In this novel, however, rather than celebrating this paradigm of masculinity, Amis holds it up to scorn and ridicule. Whereas Bond can, on a daily basis, consume sixty unfiltered Balkan cigarettes with a very high nicotine content, consume half a bottle of strong spirits, breakfast on four eggs scrambled in butter and cream, four rashers of American hickory-smoked bacon, toast, marmalade, a pot of double strength coffee followed by a brandy and be informed that, apart from a slight furring of the tongue and occasional headaches a two week break "on a more abstemious regime" would return him "to his previous exceptionally high state of physical fitness" (Fleming 1961 p.11), Amis shows the effects of this indulgent libertinism. Whereas Bond dominates and controls the flow of excesses and indulgence that flow around and through him, John Self "is consumed by consumerism", a hapless victim of the hedonistic lifestyle living a "life without sustenance of any kind – and that is why he is so fooled by everyone; he never knows what is going on" (Amis 1986 p.7). Moving from one dulled, pointless sensation to another Self has occasional moments of lucidity when he realises that his role is always passive and that control belongs elsewhere "Recently my life feels like a bloodcurdling joke. Recently my life has taken on *form*" (Amis 1984 p.3).

Self, Edmondson argues, is driven by "fear and shame: fear that he will not have any money; shame at what he does to get it, and what he does with it once he has it" (Edmonson 2001 p.147). Whilst this is a valid reading because everything and everyone in the novel is connected to, with and through money, there are several other factors at play and Self's obsession with money is, in itself, another mask. What John Self desires most of all is to be himself, but his inability to function with, or attract women, denies him this desired focal point and money, pornography and masturbation fail to offer adequate compensation. When Self averts his gaze from money to this all-pervading sense of lack he acquires a previously unnoticed sense of depth:

> I like to think of my West London flat as a kind of playboy pad.
> This has no affect on my flat, which remains a gaff, a lair, a lean-
> to – a sock. It smells of batch, of bachelordom: even I can nose it
> (don't let batch into your life, into your bones. After a while, batch
> gets into your bones). Like an adolescent, throbbing, gaping, my
> poor flat pines for a female presence. And so do I. Its spirit is
> broken, and so is mine.
> (Amis 1984 p.63)

Like Smiley and the Commander, Self's masked-ulinity carries him along a path of destruction: Anne Smiley's promiscuity destroyed George's career, sense of self worth and left him incapable of finding the strength to turn down an unwelcome dinner invitation; the Commander traps himself in an environment where the very things he sought to gain are denied him, and Self's obsessive denial, the transference of his need for intimacy onto pornography and the libidinous circulation of money bankrupts him economically, mentally and emotionally. In all discourses of masculinity, the death of the subject is omnipresent. Schwenger writes:

> Again and again in works by the School of Virility the very drive
> for control is itself the cause of control's dissolution. The men
> who pursue this control have their own kind of vital energy;
> ultimately, though, they lose the deeper *élan vital*, that flexible
> principle which includes all possibilities and not just that of

manhood.
(Schwenger 1984 p.154)

Interestingly, the root of all these men's troubles, the moment masculinity was fractured, is located in the sixties. It was the moral decadence and contempt for authority of the 'permissive society', coupled with Britain's diminishing role in world affairs, that prompted Bill Haydon's betrayal; it was the slackening of moral virtues in the sixties that created the backlash movement which allowed the Gilead junta to take power and, of course, it is 'hope I die before I get old' rallying call of the sixties youth-culture that Self attempts, and significantly fails to live up to. The creation of the eighties male thus begins with the de-idealisation of the 60s masculine icon; the creation of the anti-Bond. Although the dominant historical discourses of the 1980s were the Victorian era and the 1930s, the sixties, as we shall see in the next chapter, played an important and significant role in defining the period.

After the last conference of Women's Liberation in 1978, the feminist argument had been won on an intellectual if not yet on a practical level, and the established female tradition of writing was beginning to be rewritten and critiqued. Throughout the 80s, feminism fragmented as discourses of power and authority became inexorably enmeshed with one another. Exploring the female experience was a project that could no longer be disassociated and removed from other factors: the feminist revolution against pornography and rape produces a neo-biblical backlash in The Handmaid's Tale (1987), the dichotomy of magics in Equal Rites (1987) is exposed as a cultural construction and the condition of Barker's women is determined not only by patriarchal oppression but also by economic, environmental and cultural dynamics. The confessional mode of women's experience had given way and suddenly there was no space or possibility for a construction that is not, in itself, always already a reconstruction. Context, as Offred observes is all (Atwood 1987

p.154), and, as Ruth finally realises in The Life and Loves of a She Devil (1983), it is the framing context of power that contains and drives the mechanics of gender construction. It is not, Ruth asserts, "a matter of male or female after all; it never was, merely of power. I have all, and he has none. As I was, so he is now." (Weldon 1983 p.240).

Once the agonistic struggle based upon anatomical difference is eschewed and it is established, however tentatively, that power possesses individual subjects rather than being possessed by them, traditional modes of representation become increasingly precarious. Weldon argues that "women have to fight as much against their own natures as against the world or against men's behaviour" (Haffendon 1985 p.312) and this inner dialogue, this exchange between the subject as a psychological entity and socially constructed being which is now being enacted in the proliferation of 'lad's literature' and 'relationship novels' gained its momentum in the 80s with the creation of *homo-postmodernus*. The postmodern male is significantly disempowered. John Self, despite his attempts to put himself at the centre of his world, is always undercut and marginalised; Smiley's secret agents find themselves embroiled not only in the shadowy world of espionage but in the grey zone of an eroding masculinity; between the lines of The Old Devils (1986), Kingsley Amis' last hurrah for the womanising, hard drinking, macho-men of the past, there is an overwhelming sense of defeat as a group of friends plagued with loss, regret, irritable bowels, cirrhotic livers and uncooperative colons attempt to defy the changing times while, at the other end of the scale in The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole (1982) a thirteen year old boy attempts to define his maleness amidst increasingly shifting paradigms, adolescent confusion and political correctness. Perhaps the most striking example of *homo-postmodernus* is offered in James Kelman's novel A Disaffection (1989). This novel reveals the slow and irreversible disintegration of Patrick Doyle, a teacher trying to come to terms with "all those

failed plans and principles and ideas for the future" (Kelman 1980 p.3). Doyle's barely repressed fury at his family, himself, the educational system and the government who is slowly dismantling the foundations of the welfare state explodes on every page, yet beneath these surface grievances lies a deeper disaffection; his growing awareness that it is no longer 'a man's world.' With the albatross of bachelordom around his neck, Doyle is unable to identify and assert himself in any meaningful way. His total lack of confidence and self-esteem creates a false idealisation of Woman and he turns to Alison, a fellow teacher, to provide a temporary anchor against the ensuing tides of insanity:

> Alison was safeguarding him. It was good the way she could do
> that, make him stop dead, to not do it, whatever it was, to not do
> whatever it was he was doing, or just about to;
> (Kelman 1989 p.20)

Doyle's pursuit of Alison, however, like his ambition to create music from the plastic pipes he discovered at the back of an arts centre, never moves beyond the fantasy state of wishful thinking. Ultimately, Doyle is a man of inaction; he hides or retreats from any situation where he might reveal the disintegrating and unravelling masks of selfhood. Indeed, one of the few moments in the novel where Doyle becomes, albeit temporarily, a potent force is when he finally visits his brother Gavin and finds himself occupying the empowering roles of unexpected guest, family prodigal, "one of the lads", the educator and, of course, the supplier of alcohol. Although not quite king for the day, Doyle does begin to regain some, albeit temporary, sense of identity and self-worth. Feeling neither excluded nor awkward, Doyle's pipedreams are forgotten: "there was no point trying to lasso the moon" (Kelman 1989 p.268) he declares in an ironic subversion of Frank Capra's 1946 movie It's A Wonderful Life, arguably one of the greatest homages to the perseverance and dreams of the average man. Safe, relaxed, and finally confident enough to be intimate, Doyle confesses that

he hid from Gavin previously and this confession creates a sense of tension. Doyle once again finds himself the outsider:

> Things were not alright. They were alright. Before I came. Before
> I came things were alright. Things were alright before I came.
> Now that I am here things are not alright. I should not have come
> and things would still be fine; yous three neighbours would be
> fine. Instead of that in came myself and fucked up the
> proceedings, the atmosphere, clouding things over, making things
> go awry.
> (Kelman 1989 p.272)

The fumbling, naïve logic, the constant repetition and the pitiful acceptance of blame and responsibility all reveal that Doyle has regressed into a highly infantile state. Nor is he alone in this. The men of Barker's Union Street (1982), Smiley and his ageing cohorts, Kingsley Amis' unrepentant rogues, Adrian's father, George Mole, the Scrabble and role-playing Commander in The Handmaid's Tale (1985) and of course John Self in Money (1984); wherever and whenever masculinity is investigated in 80s fiction, the Peter Pan syndrome dominates, and these continuous images of the man-child/child-man constantly undercut and displace the lost and discredited masculine ideal. In Ian McEwan's novel, The Child In Time (1987), Charles Darke, a high flying government minister, voluntarily regresses to childhood, dressing up as a schoolboy and playing in the woods in an effort to escape the pressures and responsibilities of power. Unfortunately, Darke fails to realise that the infant is his natural state. Thus, once discarded his coherent social identity becomes lost while his nostalgic fantasy self becomes a permanent, and ultimately fatal, refuge. In all of its incarnations, the masks of masculinity hide the face of an angry, wilful, violent, lost and frequently perverse child. *Homo-postmodernus* is, it would seem, irresistibly trapped in its infancy.[56]

With gender roles and sexual identification providing a major theme for novelists in the 80s, it would be unusual to say the least, if the tensions,

anxieties and concerns about sexuality, identity, feminine empowerment and the correlative masculine regression, did not create a darker and more unconscious mode of representation. When this uneasiness is placed into juxtaposition with the emergence of Britain's first woman Prime Minister, it was perhaps inevitable that excess and uncertainty generated by these concerns would manifest themselves in the creation of the feminine grotesque. In <u>The Life and Loves of a She Devil</u> (1983) Ruth's final declaration that she is "a comic turn, turned serious" (Weldon 1983 p.240) is a telling one. Despite the tucks in her legs, the plastic surgery, the extreme dieting she has undergone to become a facsimile of Mary Fisher, both Ruth and the reader are aware that this is a deception. The female beauty, as defined by Mary Fisher, is present only in absence, her "features are so regular and so perfect they are hard to remember. She is all woman because she is no woman" (Weldon 1983) and, correlatively, Ruth's initial position is that she is no woman because she is all woman. Ruth's deception and deconstruction of the image significantly alters the balance of power between her and Bobbo because Bobbo is still seduced by the surfaces whereas Ruth has explored the depths necessary to manipulate, alter and utterly transform the field of perception.

Traditionally, the grotesque is associated with the comic and satirical. Denoting the bizarre, freakish, fantastic, monstrous, unnatural, ridiculous and excessive, the grotesque is always already an aberration; a deviant, a throwback, an evolutionary wrong turn and, providing not too many questions were asked of the reader or the text, Ruth could be conveniently slotted within this category. It is worth noting, however, that throughout Weldon's novel, despite the efforts to depict Ruth as freakish, despite her overpoweringly repulsive countenance and physique, Ruth has little difficulty in finding sexual partners of either gender: her allure is unmistakable because, as we see at the end, beneath Ruth's surface is Mary Fisher, the elusive object of desire. If Mary Fisher is all women, then

Ruth is all women *plus*: the layers of fat, facial warts and incredible physique are extras. Ornaments, as it were, become the bonuses, the visible extras. It is unsurprising, therefore, to discover that images of reduction, of shaving and peeling away dominate the text because this novel is, undoubtedly, an archaeological expedition. As Ruth reduces herself, this excess has to be placed somewhere, and through a slow and painful series of episodes, Mary Fisher gains the divested contents of Ruth. Both women are recreated and liberated as the simple dichotomy of the beautiful and the ugly collapses.

Salman Rushdie, in his novel <u>Shame</u> (1983), creates the unforgettable Sufiya Zinobia. Sufiya offers the other side of the image provided by Ruth. Whereas Ruth closes herself down, staples her knees and shrinks herself, Sufiya opens and extends herself, surrendering to the hidden excesses of the unnameable within:

> On all fours, the calluses thick on her palms and soles. The black
> hair, once shorn by Bilquis Hyder, long now and matted around
> her face, enclosing it like fur; the pale skin of her *mohajir* ancestry
> burned and toughened by the sun, bearing like battle scars the
> lacerations of bushes, animals, her own itch-scratching nails. Fiery
> eyes and the stink of ordure and death. "For the first time in her
> life"– he shocked himself by the sympathy in the thought – "that
> girl is free."
> (Rushdie 1983 p.254)

This association of freedom with the female grotesque is an important one because, rather than being synonymous with ugliness, the association with the positive virtues such as liberty, activity, vitality and the primeval forces of nature opens up another element to the grotesque; an element which makes it part of the beautiful, a counter aesthetic as it were; an aesthetic that becomes more visible when examining what is actually meant by the term grotesque.

Originating from the Italian *grotte* meaning caves and, used in its correct technical sense, the grotesque "denotes a kind of decorative ornament consisting

of medallions, sphinxes, foliage, rocks and pebbles. Because they were found in grottoes they were called *grotteschi*" (Cuddon 1991 p.393). In art the term initially referred to a combination and synthesis of animal, human and vegetable forms. The grotesque, in short, abandons the principles of separation and exclusion; all life is represented and intermingled equally; it is the liberation of form from the narrow confines of culturally determined context. Whereas the masquerade of femininity is repressive, restrictive, confining and of course, reductive in its aims to police a baseline of acceptability, the feminine grotesque celebrates the excess and alterity that the patriarchal discourse of beauty seeks to eliminate. Whilst conventional beauty is predetermined by exclusion, the unconventional beauty of the grotesque is all-inclusive, spilling over the frames that separate, restrict and define the subject for aesthetic contemplation. Thus, in a period where masculinity was collapsing and women were beginning to harvest the seeds sown in the feminist revolutions of the 60s and 70s it is understandable that the excitement, fears and anxieties manifested themselves in an evocation of the uncontrollable and uncontainable. Perhaps the perfect example of the feminine grotesque as a celebration and release of femininity, as an escape from the narrow confines and restrictions of the culturally determined norms advocated by the masquerade of womanliness can be found in Jeanette Winterson's novel <u>Sexing the Cherry</u> (1989).

The novel is set during the period of the English Civil War and in the present, tells the story of Jordan, who joins the King's gardener, John Tradescant, on journeys both real and imaginary, and his gargantuan mother, the Dog Woman. Without doubt, the Dog Woman epitomises both the nature and the purpose of the feminine grotesque. This is a woman who held a baby in the palm of her hand, kept a dozen oranges in her mouth at once and outweighed an elephant. From every viewpoint offered, the Dog Woman is a genetic transgression: she sees herself as a woman who deems herself "too huge for love" (Winterson

1989 p.34), an opinion which is re-confirmed when her lover declares her too big for penis or tongue. To her son, Jordan, she is an undeniable impossibility. "She is like a mathematical equation", Jordan confesses, "always there and impossible to disprove." (Winterson 1989 p.79). Unrestrained and uncontrollable, it is easy to see the Dog Woman as the laughing Medusa, defying the patriarchal codes and conventions of our time not only with her words and actions, but also with her body, with her unique physical presence. Yet, despite her seemingly undeniable bulk and heaviness, the Dog Woman is a maze of contradictions. When her father swung her on his knees as a child she broke both his legs whereas her mother who "was so light that she dared not go out in the wind, could swing me on her back and carry me for miles" (Winterson 1989 p.25).

Both central and peripheral, the Dog Woman holds the contradictory balance of excess and restraint in perpetual suspension. Although she asserts with some conviction that, "For myself, I would rather live with the sins of excess than sins of denial" (Winterson 1989 p.67), her actions frequently give the lie to this attitude. Her resistance to sexing the cherry, for instance, shows the innate conservatism within her excess, as does her loyalty to the King. For the Dog Woman, the monarchy and its line into perpetuity 'fixes' time. The Civil War and the beheading of Charles is a crime against time itself: with this act humanity invades the line of temporality and imposes chaos on order. As the outsider, as the representative figure of alterity, the Dog Woman is forced to demand that others provide, protect and maintain the stability which her very existence denies, and her vengeance against the homosexual puritans is an example of this movement against transgression. She knows, as do the citizens in the city plagued by love, that restraint and repression are inscribed within the act of excess. Restraint is thus the seed of excess and excess is the demand for restraint.

Although different metaphors and motifs emerge in different periods to illustrate and illuminate the tensions and explorations of gender, it is within this dialectic of chaos and order, of desire and ideology, of the sacred and profane, that the political imagination is born, and in the fiction of the 80s, the feminine grotesque and the infantile *homo-postmodernus*, provided the textual motifs for exposing and exploring the tensions between the two whilst maintaining them in a libidinous stasis. In the following chapters we shall see how a similar tension between history and time, between apocalyptic visions of death and affirmations of life were also intrinsic to the fiction of the 1980s.

4 - DEJA MORT: NUCLEAR NIGHTMARES AND THE 'POSTMODERN' CONDITION

Although there was a distinctive loss of certainty, and a growing awareness of collapse and implosion within the field of the personal throughout the fiction of the 80s, this immanent sense of crisis and disintegration was not restricted to the realms of the subjective. The political imagination, as we have already seen, is inexorably bound up with the struggle for identity and self-definition, eschewing the exclusive categories of the individual *and* society in favour of the twofold dynamic of the individual *in* society and, equally important, society *within* the individual. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that events, movements and displacements within the political and cultural spheres impacted so greatly upon the personal that any distinctions between the two evaporated.

The notion of a society where everything and everyone is consumable, where the medium becomes the message, where there is no hidden depth beneath the surface and where every experience is reduced to the level of an M. T. V. rock video has been popularly embraced as a "post-modern" society; a society that has gone beyond the modern experience; an experience that refutes the real, but still reproduces it, mocking it with parody and pastiche. "Its ideal cultural institution," Mulhern writes "would be a jukebox; here is the week's repertoire, take your pick; fulfilment in three-minute segments, 20 p a shot" (Mulhern 1996 p.86). This association of postmodernism with a three-minute culture is both a popular and interesting one to develop because the emergence of such a culture in the 80s coincided with both the microchip revolution and an increasing escalation of the Cold War.

The problem with using the term postmodern here, however, is obvious. Postmodernism, as we saw in Chapter 1, is not a nihilistic and wilful rejection of the real, nor a free for all abandonment of value but an immanent critique of modernity from within.[57] Indeed, rather than entering into the postmodern era, during the 1980s, the containment field of faith and selective amnesia collapsed revealing an irradiated modernity in which the average lifespan was approximately four minutes: the minute of existence and the three minute warning of extinction. For many people the countdown to a nuclear war seemed inevitable and, as E.P. Thompson observed, the change in public consciousness was remarkable:

> The notion that a war might be fought to 'advantage', that it might
> be 'won' gains ground. There is even a tremor of excitement in
> our culture as though, subconsciously, human kind has lived with
> the notion for so long that expectations without actions have
> become boring.
> (Thompson 1980 p.56)

This form of knowledge or premonition obviously has its price: its effects become visible and certainly in the 80s things did fall apart as the centre collapsed; although unlike Yeats's visionary demon, the beast did not slouch towards Bethlehem to be born: it skateboarded at supersonic speed wearing a Sony Walkman with one hand on a filofax and the other on the nuclear button. This chapter, therefore, will examine how a sense of impending destruction and dissolution manifested and, arguably, dominated the literature of the period: a period when, as Martin Amis succinctly remarked, the nuclear reality burned itself into the human psyche:

> When nuclear weapons become real to you, when they stop
> buzzing around your ears and actually move into your head,
> hardly an hour passes without some throb or flash, some heavy
> pulse of imagined supercatastrophe. Staring at the many-eyed
> helmet of the Capitol, you see the clouds above on fire, the winter
> sky ignited, taken out. Now is the time to see this, and your head
> is the place to see it in. The reality won't be seen by anyone.
> (Amis 1994b p.13)

Amis's apocalyptic tone and sense of impending cataclysm was, given the political conditions of the time, understandable. The heightening tensions between the super-powers from the late 70s escalated throughout most of the 1980s. These fears and anxieties were further stimulated by a growing awareness of the Strangelove syndrome (the possibility of a nuclear war being triggered by an accident or technological glitch). Even though neither nightmare scenario emerged, there was ample evidence at the time to suggest that both scenarios were not only thinkable but also inevitable.

On June 3rd 1980, for example, over 100 U.S. B 52 bombers were readied for take off along with the Presidential jet when NORAD mistakenly 'detected' a Soviet missile attack. With billions of dollars spent in technology, the fallibility of the system was revealed by a defective computer chip costing approximately 42 cents. Similarly, the release of home computers increased the dangers even more as the Pentagon's computer system became a prime target for hackers. Then, of course, there were the accidents involving the nuclear arsenal or power stations that proliferated the news. Incidents such as the explosion in the silo of a Titan II ICBM (Inter Continental Ballistic Missile) in September 1980, the collision of the USS George Washington submarine armed with 160 nuclear warheads with a Japanese freighter in 1981, the fire aboard the Russian submarine K 219 in October 1986 in which a nuclear meltdown was narrowly averted. These, and there are may other incidents, not least the Chernobyl fire and explosion mentioned in chapter 2, would, on their own, have been sufficient cause for anxiety, but this anxiety was doubled by the militaristic preparations and political rhetoric of the time.[58]

Dubbed the Iron Lady in 1976 by the Soviet news agency TASS, Mrs. Thatcher, as Enoch Powell suggested in the Falklands debate, took a great deal of pride

and pleasure in the sobriquet.[59] It is unsurprising therefore that despite being optimistic about canvassing support within the Labour, Liberal and SDP parties, when reporter Gavin Scott published a Peace Action handbook <u>How To Get Rid Of The Bomb</u> (1982) he held out no hope of deflecting the hawkish mood of the Conservative Party declaring that "only the most optimistic person would suggest that the Conservative Party is ripe for conversion" (Scott 1982 p.38). Certainly, Mrs. Thatcher did little to alleviate these feelings. Throughout her tenure she was unabashedly vocal in her insistence that a nuclear weapon free world was both unobtainable and undesirable (Thatcher 1993 p.463). Although her extremist views initially isolated her somewhat in foreign affairs, the election of Ronald Reagan to the US presidency in 1981 provided her, not only with her staunchest ally, but also with the diplomatic legitimacy she desired. Unsurprisingly, Reagan's words to the House of Commons in June 1982 were warmly received by Mrs. Thatcher who wrote:

> The speech itself was a remarkable one. It marked a decisive stage
> in the battle for ideas which he and I wished to wage against
> socialism, above all the socialism of the Soviet Union ... Instead
> of seeking merely to contain communism, which had been the
> West's doctrine in the past, we wished to put freedom on the
> offensive.
> (Thatcher 1993 p.258)

"The emergency is upon us," he declared and his imagery of civilisation perishing in "a hail of fiery atoms," or withering "in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil" as he evoked past wars and past victories whilst describing his ambitions to leaving "Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history" were chilling enough. When these statements were taken in conjunction with escalating defence spending, the deployment of Cruise missiles and the 'Star Wars' Strategic Defence Initiative, the stakes in the nuclear poker game were raised considerably (Lacquer 1993 pp.524-5). For the first half of the decade, against the backdrop of a volatile international climate which included the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the emergence of the

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Solidarity movement in Poland, the US bombing of Libya and invasion of Grenada, and the Falklands War, military planners and experts began talking on late night news programmes about a 'winnable' nuclear war and a 'limited European theatre of operations' whilst rationalising the deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles as modernisation.[60] Smith writes:

> As it has done for at least twenty-five years, NATO war planning amounts to preparing to defend Europe by blowing it up. The main difference today is that the planning appears to be more enthusiastic
> (Smith 1980 p.114)

For the majority of people, the ticking of the bombs became increasingly audible and the effect of this on the cultural psyche was enormous. Certainly within the fictional production of the period the fallout is almost omni-present. Although it would be impossible to begin to deal with the vast range of post-nuclear fictions, it is possible to illustrate the sheer scope through a few selected texts and J. G Ballard provides an excellent starting point here.

In the essay "Thinkability" which serves as an introduction for his nuclear haunted stories Einstein's Monsters (1987b) Martin Amis observes that "about one SF novel in four is set beyond the holocaust... yet the senior generation of writers has remained silent; prolific and major though many of them are, with writing lives that straddle the evolutionary firebreak of 1945" (Amis 1987b p.23). One notable exception to the post-nuclear silence Amis complains about is J.G. Ballard, a writer who has always seemed to manage to significantly bridge the gap between literary and genre fiction. Born in Shanghai, China in 1930, and interned by the Japanese until his family returned to England in 1946, Ballard made his name as a Science Fiction writer in the 60s with his first novel The Drowned World (1961). Although Ballard published other books of interest in the 80s, it is the semi-autobiographical novel Empire of the Sun, (1985) in which Ballard confronts the post-nuclear paradox through the story of Jim, a

young British schoolboy struggling to survive in internment camps and on the forced death marches that I shall focus on here.[61]

Empire of The Sun (1985) doubles as a both a personal and a social *Bildungsroman*, charting the growth from immaturity to awesome responsibility for both Jim and the human race. From the moment "Uncle Sam threw a piece of the sun at Nagasaki and Hiroshima" (Ballard 1985 p.274) Jim, like the rest of the world, finds himself existing in a state of *deja mort*: a condition where the clear boundaries between life and death are demolished, thus creating a sense of life in death as the world "began to face the possibility, for the first time within history, of its own ending as a dateable, historical event." (Connor 1996 p.199)

This rites of passage scenario is established the moment the novel begins in Shanghai, immediately prior to the Japanese occupation. Almost immediately, Jim finds himself occupying two worlds: the world of the child's imagination and the reality of world affairs. Conflicting signs of the real and the imaginary surround Jim as they compete for dominance. Although the real effects of war - beheadings of Communist sympathisers, refugees dying of cholera, the bones of the unburied dead rising to the surface of the paddy fields – are uneasily juxtaposed with the romanticised propaganda which fuel his childish imagination, Jim who, "is everything one could want in a hero - affectionate, tireless, brave and more curious about life than a research biologist" (Batchelor 1984), is initially confident in his ability to distinguish the reality from the illusion. "In a real war," he asserts, "no one knew which side he was on, and there were no flags or commentators or winners. In a real war there were no enemies" (Ballard 1985 p.14).

Even though he can distinguish between the manufactured realities offered by British Movietone newsreels and the bones of the dead rising in the spring,

reality for Jim, in many ways, is an absence of certainty underwritten by the impossibility of a guarantee because reality is constructed as spectacle. It is, for Jim, removed from the personal sphere and something to be observed rather than participated in. As people leave the western suburbs for their Christmas parties Jim observes that Shanghai has been transformed into a "city of clowns" (Ballard 1985 p20). When the war does break out, Jim notices a sense of distance from events. "Walls of strangeness separated everything," Ballard writes "every face that looked at him was odd" (Ballard 1985 p.50).

This sense of estrangement is developed and Jim becomes an almost spectral observer of the hostilities as he spends four months foraging for food in abandoned houses, riding through Shanghai on his bicycle, seeking to avoid capture and enslavement. Desperate and hungry, Jim allies himself with Basie, an American sailor whose protection is at best ambiguous.[62] No longer protected by the wealth, security and his Western origin that had clearly marked the boundary between the 'show' and the 'audience', Jim grows to realise the irony of his predicament and the fact that his only safety lies with the protection of the Japanese. Slowly acknowledging that if reality is a performance, an improvisational masquerade then he, too, must participate, Jim embraces the end of isolationism and tricks Basie into visiting his old home where they are captured. Jim is acutely aware of this splitting and doubling of himself and the ease with which he seems to accept and discard both identity and aspirations. Ballard writes:

> A strange doubling of reality had taken place, as if everything that
> had happened to him since the war was occurring within a mirror.
> It was his mirror self who felt faint and hungry, and who thought
> about food all the time. He no longer felt sorry for this other self.
> (Ballard 1985 p.103)

Once he accepts his role as a 'performer' Jim excels in the part and the naïve spectral schoolboy turns into "into a resourceful prisoner who can thrive in a

world turned upside down, learning how to hoard food, hustle for favours and ingratiate himself with the moral and immoral authorities of the camp" (Batchelor 1984). As the war draws to a close Jim, who is confined inside the decaying Olympic stadium, witnesses the Nagasaki bomb:

> But a flash of light filled the stadium, flaring over the stands in the south-west corner of the football field, as if an immense American bomb had exploded somewhere to the north-east of Shanghai. The sentry hesitated, looking over his shoulder as the light behind him grew more intense. It faded within a few seconds, but its pale sheen covered everything within the stadium, the looted furniture in the stands, the cars behind the goal posts, the prisoners on the grass. They were sitting on the floor of a furnace heated by a second sun … Jim smiled at the Japanese, wishing he could tell them that the light was a premonition of his death, the sight of his small soul joining the larger soul of the dying world.
> (Ballard 1985 p.267)

Here Ballard almost dispassionately illustrates the post-nuclear paradox. The bomb is the ultimate spectacle, a complete guarantee of meaning that ends the possibility of meaning. In that short flash of light Jim, for the first time, sees everything. There is no refuge or hiding place; nothing is safe, nothing is left unseen in shadows. The nuclear blast is like a giant flashlight taking and freezing reality in a permanent now and, because everything is trapped, illuminated and captured in the containment field of the atomic bomb the fragile border between the living and the dead is obliterated allowing a new state of existence, of living in death, to emerge. Thus, Jim's premonition of his own death is all too real but he is also aware that it is in the hands of people, rather than a God, that the ultimate power over life and death exists. A little later, after briefly resuscitating a wounded Japanese pilot, Jim enacts the second coming and, in a frenzied hallucinatory state, he adopts the role of the nuclear messiah:

> His hands and shoulders were trembling, electrified by the discharge that had passed through them, the same energy that powered the sun and the Nagasaki bomb whose explosion he had witnessed. Already Jim could see Mrs Philips and Mrs Gilmour rising politely from the dead, listening in their concerned but puzzled way as he explained how he had saved them. He could

imagine Dr Ransome shrugging the earth from his shoulders and
Mrs Vincent looking back disapprovingly at the grave.
(Ballard 1985 p340)

In one of the greatest ironies of the 'new age', Jim survives the end of the
Japanese and retreats to the safe haven of the Lunghau camp through the
friendly canisters of food and reading materials dropped by the same bombers
who devastated Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Learning of the genocidal impulse
within humanity through accounts of the Nazi death camps from the newspapers
and magazines dropped from the sky, Jim realises that humankind has now
harnessed the technology to fulfil those impulses. The bomb that has ended
world war two. He understands, has already heralded the start of world war
three (Ballard 1985 p.349). Thus, although the novel sees Jim reunited with his
parents, the ending is both downbeat and tentative, recognising that the terrible
beauty born in Japan in 1945 is waiting to fulfil its promised destiny.

If Ballard is the chronicler of the beginning of the irradiated reality of the post-
nuclear world, then Martin Amis is the apocalyptic visionary of its fulfilment.
"Although we don't know what to do about nuclear weapons" he writes, "or
how to live with nuclear weapons, we are slowly learning how to write about
them" (Amis 1987b p.9). As though he is making up for cancelled time, for the
future he fears will never emerge, Amis has confronted and wrestled with the
problems of the nuclear destiny at length in his journalism and his fiction.
London Fields (1989), arguably his most compulsive book, is set at the turn of
the century and its apocalyptic tone is established immediately. Samson Young,
a writer from Hell's Kitchen in New York has traded addresses with the highly
successful and affluent writer Mark Asprey. Sam arrives at Heathrow on a red
eye flight from New York as Europe is on the verge of both an ecological and
nuclear Armageddon. "I had the airplane to myself" Sam comments, "because
nobody in their right mind wants to come to Europe, not just now, not for the
time being; everybody wants to go the other way" (Amis 1989 p.2) The

business of Heathrow is Departures, with everyone who is able to do so fleeing ground zero. In addition to the environmental crisis in which the sky is poisoned, threatening, and in Sam's words "supermetereological", the political situation is worsening. A total eclipse of the sun is also in the offing and to complete the sinister synergy of events Sam rescues the diaries of Nicola Six, a young woman who has had visions both of the world's destruction and her murder.

Nicola Six has been a murderee all her life; a victim just waiting to find her killer and, she presumably settles on Keith Talent, a small-time cheat and professional bruiser lost in dreams of a career in professional darts. Keith is a born loser, an insignificant member of the criminal underclass who constantly bemoans his lack of talent for the heavy stuff (Amis 1989 pp.4-5). After witnessing the meeting of the murderer and murderee, Sam is surprised to see Nicola discard her diaries outside Mark Asprey's apartment. Reading her diaries, Sam, who has been suffering from writer's block for some time, can't believe his good fortune. Amis writes:

> This is a true story but I can't believe its really happening. It's a murder story, too. I can't believe my luck. And a love story, (I think) so late in the century, so late in the goddamned day. This is the story of a murder. It hasn't happened yet. But it will. (It had better) I know the murderer. I know the murderee. I know the time, I know the place. I know the motive (*her* motive) and I know the means. I know who will be the foil, the fool, the poor foal, also utterly destroyed. And I couldn't stop them, I don't think, even if I wanted to.
> (Amis 1989 p.1)

Sam inveigles his way into the lives of Nicola, Keith and the foal, Guy Clinch but, just as Jim discovered in Ballard's novel, there is no outside vantage point from which one can dispassionately observe. There is, after all, no need for audience in the nuclear theatre, there is no necessity for a cheerleading section

to applaud the final act. The final act is final and the 'audience' become the supreme performers.[63]

This absence of neutral space is manifest in the novel's style, as well as in its content. Whether it is the black, 'mortuary Christmas party' humour that has underlined his oeuvre from <u>The Rachel Papers</u> onwards, or his dextrous weaving of styles, techniques and subject matter from authors as diverse as Muriel Spark, Raymond Chandler, Saul Bellow, D.H. Lawrence and the Batman comics, Amis' writing is skilful and implicates the reader at all levels. We are allowed 'in' on the joke but the deadly seriousness of the themes (nuclear and ecological apocalypse, urban decay, the collapse of society and the rise of the criminal underclass) also makes us realise that we are part of that joke and it just isn't funny. Throughout the novel, for instance, there are constant references to that mainstay of polite conversation: the weather. But the weather, like everything else, is loaded, tainted, impoverished and poisonous (Amis 1989 p.14). Even access to the imaginative space is constrained and restricted. Keith dreams of professional darts, Guy Clinch dreams of Nicola Six and her Little Boy Enola Gay, Nicola dreams of death and Sam, a professional writer, is beyond dreams and can only transcribe what he sees and hears. His imagination is so stunted and irradiated that access to it is impossible.

Ironically, in a decade where the 'death of the author' discourse was dominant, it is only when we turn to Amis himself that we can construct a figure who has the ability to create and order the boundaries, yet even this is illusory because the author's note at the beginning of the text explaining the search for a title, is implicated within the novel. The MA who signs it is, at once, Martin Amis, the supreme puppet-master and his alter ego within the text, the absented Mark Asprey.

Throughout the novel, the overwhelming sense of escalation, of things moving beyond the point of control is reinforced on every page. The revelations and twists from the predicted, almost inevitable plot we are promised at the beginning of the book occur at breakneck speed, surprising everyone but Nicola Six who, on seeing Sam, declares "You, always you" (Amis 1989 p.465). Returning home to Asprey's apartment after the murder, Sam commits suicide, appointing Asprey as his literary executor and asking him to burn the book that Nicola has destroyed just as surely as she once destroyed one of Asprey's.[64] It is only then, in the last few pages, that some form of stability, a tentative sense of safety returns. The nuclear and ecological holocausts, like Sam's novel, are halted as the world pulls back from the brink leaving us with a feeling of thwarted suspense. Not this time, Amis suggests, this time the holocaust was purely textual; this time the book and, correlatively, the witnesses survived. This suggestion of the nuclear weapon as text is one that I shall deal with a little later in the chapter, but first it is worthwhile examining Amis's nuclear fiction collection Einsteins Monsters (1987b).

Einstein's Monsters (1987b) comprises of an essay on nuclear weapons and five short stories. In the essay Amis declares that he is sick of nuclear weapons, that they "distort all life and subvert all freedoms" and that the world's arsenals, even though they are, as yet undetonated "are already waging psychological warfare" (Amis 1987b pp.8-23) and his is a compelling argument although the stridency and hysterical tone in his writing do tend to undermine the validity of his case:

> I was born on August 25 1949: four days later the Russians
> successfully tested their first atom bomb, and *deterrence* was in
> place. So I had those four carefree days, which is more than my
> juniors ever had. I didn't really make the most of them. I spent
> half the time under a bubble. Even as things stood, I was born in a
> state of acute shock... By the fourth day I had recovered, but the
> world had taken a turn for the worse. It was a nuclear world.
> (Amis 1987b p.7)

Whilst the desire to place oneself in the centre of history works as a rhetorical effect in fiction, in this essay the conceit of a fully knowledgeable baby feeling the unmediated psychic effects of the nuclear world not only fails to rise anything above the risible, it is inaccurate: the world has been a nuclear world since the atomic bombs were first used. Thus, although he makes some salient points, the essay fails to convince the way his fiction does.[65]

The first story in the collection, and arguably the best, is "Bujak and the Strong Force or God's Dice". The story concerns Bujak, a Polish immigrant living in London. Bujak is the last of a dying breed, a 20th century warrior who has spent all his life in the resistance (Amis 1987b pp.31-2). Bujak is a walking bomb, the neighbourhood deterrent. Possessed by an innate energy, by an indescribable force the community refer to him as "Bujak the peacekeeper, the vigilante, the rough-justice artist" a man who could "silence a pub just by walking past it" (Amis 1987 p.35). As Bujak's relationship develops with the narrator, Sam begins to see the source of Bujak's strength in terms of nuclear physics and fears "the energy coiled, seized and locked in Bujak" (Amis 1987b p.40). Bujak's theory of the 20th century is one that we have seen in London Fields (1989) and Empire of the Sun (1985): the world is already dead and the living ghosts haunt the cities enduring the suicide's shame. Twentieth century man has, according to Bujak, come too close to the lethal energy of the 'strong force' and he suggests that even if the world disarmed tomorrow "the species would still need at least a century of recuperation, after its entanglement, its flirtation, after its thing with the strong force." (Amis 1987b, p,42).

Muggings, rapes, murders, the dissolution of family life and community, urban decay – these, are all symptoms of the nuclear event waiting to be unleashed. The sickness of late twentieth century society and culture, Amis suggests, is a

radiation sickness seeping from the unexploded but still lethal bombs creating mutants, monsters, and sub-humans. "If you think about nuclear weapons" Amis writes, "you feel sick. If you don't think about them, you feel sick without knowing why." (Amis 1987b p.23). For Amis, the world is suicidal. Like Nicola Six, it is a murderee, a subject "somehow psychologically predisposed to be murdered" (Szamuely 1990 p.47). In New York, Sam comes to the same realisation as Ballard's Jim, and he is forced to accept that it is the world, rather than any specific location, that is no longer safe. "Something has come loose," Sam observes, "something is wriggling, lassoing, spinning towards the edge of its groove. Something must give and it isn't safe ... And what do animals do when you give them only danger? They make more danger, more, much more" (Amis 1987b p.36).

Throughout the story we are waiting for the explosion, for Bujak to unleash his 'plutonium fists', to go ballistic. Thus, when Bujak returns home to find his mother, daughter and granddaughter raped and murdered, with the culprits still asleep in the house, our expectations, our demands for retribution, are overpowering. Bujak, however, resists the destructive force within him but this resistance has its price. Having refused to add to the death toll Bujak hands the youths over to the police. Restraint neutralises Bujak; although he is still the same man, he is also diminished. "If I had killed them," he tells Sam, "I would still be strong. But you must start somewhere. You must make a start" (Amis 1987b p.49). Although Amis builds and creates this nervous anticipation we discover, just as we discovered in London Fields (1989) that the condition of suspense is never relieved, only diverted. The true horror of the post-nuclear age, Amis suggests, is that this unrelieved suspense, this societal sickness and pervading sense of haunting, rather than living "in as much as it can be experienced, is the experience of nuclear war" (Amis 1987b p.22). Unlike Ballard who is able to represent the atomic event, Amis takes us to the brink of

the apocalyptic future but can never take that final step because such a step is unwriteable: "to this crime," Amis opines, "there will be no witnesses; there will just be innocent bystanders in their millions." (Amis 1994b p.14). The circus of death has but one performance and it *will* bring the house down but, before that final, one-night only production, there are rehearsals every four minutes.

Amis's argument throughout <u>Einstein's Monsters</u> (1987b) is that the effects of the nuclear arsenals can only become controllable once the desire not to use them becomes predominant. The ultimate horror of "Bujak and the Strong Force" is not Bujak's force, but the reader's desire to see that force unleashed under the guise of justice. It is this alliance of morality and destructive capability that provides the greatest danger for our species survival. E.P. Thompson makes a similar point when he writes:

> What makes the extinction of civilised life upon this island
> probable is not a greater propensity for evil than in previous
> history, but a more formidable destructive technology, a deformed
> political process (East and West) and also a deformed culture.
> (Thompson 1980 pp.50-1)

The deformation of culture was, perhaps, Thompson's most urgent concern. Before any conflict or hostility emerges into the real, the desire and mental scaffolding has to be erected. In much the same way as the constant visits by the Herald provide the momentum for Shakespeare's battle of Agincourt, certain rhetorical flourishes and psychic preparations must be made to overcome a natural reluctance to endanger oneself whilst constructing the necessary antipathy of feeling towards the enemy. There are, as Clausewitz (1873) correctly asserted, moments of manoeuvrability, hesitation and negotiation before the inevitability of physical conflict and it is in those moments when various organs strive to make the unthinkable not only thinkable but also desirable.[66] Wars begin, as Thompson asserts, within the realms of language

and thought and "we kill each other in euphemisms and abstractions long before the first missiles have been launched" (Thompson 1980 p.51).

From the moment it took office the Conservative government and its allies began the onslaught of ideas.[67] Their strategy was three pronged: first, as we have seen, there was considerable rhetoric stereotyping the Warsaw Pact countries as an 'evil empire' and the 'natural' enemies of freedom, second, a series of public relations strategies were engaged to persuade people that casualties and collateral damage could be controlled, thus creating the illusion that civil defence was a viable option and, finally, those advocating disarmament or those who opposed the government's policies were branded either as 'the enemy within' or as well-meaning, misguided idealists who were being manipulated by the invisible cadre of Hard Left Soviet agents or sympathisers. I will deal with the third point shortly, but first it is necessary to tackle the Civil Defence initiative and cultural responses to it.
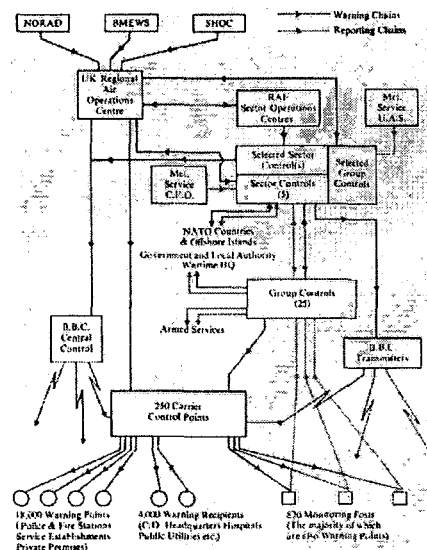

Fig.1 UKWMO Network

The UKWMO (United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation) leaflet produced by the Home Office in 1979 begins with two equally frightening statements "The United Kingdom is very vulnerable to nuclear attack. But even

if this happened, countless lives could still be saved - provided that the public was given even a few minutes' warning." This brochure offers a minute by minute account of how a vast and intricate network of information centres and monitoring systems will help protect the country from the worst effects of a nuclear encounter (see fig.1). This document ends with a reassuring picture of a clear, healthy sky accompanied by the legend "Life goes on... Through the existence, readiness and prompt response of UKWMO, ten million lives may have been saved - to see the dawn of another day".

By 1983 the government had pledged £45 million to Civil Defence. The most notable document it produced was the survivalist handbook Protect and Survive (1980). One only has to give this document a cursory glance with its comforting advice such as "If the block is five stories high or more, do not shelter in the top two floors," or "Even the safest room in your home is not safe enough," to realise that "Nuclear civil defence is a non-subject, a mischievous fabrication. It bolsters fightability. It bolsters thinkability." (Amis 1987b. p.20). Certainly, as we can see from fig.2, the official handbook, despite the self assured and strong male defending his family from the nuclear blast offers little in the way of comfort. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the government's initiative was a public relations disaster which convinced an overwhelming number that protest provided "the only realistic form of civil defence" (Thompson 1980 p.57).[68]
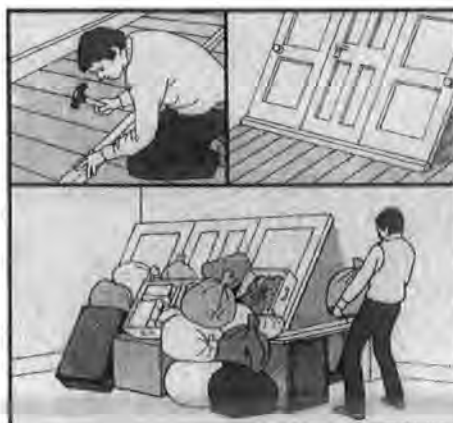

Fig.2 Preparing the Inner Refuge

The battle of ideas over Civil Defence provided one of the great, if unsung, defeats of the Thatcher government and it rapidly became an issue that was greeted with such general derision that it was regarded as unspinnable. The political initiatives, both from the Labour Party and organisations such as CND had limited effect; it was in the field of culture, a culture that resisted such a gross deformation, that the tissue of lies and improbable scenarios issued by HMSO and Central Office were exposed. The Barry Hines scripted Threads (1984) followed the fortunes of two Sheffield families, the Kemps and the Becketts prior to and after a nuclear war. The images offered of buildings exploding, milk bottles melting in the heat and the inability of the authorities, many of whom had only just discovered their duties, were horrific, though none more so than the man biting on a rag as he has his leg amputated or the woman walking through the streets carrying her dead baby. In the field of music, which was becoming increasingly politicised, similar resistance to the 'party line' manifested itself. From vintage bands such as Jethro Tull who sang "Burnt shadow printed on the road now there's nothing there at all/They said: protect and you'll survive" to new bands such as Big Country whose song "1000 stars" insisted with poignant resignation that survival was impossible as two lovers cling together amid the flames of a burning city, apocalyptic visions countered the calm tones of the government pamphlets. In 1981, former Deep Purple front-man Ian Gillan charted with his song "Mutually Assured Destruction", a single that came complete with a polemic, though naïve and badly written, one act play whilst in 1984, Liverpool sensations Frankie Goes To Hollywood used Patrick Allen, the 'official voice' of government information programmes, for their number one single "Two Tribes".

Similarly, in the field of comedy, resistance was particularly telling. Jasper Carrott developed a whole routine based on reading the Protect and Survive

(1980) handbook aloud and a whole new breed of alternative comics appeared to castigate the government and its policies. In the forefront of alternative comedy was Ben Elton who used the radical and ironical reversal of the situation comedy format to great effect with the cult series The Young Ones. In the episode "Bomb" the four anarchic students discover a nuclear bomb in their kitchen to great comedic effect:

> NEIL: Seriously, we ought to do something about this bomb! I'm going upstairs to get the incredibly helpful and informative "Protect and Survive" manual! Nobody better touch this while I'm gone!
> RICK: What are you doing?
> [Neil is reading his survival manual while painting himself white with a paintbrush]
> NEIL: Oh, painting myself white to deflect the blast!
> RICK: That's great, isn't it, Racial discrimination, even in death! What are these? [indicates a few lunchbags on the table]
> NEIL: Oh, sandbags!
> [The table now has a drape over it saying, 'KEEP OUT, FALLOUT'. Mike enters carrying food in both hands]
> MIKE: Neil, where's the table?
> NEIL: Oh, good. You got the provisions.
> MIKE: Yeah
> NEIL: No, not on the roof man!, put it in the food zone! Anyway, it's got to be tinned if it's going to survive ten years of fallout!
> (Elton, Mayer & Meyer 1982)

Even Mrs. Thatcher's favourite television programme, the satirical Yes Minister, got in on the act, centring an episode around the ineffectuality of the Civil Defence initiative.[69] The most telling intervention, however, came with the publication of Raymond Briggs's comic strip novel When The Wind Blows (1982).

Born in London in 1934, Briggs won the Kate Greenaway medal for his work on the Mother Goose Treasury (1966) and published several comic books including Father Christmas (1973) which also won the Greenaway award, and Fungus The Bogeyman (1977). Briggs became a household name when his animated film The Snowman (1982) was broadcast on the fledgling Channel 4

on Christmas Day and rapidly became a national institution. The publication of When The Wind Blows (1982) won immediate praise from critics and anti-nuclear campaigners. The story is a simple one. As international tensions heighten, Jim and Hilda Bloggs, a middle class couple who have retired to the countryside, drink endless cups of tea as they summon up the Blitz spirit and prepare to 'do their bit'. The Bloggs' are the perfect audience for the various government leaflets; they look back fondly to the Second World War and are more than prepared to "roll up our sleeves, tighten our belts and put on our tin hats till its VE day again" (Briggs 1982 p.2). Jim speaks with pride of the American "IBM" missiles and "super commuters". Unlike some of the more strident anti-bomb rhetoric that writers such as Amis offer, Briggs organises his material with care and subtlety. When Hilda asks Fred if they need to dig a hole and build a shelter he replies with absolute confidence "Oh no, dear. That's all old fashioned. With modern scientific methods you just use doors with books and cushions on top" (Briggs 1982 p.2) Similarly, the friendly and comforting pastel colours at the beginning of the book become sick, leprous greens and yellows after the blast and, through the perfectly normal and real depiction of the Bloggs' attempts to 'do their bit' the tragic irony of the real seeps through the safe, nostalgic frame of reference they occupy, exposing the aporias in the various self-help, survivalist manuals which urge Jim to remove the doors to make an inner refuge and then to close them to prevent the spread of fire. Jim's immediate response is to confidently assume that the blast will put the fires out (see fig 3).

Fig 3. Jim Bloggs protects to survive.

Despite his willingness to be a model citizen and accept, as absolute truth, all of the information the government has given him, Jim encounters several problems, not least the impossible contradictions between the various official pamphlets. Poring over the various texts Jim explains to Hilda, "In the Governmental leaflet it says "Remove thin materials from windows" and in the County Council leaflet it says "hang white sheets in the windows." I wonder which is correct?" (Briggs 1982 p.12). Because the manuals demand unflinching compliance and loss of agency, Joe Bloggs is the perfect reader for them. It is through this complete absence of critical, independent thought that the pointless banality of the Civil Defence initiative is revealed. The Bloggs', suffering from hair loss, bleeding gums, acute diarrhoea and all the other effects of radiation sickness, die in their makeshift shelter: already body bagged in paper sacks which Joe insists they wear – just in case.

Nuclear nightmares haunted the texts and the consciousness of the 80s to a remarkable degree. Although we have, thus far, examined only a handful, there were many more texts dealing with the apocalyptic visions that haunted the 80s as writers strained their imaginations to their limits in an attempt to imaginatively represent the unrepresentable effect of complete annihilation and multi-lateral bereavement on a global scale.[70] "The unthinkable," Connor opines, "must first be thought in order to preserve its unthinkability, must be made actual in imagination in order to remain purely potential in fact" (Connor 1996 p.201). The problem with this potentiality, however, is that for many, *the fears were as real as the actual event*. Describing this decade as the 'golden age of nuclear paranoia', Steve Rose accurately sums up the mindset of the period, particularly among the young whose future was always cancelled, postponed, held in abeyance:

As a schoolboy in the 80s, I was convinced that a mushroom cloud

would blossom on the horizon at any moment, ideally during maths. We'd then spend three weeks living under a door propped against a wall while fire rained and dogs melted outside, and we'd spend the rest of our mutated lives scrabbling for radioactive turnips on the charred wastelands of Surrey. The whole of 80s society seemed to be telling us we weren't going to make it past adolescence: reassuring government advice leaflets called Protect And Survive ("you cannot remove radiation from water by boiling it"); friendly children's books such as Raymond Briggs' When The Wind Blows; and cheerful pop ditties Enola Gay and Two Tribes - particularly that floor-filling "dance mix" sampling nuclear attack instructions.
(Rose 2001)

Of course, given the widespread hostility towards the pro-nuclear stance, it is surprising that this bedrock of feeling failed to affect government policy. Certainly two of the more pressing reasons for this, which I will deal with in a later chapter, were the government's intransigence and the failure of the left, particularly the Labour Party, to mount an effective, coherent and sustained opposition. It is also interesting to note that the government and its allies in the media constantly equated nuclear weapons with patriotism, xenophobia and gender issues. A useful text in examining this stigmatisation is Frederick Forsyth's best-selling thriller The Fourth Protocol (1984)

Published in 1984, at a time when the post-Falklands popularity of the Conservative Party was fading and Neil Kinnock's re-vamped Labour Party was beginning to recover from its self-inflicted wounds, Frederick Forsyth's novel proved a gift to the Conservative Central Office. Forsyth had already established his name as a writer whose impeccable research blurred the boundaries of fact and fiction with thrillers such as The Day of the Jackal (1995), The Odessa File (1995) and The Dogs of War (1996). Forsyth thus had a greater degree of credibility than most writers within his genre. Indeed, his reputation for background detail and veracity was such that Neil Kinnock's 1987 election campaign was effectively derailed in the crucial first week due to the media's obsession with the possibility of an overnight coup within the

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Labour Party should they prove victorious. The origin of this conspiracy theory was Forsyth's lack-lustre novel.

The plot is relatively simple: the extremist Chairman of the KGB plans to manipulate a Labour election victory in the 1988 General Election by exploding a small nuclear device near an American air base in England, thus creating an anti-American, anti-nuclear backlash within the United Kingdom. This act would guarantee a Labour government and, within a day of the election victory, Soviet agents would depose Neil Kinnock as leader in favour of Ken Livingstone – an unwitting but compliant ally to the Soviet cause. Within weeks, the conspirators confidently declare, Britain would become an 'unofficial' satellite of the Soviets. This plan (which neatly overlooks the clause in the Labour Party constitution which guarantees that no standing Prime Minister need face a leadership challenge) is concocted by Kim Philby. Despite his years of exile and drunken debauchery in the Soviet Union, Philby not only possesses a complete and thorough knowledge of the contemporary British political scene, an acute knowledge of the Labour Party and its constitutional changes, he also (within the confines of the Forsyth's imagination) has expert psychological insights into the mind of the average British voter. Indeed, Philby's prescience knows no bounds: his judgement and analysis is given greater weight than that provided by the KGB intelligence services as well as several 'independent' experts. What follows is a basic rehash of Forsyth's earlier novel <u>The Day of The Jackal</u>. The cool Russian super-assassin assembles his bomb and lays his plans whilst the dogged guardian of law and order, John Preston, attempts to track him down and save the day which, with the help of those 80s thriller standards, the SAS and a Russian mole, he is able to do just before the order comes through.

From the introduction of his first character, professional thief Rawlings, Forsyth's tone is condescending. "Like all of his kind," Forsyth writes, "he hated to leave the security of his own manor" (Forsyth 1984 p.10). With this seemingly innocuous generic statement, Forsyth immediately erects a scaffolding of privilege and values from which he, and his readers, can view the action. Forsyth follows this statement up with various explanations of underworld, or criminal behaviour that seem at first superfluous to anyone who has watched a police show on television, or read a crime novel, in the previous twenty years. Although these detailed descriptions of 'heavy mobs', 'form sheets', and 'copper's narks' appear innocuous, however, they serve a useful purpose: they inculcate a passive acceptance of 'expert' statements that might otherwise have been questioned. Indeed, within the space of ten pages one is so used to coming across these intrusions, it is almost impossible not to be seduced into a state of uncritical compliance. Thus, when we come to a statement that would ordinarily cause a reader to sit up and take notice, they have already been lulled into a somnambulant state. Forsyth, for instance, writes:

> He (Philby) knew what was going on, and what was intended,
> deep inside the heart of Britain's Labour Party. Others had
> received the mass of raw intelligence that he had studied over the
> years, and which was still passed to him as a sort of favour. But
> only he had been able to put all the pieces together, assembling
> them within the framework of British mass psychology, to come
> up with the real picture."
> (Forsyth 1984 pp.21-2)

Overlooking the obvious facts that Philby was an unreliable drunkard who was, by this time, an embarrassment to his Soviet masters, Forsyth also misdirects his readers regarding Philby's area of expertise. Philby worked for MI6 rather than MI5 and thus his interest was limited to foreign governments and, for the latter part of his career, he was assigned the Middle East under the guise of a reporter (Morgan 1990 p.225). This mythologising of Philby causes immense credibility problems with Forsyth's carefully cultivated aura of expertise,

problems that detailed workings of Chubb mortise locks (Forsyth 1984 p.25) or the imperfections of Hamber safes (Forysth 1984 pp.26-7) strive almost immediately to overcome. Philby's role is, however ludicrously it may appear, essential to the ideological framework of the novel. The name Kim Philby has become a touchstone for treachery and betrayal, and this makes it easy for Forsyth to position everyone who opposes the deployment of Cruise and Pershing as either traitors or idealistic, naïve fools who are the unwitting pawns of the Soviet Union. Forsyth writes:

> There had been marcher demonstrations before, but this was to be the biggest. Press and television were in heavy attendance, the cameramen running backwards up the road to film the dignitaries in the front rank. These included three members of the Shadow Cabinet, two bishops, a monsignor, various luminaries of the reformed churches, five trade-union leaders and two noted academics.
> Behind them came the column of pacifists, conscientious objectors, clerics, Quakers, students, pro-Soviet Marxist Leninists, anti-Soviet Trotskyites, lecturers and Labour activists, with an admixture of unemployed, punks, gays and bearded ecologists. There were also hundreds of equally concerned housewives, working men, teachers and schoolchildren.
> (Forsyth 1984 pp.393-4)

At no point does Forsyth allow the real into his construction of the demonstrators. All he offers is an instantly recognisable, media-created hierarchy of stereotypes: the out of power politicians and clergy elbowing each other for the attention of the media; the 'peaceniks' and the 'Commies' and the unemployed who, presumably, should be devoting their attention towards finding work.[71] At the very bottom of the pile we find the 'bearded ecologists' which leads to the unmistakable deduction that all of the clean shaven ecologists are in favour of the bomb. Then, almost as an afterthought, comes the rather sinister "There were also hundreds of equally concerned housewives." This addition is disturbing for two reasons: first, the emphasis on gender here suggests that all of the other categories listed are male and, secondly if the last grouping of housewives, working men (no working women interestingly

enough) *et al* are 'equally concerned' then, by implication, the first and dominant group are all unconcerned opportunists. The inclusion of gays is also particularly telling. Throughout the novel, the links between masculinity, pragmatism and the bomb are inexorable. Sir Nigel Irvine, the unflappable, professional and irreproachable head of MI6 provides the dominant discourse of masculinity and pragmatics and his views are reinforced by the fact that he was the only one alert enough to see the threat, prescient enough to bring the falsely discredited John Preston in from the cold and pragmatic enough to make the necessary deals with his Soviet equals to avoid catastrophe. It is, he advises Preston, the dangerous dreams of politicians attempting to mould history to their deadly idealistic visions that pushes the world to the brink of destruction. Forsyth writes:

> A top intelligence officer has to be harder-headed than the
> toughest businessman. One has to trim to the reality. When the
> dreams take command one ends up with the Bay of Pigs. The first
> break in the Cuba missiles impasse was suggested by the KGB
> *resident* in New York. It was Kruschev, not the professionals, who
> had gone over the top.
> (Forsyth 1984 p.439)

We should forget the seductive persuasiveness of political rhetoric, particularly the rhetoric of oppositional politics, Forsyth suggests somewhat reassuringly, and trust in the shadow men, the professionals. We have the security services, the SAS, the civil service, all of whom are strong pragmatic professionals to keep us safe. British bureaucracy, the master of research glibly informs us, is "greased lightning": it is the best in the world will protect us from the weak, vain and always deviant traitors within our midst:

> The vanity, thought Sir Nigel, always the vanity, the monumental
> esteem of inadequate men. Nunn, May, Pontecorvo, Fuchs, Prime,
> the thread ran through them all; the self arrogated right to play
> God, the conviction that the traitor alone is right and all his
> colleagues fools; coupled with the drug-like love of power from
> what he sees as the manipulation of policy, through the transfer of

secrets...
(Forsyth 1984 p.212)

Although Forsyth falls short of portraying the idealist/traitor in a grubby mackintosh offering sweeties to children on Clapham Common, he leaves little room for manoeuvrability. Strong men recognise and respect the strong force of the bomb, whereas those who oppose it lose both masculinity and respect. Of course, in Forsyth's world, if not in reality, all of the strong men are in the Conservative Party and the civil service (Forsyth, p.299).

Although Forsyth's novel is acutely, and frequently embarrassingly biased both towards the bomb and the Conservative Party, it does illustrate some of the reasons why the vocal opposition to the deployment and escalation of nuclear weapons had little effect in deflecting or undermining the government: a recently resurgent pride in British militarism, an irrational xenophobic fear of the Soviet Union and the emasculating effect of nuclear denial proved, for many, an irresistible constellation. Thus, for most of the decade, nuclear destruction was both undesirable and inevitable; Einstein's monsters, as Amis suggests, were not just the bombs but the people whose consciousness had become as black and irradiated as the soon to be destroyed Earth. Late 20th century society had become poisoned, a society of mutants searching for immediate gratification, bliss on tap, actions without consequences and whose ideal cultural institution would be a juke-box, an MTV-athon. This illusion of being trapped within the four minute present had a dramatic impact upon concepts of both time and history.

If history, at least for the moment, can be defined as the progression and development of human action and thought through time and space, then undoubtedly the antithesis of history, its radical Other, is the threatened apocalypse offered by the instantaneous and all encompassing nuclear arsenals.

These weapons provide the ultimate sanction, the absolute no: they are the technological realisation of the Lacanian phallus, which must always be contained within the veil of words, rhetoric, and political manoeuvrability. Their speech is our silence, their becoming is our absolute ending: an ending that effectively puts "a limit to narrative's craving to reach beyond itself, to redouble its limits" (Connor 1996 p.200). Thus, particularly in the 80s, humankind was caught in a strange paradox: the fears and concerns and expectations of the nuclear holocaust were both real and frightening, and yet these very real fears were based upon the fiction of an event that had not yet occurred. We were constantly thinking the unthinkable to prevent or postpone the moment when the unthinkable became thinkable. The incommensurability of these two impulses is explored in Maggie Gee's excellent and innovative novel The Burning Book (1983).

The Burning Book (1983) is a wide-ranging dynastic saga telling the stories of two families, the Ships and the Lambs, who are connected by the marriage of Henry Ship and Lorna Lamb. Unlike any other dynastic novel, however, Gee's novel is concerned with death rather than life. From the first page, the futility of narrative in the face of the 'final violence' is foregrounded and this sense of hopelessness is reinforced at every turn. Gee writes:

> In an ordinary novel that would be the whole story, how a woman
> found out how to love. But Lorna was in the wrong story, the
> wrong century, the wrong world ... She did discover real love in a
> world which was mostly fiction. But she lived, like most of her
> neighbours, in a novel too late to be bought. There wouldn't be
> time for this novel, there wouldn't be space for this novel.
> (Gee 1983 p.52)

Similarly any sense of unity, closure or justice is shattered when, after all of their tribulations, the perfect day enjoyed by Henry and Lorna at Kew Gardens is interrupted by the moment of the nuclear explosion. More than any other novel of the period, The Burning Book (1983) is Khattum Shud's ultimate anti-

story: a deathly non-narrative of inevitable blackness; a nightmarish silence accompanied by the rank odour of charred meat. What distinguishes Gee's narrative is that she eschews the morbidity of unrelieved suspense. This is a novel written from beyond the grave; a semi-coherent echo of screams echoing in the aftershock. The last minute noble and human sacrifice that Amis presented at the end of <u>London Fields</u> to resolve the problem and re-establish the status quo is not on Gee's agenda:

> The screams seem unwriteable, likewise, and yet they demand to
> come in. It is hardly the thing, I think, to be heard in a family play.
> But thousands of voices are crying. They scratch at the pane like
> birds.
> (Gee 1983 p.20)

Both in content and style, Gee's anti-narrative technique forces her readers to occupy the critical space theorists such as Baudrillard deny are available. As she switches discordantly between time frames, Gee plays with temporal stability to reveal how the simultaneity of the moment over-rides and over-writes linear history. Propelled backwards, forwards and sideways, the vertiginous speed of the narrative makes the reader aware that history is both more and less than an organised and objective narrative; it is a mode of deceleration, a way of slowing down and decompressing time. It is a revolution against forgetting, although in Gee's novel, the revolution fails. One by one her characters are killed off in parenthesis, the human subject becoming little ore than a side issue: it is an unwritten footnote and there will be no one left to remember it. Both history, and those who are able to record it, are obliterated. Gee writes:

> The last light shone with no-one to see it. The final photograph
> made its print. Everything was on it, nothing escaped. The pattern
> had an unearthly clarity. Melted eyeballs, shattering bone.
> Miracles of form became crackling bacon, miracles of feeling
> flashed to hot fat... All was as if it had never been. Blackening
> paper, the last leaves burning.
> (Gee 1983 p.298)

Like Ballard who records the beginning of the post-nuclear world, Gee falls back on the metaphor of the photograph, the mighty brilliant flash of life that encompasses and freezes everything, particularly time, in a single moment when recording its ending. As the three blackened pages which follow and illustrate this complete and absolute end, this photograph is one that will never be developed, never be looked at, and never placed in an album by any agency[72]. Gee's novel, Connor correctly asserts "is remarkable for its determination to eschew the consequences of living on, preferring to undergo or live out the consequences of annihilation in and for narrative" (Connor 1996 p.238). More than any other text of the period, Gee's novel takes us closest towards the reality of nuclear annihilation but it does not, indeed it cannot, take us there. After the burnt pages comes another ending, a chapter against endings, a poetic plea to set "beginning against ending." Thus, although one book is burnt, the other book, the one that contains it, survives.

The nuclear phenomenon, as Derrida pointed out, is "fabulously textual" not only because "Nuclear weaponry depends ... upon structures of information, structures of language, including non-vocalizable language" but also, because the event has not taken place, it exists only in the realms of discourse where "one can only talk and write about it." (Derrida 1984 p.23). Thus, although the literature focused on the possibilities of survival after the event, or offered last minute reprieves from the event and, in some rare cases, explorations of the nuclear event as fantasy, the singularity of the nuclear experience was beyond expression because that would be the moment when the act of speech, the act of writing became impossible.[73]

The threatened apocalypse did, however, have real and determining effects. It was a major contributing factor to the 'three minute' culture, a culture of

acceleration which displaced the politics of space and territory with the governance of speed.[74] Derrida writes:

> Whether it is the arms race or orders given to start a war that is itself dominated by that economy of speed, throughout all the zones of its technology, a gap of a few seconds may decide, irreversibly, what is still now and then called humanity – plus the rate of a few other species. As we no doubt all know, no single instant, no atom of our life (of our relation to the world and to being) is not marked today, directly or indirectly, by that speed race.
> (Derrida 1984 p.20)

This threat of absolute ending posited the future not as a linear point that would, in time, be reached, but as an alternative history that could be cancelled or, quite literally, erased. Thus, the simple line of progress and the march of history from the past through the present towards the future became dislocated, twisted and warped by the dynamics of speed. Defence strategies and military initiatives were dominated, not by territorial considerations, but with crushing down and compressing the nanoseconds of response time. De Kerckhove makes a similar point, arguing, "Hitler's reach for *Lebensraum* was the last great thrust of territorial conquest. Hiroshima put an end to that and to all further territorial reaches" (De Kerckhove 1984 p.74).[75] Once the fixed boundaries and rigid demarcation lines which organise and control the sense of linear temporality became crossed and confused, the time-lapse between perception, thought and action began "to merge so closely that the actual can no longer be distinguished from the potential" (Virilio 1989 p.3). Instabilities created by a sense of temporal inter-penetration in which time is, in the words of T.S. Eliot, "eternally present" and "eternally unredeemable" occurred. These instabilities proved fruitful for novelists exploring the sense of disjunction and displacement experienced during the heady cold war days of the 80s.

In his novel The Child In Time (1987) Ian McEwan explores the ambiguous and occasionally perilous relationship between human beings and time. Time

travel in this novel, however, is as problematic as it is dangerous as McEwan playfully challenges his readers into writing their own text over his. In the novel, Stephen Lewis, a successful writer for children, takes his daughter to the supermarket where she is abducted. No explanation is offered for this abduction; there is no physical evidence, save the disappearance of the child to support it. From that moment on, the novel follows two patterns. The first, which holds faith with the dynamic theory of time in which the future is not yet determined while both the past and present are concrete realities connected by a line of causality, deals with a man's struggle to overcome the loss of his daughter and the remorse he feels. As the novel ends, Stephen comes to terms with loss, parental guilt, his ambivalent feelings towards his own parents and he eventually reconciles with his estranged but pregnant wife. On this level alone the novel works, but McEwan complicates matters with the non-linearity of his narrative and his frequent asides on the nature of time:

> Following her broken night and shopping expedition, Kate would
> be needing sleep by midday. Then they could be sure of
> uninterrupted time. Later, in the sorry months and years, Stephen
> was to make efforts to re-enter this moment, to burrow his way
> back through the folds between events, crawl between the covers,
> and reverse his decision. But time- not necessarily as it is, for who
> knows that, but as thought has constituted it – monomaniacally
> forbids second chances. There is no absolute time, his friend
> Thelma had told him on occasions, no independent entity. Only
> our particular and weak understanding.
> (McEwan 1987 p.14)

Once the "uninterrupted time" of lived normality is ruptured, McEwan tracks the traces of time in all of its manifestations from the "dead time" of the traffic jam through the "bureaucratic time" of governmental committees to the "panic time" and "empty time" of loss until the "meaningful time" of self redemption is reached, thus allowing the novel to end in "before time." McEwan writes:

> Directly above the moon was a planet. It was Mars, Julie said. It
> was a reminder of a harsh world. For now, however, they were
> immune, it was before the beginning of time, and they lay

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> watching planet and moon descend through a sky that was turning
> blue.
>> They did not know how much later it was they heard the
> midwife's car stop outside the cottage. They heard the brick slam
> of its door and the tick of hard shoes on the brick path.
>> 'Well?' Julie said. 'A girl or a boy?' And it was in
> acknowledgement of the world they were about to rejoin, and into
> which they hoped to take their love, that she reached down under
> the covers and felt.
> (McEwan 1987 p.220)

Within the framework of the dynamic or "uninterrupted time" frame, the gender of the baby is relatively unimportant. Either Stephen has escaped from the memories and delusions that took him 'out of time' or, like his friend Charles, he has retreated so far within them that escape is impossible. It is only when the novel is read through the frame of static or relativistic time that the child's gender becomes pivotal.

In this reading Stephen's daughter, Kate is abducted not by any human agency but by time itself, only to reappear renewed and reborn at the end. In this interpretation Kate becomes the first of many travellers in time: Charles, a high profile political golden boy personally groomed by the Prime Minister seeks to escape the pressures of compressed and compartmentalised bureaucratic time by mentally retreating into that fantastic 'timeless' world of childhood, only to lose himself. At the beginning of the third chapter, Stephen, on his way to visit his estranged wife, slips back through time to witness his mother and father discussing whether they should marry or risk aborting him. Thus, it's not a simple matter of a grief-frozen Stephen stepping out of time or stopping 'real time' through concentrated acts of denial the way Claudia's mother does in Penelope Lively's Moon Tiger (1987). On the contrary, in McEwan's novel time itself, both as an idea and as a physical phenomenon is warped and twisted. It reverberates backwards and forwards with all of the possible permutations of past, present and future oscillating in the struggle for stability. Charles's wife, Thelma (who coincidentally wrote her PhD thesis on the nature of time),

dismisses the common-sense linear notion of time as "either nonsense or a fraction of the truth. Time," she informs Stephen "is variable" and theories of time are caught between the irreconcilable theories of relativity and quantum physics (McEwan 1987 p.118). The narrator's optimism at the end of the novel, an optimism that suggests both unity and closure, appears both hollow and unfounded. There is, after all, no absolute certainty that the journey through times and spaces are over. Indeed, it is possible, that in a last desperate effort Stephen has willed himself back into an alternate time stream in which Kate is not so much reborn as born only to disappear again.

Another novel that ends with the image of a child in time is Martin Amis's Time's Arrow (1991). Even though Amis's novel falls just outside the remit of the period being discussed, it is a text vitally important to the 80s for two reasons. First, the concept of time reversing, of a man living his life backwards is one that Amis first postulates at the end of "Bujak and the Strong Force" (Amis 1987b). More importantly, however, this novel, in conjunction with London Fields (1989), brings together the two holocausts that determined the post-nuclear consciousness within the period: the "fabulously textual" holocaust of nuclear weaponry and the tragically real holocaust which revealed humankind's capacity for connecting a genocidal impulse with technological development in, as Amis succinctly suggests, "a reptilian and logistical combination of the atavistic and the modern" (Amis 1991 p.176).

In Time's Arrow (1991) Amis returns to the image of the missile, the dart, only this time its flight is reversed: everything moves backwards offering a darkened rewind reality for the videotape generation as Amis presents his readers with an ironic investigation of the Holocaust. His narrator, haunted by a nightmarish "figure in the white coat and black boots" (Amis 1991 p.16) relives his life from the grave to the womb. Amis writes:

Eating is unattractive too. First I stack the clean plates in the
dishwasher, which works okay, I guess, like all my other labour
saving devices, until some fat bastard shows up in his jumpsuit
and traumatises them with his tools. So far so good: then you
collect a soiled dish, collect some scraps from the garbage, and
settle down for a short wait. Various items get gulped up into my
mouth, and after skilful massage with tongue and teeth I transfer
them to the plate for additional sculpture with knife and fork and
spoon.
(Amis 1991 p.16)

Even as a gimmick and nothing more, Amis's writing is sharp, witty and
original enough to engage the interest and expose the normal human,
mechanical and bodily functions we take for granted to deeper and further
scrutiny. But Amis's purpose is not to provide light entertainment or to engage
in an extravagant stylistic exercise: those are merely the devices he uses to take
his readers into the heart of darkness itself - Auschwitz.

The problem most readers have when confronted with accounts and even
photographs of the extermination camps is that, like the nuclear holocaust, this
holocaust is unthinkable. The mind can extend only so far before a moment of
blockage is reached and it retreats, seeking to control the sublime singularity of
the event with metaphor and comparisons.[76] Hertz writes:

The moment of blockage, when an indefinite and disarrayed
sequence is resolved (at whatever sacrifice) into a one-to-one
confrontation, when numerical excess can be converted into that
supererogatory identification with the blocking agent that is the
guarantor of the self's own integrity as an agent.
(Hertz 1993 p 90)

Hertz's argument, that it is the moment of blockage, rather than the moment of
sublimity when imagination fails and the mind threatens to collapse, which is
desired is a valid one, and helps us understand why it is deemed essential to
determine meaning as presence. Hertz writes:

The mind, seeking to match its object, 'expands', and that

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'enlivens' and 'invigorates' it but when its capacity matches the
extent of the object, the sense of containing the object, but also
(with a hint of theological paradox) being filled by it, possessed
by it, blocks the mind's further movement.
(Hertz 1993 p 86)

Amis offers his readers no such luxury. By presenting the events in reverse, the
natural moment of blockage is bypassed: in his novel, the 'Jews' are resurrected
through the magic of Zyklon B. They are given hair, spectacles, gold teeth,
money and, when they are fit enough to travel, the 'philanthropic' Nazi's send
them away on trains to live happy lives. Throughout the novel, the Auschwitz
period is the only time that life makes sense to Odilo Unverdorben and it is here
that Amis twists the knife. Presented this way, his readers cannot instinctively
pull away or deny the true nature of the horrors committed; the use of irony and
the reversal of time forces them into affirmation, to recognise that Rosenfeld
was correct and "There are no metaphors for Auschwitz', just as Auschwitz is
not a metaphor for anything else. If one wants 'meaning' out of that, it can only
be this: at Auschwitz, humanity incinerated its own heart " (Young 1990 p.90).

At Auschwitz humanity incinerated its own heart. This, of course, contains the
implicit suggestion that humanity had a heart to begin with, and it is this very
assertion that Auschwitz casts doubt upon. In the build up to Auschwitz, Amis
persuades his reader to empathise with Otto. The use of the first person
narrative, the slick, dark humour, the defamiliarised and alienated experiences
of sensual life all collaborate into creating a sense of identification and, most
importantly, of naïve innocence. In much the same way as the homicidal
detective worried about Mary Lamb in Amis's earlier novel Other People (1981)
the reader becomes anxious for, rather than about him. They want him out of
the risk area and it is only when the reader is fully committed to, and implicated
with Otto, that Amis forces them to confront Auschwitz, not as a metaphor or
textual trick, but as a singularity. Auschwitz is a singular experience, Amis's

novel suggests, because it exposes a motive too horrible and too banal to contemplate; at Auschwitz Humanity attempted to 'spring clean' its soul. The 'final solution' was executed not by madmen but by bureaucrats, civil servants, and doctors. Like Solomon's infant, the Jews were not people but commodities viewed only as numbers, triplicate forms, statistics, or raw materials that had to be transported, exploited and dispersed efficiently. To understand both the mentality of those who created Auschwitz, and the banality of evil, all one has to do is to watch detergent commercials on television that claim to 'remove all stains biologically'.[77] Lacoue-Labarthe writes:

> The Jews were treated in the same way as industrial waste or the proliferation of parasites is 'treated' … This purely hygienic or sanitary operation (which was not only social, political, cultural and racial, etc. but also *symbolic*) has no parallel in history. Nowhere else, and in no other age, has such a will to clean and totally eradicate a 'stain' been seen so compulsively, without the least ritual.
> (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990 pp.36-7)

The deformation of culture and the sanitising of language are also important factors in both holocausts. Baker (2000) comments at length on the way Amis skilfully weaves the polite euphemisms of the Nazi doctors into the narrative to allow ways of desensitising the event. Like the nuclear arsenals, Amis suggests, Auschwitz freezes, distorts and warps time: it is the obscene parent of the neutron bomb that leaves property intact but cleanses the area of people.[78] The bureaucratic and scientific mind's willingness to bypass or circumvent the ethical dimension ossifies time. The two, Amis suggests, are immutable and it is only in those two moments that time exists; everything prior to Auschwitz was a passage towards it, everything post-Auschwitz is a step closer to the second, and ultimately final 'solution'.

There were, of course, several other, less extreme though nonetheless interesting novels dealing with warped time, cancelled presents and diachronic

disruptions.[79] Michael Moorcock's wonderful <u>Mother London</u> (1988) is a case in point. Moorcock is no stranger to fantasy and the fantastical. The author of several fantasy novels, creator of characters such as Elric, the angst-ridden albino Prince of Melnibone with the soul-drinking black sword and Jerry Cornelius, a savage parody of the Bondian super-hero who are, in turn, all incarnations of the Eternal Champion; a doomed sailor on the seas of time. In <u>Mother London</u> (1988), Moorcock is firmly grounded in the real and the organisation of his novel, flipping backwards and forwards through the decades, is important. <u>Mother London</u> (1988) follows the history of the capital from the Blitz through to the 1980s, focusing on the lives of three disturbed individuals whose paths connect in a mental hospital. Moorcock organises his material in such a way that the reader finds it almost impossible to make linear connections unless she is prepared to abandon regular reading practice and read individual chapters in chronological order. Of course, those who follow that path are not only offered a more traditional, though completely different and certainly less compelling novel, they are also forced to acknowledge the dynamic, commonsensical notion of time as a construction. Linear connections, simple equations of cause and effect mask the hidden, deeper realities of history as a continual process of revisionism and corruption. In the next chapter we shall see how this process was enacted in the discourses of Thatcherism and Fukuyama before examining how the novelists of the period responded to the challenges offered by a culture in which history was, quite literally, up for grabs.

5 - BARBARIANS AT THE GATES OF TIME – THE STRUGGLE FOR HISTORY IN THE AGE OF SPEED

For most of the 80s, as we have seen, there was an overwhelming sense of impending apocalypse. "Consciously or unwittingly," De Kerckhove suggested, "we have been rehearsing the nuclear blast since 1945" (De Kerckhove 1984 p.78). During the Reagan/Thatcher administrations, this theatre of destruction committed itself up to, and including, the final dress rehearsal. Yet, by the end of the decade, the Berlin Wall had collapsed, the Soviet Empire had been dismantled and capitalism was wreathed in laurels as the ultimate victor. A 'New World Order' heralding the triumph of liberalism and capitalism in the battle of ideas was offered in yet another 'end of history' discourse. This chapter will examine how, throughout the 80s the struggle for history and time was represented in the fiction of the period and how the Hegelian dialectic was appropriated by the Right as the nuclear discourses of the 80s gave way to the conservative triumphalism of Francis Fukuyama

The political imagination, as we have seen throughout this investigation, manifests itself in the struggle for, and negotiations of, identity. Correlatively, just as individual subjects seek a point of stability, a self-centredness which allows them to recognise themselves and have that recognition acknowledged, human society performs a similar series of negotiations in identifying itself. These mask plays, despite their seemingly self-assured stability, are always provisional and frequently problematic. Despite this, however, a sense of coherence is created, accepted and acknowledged and a line of historical continuity is drawn to act as a guarantor of meaning and permanence.[80] This guarantee, however, is normally underwritten by the dominant or ruling bloc. History, as Benjamin (1992b) astutely observed, is written by and for the

victors. What was at stake in the 1980s, therefore, was not simply a political shift to the right, but the reconstruction of reality itself as the New Right revised history and sought to appropriate the grand narratives for their own political purposes. Before discussing literature's engagement with history in the 1980s any further, it is necessary to digress a little and examine two particular historical discourses of the Right: Francis Fukuyama's claims that we have reached the 'end of history' and the Thatcherist 'history' of post-war Britain.

Having been educated at Cornell University and Harvard, Fukuyama was a member of the RAND corporations Political Science Department, apart from two spells at the US Department of State. In 1981-2 he specialised in Middle East affairs and was also a member of the US delegation to the Egyptian-Israeli talks on Palestinian autonomy. In 1989 he joined the Policy Planning Staff where he published his now famous "End of History" paper. Given the political climate of the time, Fukuyama's claims that we have reached the end of history, that all of the viable alternatives to liberalism have been exhausted and that "the 'New World Order' will not be built upon abstract principles of international law, but upon the common principles of liberal democracy and market economics" (Fukuyama 1991 p.19) has a seductive appeal. Suddenly, the world seemed a much safer place: the Berlin Wall had been torn down, the Soviet Bloc had collapsed and the United Nations actually appeared to be united in its opposition to Saddam Hussein. There were, of course, vocal and vociferous voices of dissent to this almost utopian vision of the future. Norris, for instance, correctly asserted "that the rhetoric and the reality are lethally at odds" (Norris 1992 p.157).[81] Before dealing with the many problems of this latest in a long line of 'end of history' theories, it is worthwhile to examine Fukuyama's claims.[82]

The twentieth century, Fukuyama asserts, "began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy" and, after descending "into a paroxysm of ideological violence as liberalism contended first with the remnants of absolutism, then bolshevism and fascism and finally an updated Marxism that threatened to lead to the ultimate apocalypse of nuclear war" the wheel has turned full circle and what is now being witnessed is "not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western Liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama 1989 p.1). Through a long and frequently tortuous path which involves a simplistic reading of Hegel which effectively neuters any political context, Fukuyama brushes aside any objections that might occur to opponents of his thesis.[83] He admits for instance that the world would still be divided between those smaller Third World nations who are still caught up in the bloody and brutal struggles of history and the enlightened post-historical nations. This should not be a cause for anxiety, however, because Fukuyama is convinced that it is only a matter of time before 'they' join 'us'. All of this seems, at face value, to be perfectly reasonable as long as it is addressed to the 'us' but what "is not quite clear on Fukuyama's account is the extent to which recalcitrant local populations might need to be persuaded, induced or coerced to accept this vision of their own best interest" (Norris 1992 p.158). On this level, Fukuyama appears to be reinstating the imperialistic mandate that created the "ideological violence" which dominated the 20th century; assuming, of course, that such a mandate was ever suspended, a claim Chomsky disputes:

> It is understandable that Western racism should surface with such
> stunning clarity after the cold war. For seventy years it has been
> possible to disguise traditional practices behind the veil of
> 'defence against the Soviets', generally a sham, now lost as a
> pretext.
> (Chomsky 1991 p.19)

There are other significant problems for Fukuyama. Asking his readers to "admit for the moment that the fascist and communist challenges to liberalism are dead" he asks the question "are there any other ideological competitors left?" (Fukuyama 1989 p.11). What is interesting is that he never returns to the problems of either fascism or communism. Having placed them to the side, they remain there in the hope of being conveniently forgotten.[84] Furthermore, Fukuyama makes the naïve assumptions that socialism and communism are synonymous with one another whilst imagining that fascism can be unified into a cohesive and universal ideology. In reality, of course, fascism possesses a chameleon quality and attempts to define an all-inclusive 'generic fascism' are riddled with problems.[85]

Fukuyama is also dismissive of the rise of religious fundamentalism. "In the contemporary world," he argues, "only Islam has offered a theocratic state as a political alternative to both liberalism and communism. But the doctrine has little appeal for non-Muslims, and it is hard to believe that the movement will take on any universal significance" (Fukuyama 1989 p.11). Fukuyama is also more than a little vague about his definition of history but his statement that "at the end of history it is not necessary that all societies become successful liberal societies, merely that they end their ideological pretensions of representing different and higher forms of society" (Fukuyama 1989 p.10) suggests that the end of ideology is synonymous with the end of history. The problem with such an assumption, however, is that it is predicated by a naïve and simplistic definition of ideology.

As a generic concept, ideology reveals the inadequacies of human discourse. It cannot be studied scientifically because science, in its basic assumptions of human progress, development, knowledge, etc. is not only potentially ideological it is, Habermas argues, rapidly assuming the primary function of an

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ideology through *"the elimination of the distinction between the practical and technical"* to such an extent that "the continual growth of the productive forces has become dependent on [a] scientific-technical progress that has *also* taken on functions of *legitimating political power."* (Habermas 1994b p.200) Similarly, philosophy cannot objectively enquire into it because ideology is the pre-condition of all philosophy - the illusion of the social, rational subject capable of philosophical thought, the concept of value that surrounds such thought, the very language in which such thought is expressed are all, in themselves, ideological creations. Ideology, in short, is anterior to all human discourse - it is the pre-requisite for social existence, the immanent desire for social intercourse.

Ideologies, on the other hand, can be defined as any and all modes or strategies of persuasion that, in order to make sense of the world and their position in it, consciously or subconsciously, induce the individual subject into accepting the politically expedient norms and values which structure society. It is through ideologies, rather than Ideology itself, that we create and maintain the norms and values, which constitute the fabric of our social organisations, and a pre-condition of their existence is an immanent awareness of their limitations. Every aim, every desire, every project is constrained by its ambitions. Thus, *ideologies are limited by a prefiguration of their own destruction.*[86] Generic ideology, however, cannot foresee its own destruction because the concept of total social disintegration, of "an ending without appendix, without the possibility of resumption or transcendence" (Connor 1996) is one that is beyond human comprehension. Even under the most extreme circumstances imaginable, as Primo Levi testifies, the desire to maintain self-respect, the desire to communicate with others, to bear witness - an act which is intrinsically social - overrides all other considerations:

> Precisely because the Lager was a great machine to reduce us all
> to beasts, we must not become beasts; that even in this place one
> can survive, to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive

> we must force ourselves to save at least the skeleton, the
> scaffolding of civilisation.
> (Levi 1994b p.47)

The "scaffolding of civilisation"- this, perhaps, is the most precise definition of generic ideology. It is the will to survive *as a social being*, to *belong* to a civilised community and, even when all of the conditions for such social assimilation are denied, the desire for it remains. We can thus define generic ideology as the future wanting to be conceived and, when a particular ideology fails, when chaos and disintegration threaten, they can be held in abeyance because the desire for a replacement is always already in place. The end of ideology presumes the end of desire, and desire, can never be satisfied because it is inscribed both within the subject and within the realms of language and representation. It can, however partially, be repressed or channelled in other ways and this is what we discover in Fukuyama. More than anything else, Fukuyama's work is driven by the need to control, to dominate or block the competing ideologies which threaten to overwhelm or disrupt his vision of society.[87] As flawed as Fukuyama's argument is, however, the very fact that the 'end of history' discourse provided the mandate for the authority of the Left, had, by the end of the decade, been appropriated by the Right needs some explanation.

After the austerity of the fifties, the sixties offered what, for many, seemed 'a brave new world'. The election in the States of the youthful Kennedy in 1960 and the famous 'Lady Chatterley' trial offered the promise of a new start. In the arts, ITV (and later pirate radio stations) threatened the cultural monopoly of the BBC. Novelists such as David Storey, Alan Sillitoe, Stan Barstow, Nell Dunn, Muriel Spark, Margaret Drabble and Kingsley Amis were breaking down the homogeneity of the 'English' novel and giving voice to the previously disenfranchised working and lower middle classes. In the theatre the Beckett and Pinter revolutions were in full sway whilst in the field of popular music,

The Beatles opened up the doors of anti-establishmentarianism and were followed shortly afterwards by more anarchic groups such as The Rolling Stones and The Who. The success of the Bond movies and Hammer Films revitalised a flagging film industry, whilst a host of anti-heroes made unlikely stars of actors such as Tom Courtney, Terence Stamp, Michael Caine and Albert Finney. In politics the Profumo and Philby scandals paved the way for the youthful Harold Wilson who, complete with pipe and Gannex raincoat promised a better, and more equitable society with 'the white heat of technology' opening up new frontiers. The women's movement became a social force while opposition to nuclear weapons and the Vietnamese war all fermented the atmosphere of social, sexual and cultural revolution, but there was also an underlying opposition as a darker nostalgia constantly challenged the youthful libertarianism. The reactionary drive for a 'return to decency' although muted was omnipresent. Mary Whitehouse, for instance, began her 'clean up television' campaign as early as 1963 whilst Powellism struck a popular note with those feeling left behind by the 'swinging sixties'.[88] In newspaper editorials, within academic and business journals, the Right were entrenching themselves for a long and vigorously fought campaign. Hall writes:

> Many of the key themes of the radical right – law and order, the
> need for social discipline and authority in the face of a conspiracy
> by enemies of the state, the onset of social anarchy, the 'enemy
> within', the dilution of British stock by alien black elements ...
> emerged in relation to the radical movements and political
> polarisations of the 1960s...
> (Hall 1990 p.24)

Thus, although Thatcherism, and Mrs. Thatcher in particular, have become the figureheads of the New Right revolution it is worth remembering that while she gave impetus and focus to the moral, political and cultural backlash against the sixties, "the deeper movement which finds in her its personification has – when properly analysed – a much longer trajectory" (Hall 1990 p.19). The swing to the right, Hall argues, is a reflexive response to an organic crisis in capitalism in

which the "strength of its intervention lies partly in the radicalism of its commitment to break the mould, not simply to rework the elements of the prevailing 'philosophies'" (Hall 1990 p.25). This was achieved by first discrediting and breaking away from Keynesian economics, fermenting a new consensus around free market individualism and transforming this economic theory into the language of moral populism by reinventing the British identity in the spirit of the Victorian self-reliant family and entrepreneurial spirit; an identity completely at odds with the notion of social welfare. Thus, a new reactionary common sense was forged around 'corner shop' economics, coupled with rampant jingoism, tabloid morality and an anti-collectivist spirit, which portraying the State as an incompetent and destructive meddler in the lives of individuals. Thatcher writes:

> Already large and unwieldy after its expansion in two world wars,
> the British Government very soon jammed a finger in every pie. It
> levied high rates of tax on work, enterprise, consumption, and
> wealth transfer. It planned development at every level – urban,
> rural, industrial and scientific.
> (Thatcher 1993 p.6)

Like Fukuyama's account of the 'end of history', the Thatcherist discourse of post-war British history is a relatively simplistic one: it tells of a bankrupt, sick and divided nation that is 'rescued' from the insanities and inefficiencies of socialism and state intervention by common sense politics and a rejection of socialism in favour of the Victorian values of the family.[89] Thatcher writes:

> No theory of government was ever given a fairer test or a more
> prolonged experiment in a democratic country than democratic
> socialism received in Britain. Yet is was a miserable failure in
> every respect. Far from reversing the slow relative decline of
> Britain *vis-à-vis* its main industrial competitors, it accelerated it.
> We fell further behind them, until by 1979 we were widely
> dismissed as 'the sick man of Europe'
> (Thatcher 1993 p.7)

This idea of a bankrupt nation, terrorised by union strong-arm tactics and hampered by a weak, ineffectual government which had not only "lost the

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public's confidence as well as Parliament's" but had also proved its unworthiness to govern through intense ideological rifts within itself, coupled with an "inability to control its allies within the trade union movement" (Thatcher 1993 p.5) is a potent one which paved the way for a radical hegemonic break with consensus politics.[90]

Prior to the election of Margaret Thatcher's government in 1979, post-war British politics had been dominated by the Butskellite consensus which aimed at full employment through the adoption of Keynesian economics; a mixed economy with pragmatically nationalised industries co-existing with the private sector and a conciliatory rather than confrontational industrial relations policy; a strong welfare state and, finally a bi-lateral defence policy that was committed to an independent nuclear deterrent and a commitment to NATO. (Coxall & Robins 1992 pp.529-31). By 1979, however, there was a significant mood swing within the British electorate away from what many regarded as the politics of failure. The Winter of Discontent under Callaghan's government refreshed memories of the miner's strike, the three-day working weeks and power cuts which brought the Heath government down.[91] There was, in other words, a crisis in consensus and Margaret Thatcher's promise to break with consensus and sweep away restrictive working practices, prevent trades union excesses, curb inflation through sound economic policies and create a culture in which hard work was rewarded touched a popular chord.[92]

Despite becoming conventional wisdom in many quarters, this 'sick man of Europe' narrative, depicting a once great nation crippled by the vagaries of socialist excess and mismanagement is riddled with problems and contradictions. The Thatcherist account, for instance, demands us to believe that the Atlee government was an abject ideological failure: a failure which created a crippling culture of dependence. A closer consideration of its achievements,

from the foundation of the welfare state to the public housing programmes which raised living standards offers a different picture, however, and Tomlinson is correct in his suggestion that "while not achieving a social revolution "Atlee's administration, "did establish a society with much less poverty, and a much greater degree of equality, than had previously existed in Britain, without sacrificing the paramount need to restore the economy" (Tomlinson 1998 p.101).[93]

If Thatcher's attempts to discredit democratic socialism and the post-war consensus by laying the blame firmly on Labour's 1945 election victory fail to convince, a closer scrutiny of her chaotic Britain of the 70s reveals similar flaws. Although it is true that the 70s were undoubtedly troubled, these troubles are, as Tiratsoo suggests frequently embroidered and embellished:

> Nobody could sensibly claim that Britain was at its finest in the 1970s, but it is also clear that the country's problems have frequently been exaggerated and distorted. We have come to see the decade in a way which magnifies the bad and neglects the good. Moreover, key events are too often presented without any context.
> (Tiratsoo 1998 p.164)

To begin with, Tiratsoo suggests, the turbulent world economy from 1973 onwards, was beyond the control of individual nations. Thus, Britain's decline in this context is neither less nor more remarkable. For instance, in the same period, Japan's growth rate more than halved while unemployment rose dramatically in other countries, particularly in the United States.[94] This grim economic picture was aggravated by Heath's aggressive policy towards trade union reforms which proved counter-productive, and it was this confrontational stance which led to the miners' strike, power shortages and a three-day working week.

The legend of a strike-ridden country held to ransom by Trades Union barons is also exposed as somewhat mythic when placed in a wider context. In reality, when we look at "an international league table of days lost through strikes between 1970 and 1979, Britain occupies a middling position" (Tiratsoo 1998 p.181). Furthermore, the strikes that did occur were rarely supported officially: indeed, executives and managers who had very little professional qualifications exacerbated many conflicts.[95]

Towards the end of the Callaghan administration, there appeared more cause for optimism than despondency. The economy, boosted by North Sea oil revenues, modest economic progress, and a strong pound against the dollar belied the grim forecasts of the IMF. Similarly, the idea of internecine warfare within the Labour Party is equally misplaced. Prior to the 1979 election, the divisions within the Labour Party were no more strident than those occurring within the Conservative Party as the New Right sought to gain hegemony. It was only after Mrs. Thatcher's electoral victory that the ideological fractures appeared within the Left. Indeed, far from being the ideologically divided party who had lost the confidence of Parliament and the people, Gallop polls prior to January 1979 consistently showed that many people saw Callaghan's Labour Party as the natural party of government. Thus, despite her frequently stated objections to people 'talking Britain down' and undermining confidence in the nation and its economy, there can be little doubt that it was Mrs. Thatcher and her allies, particularly in the tabloid press, who were the prime instigators in the creation and dissemination of the 'ailing Britain' and 'nation in crisis' discourses. This strategy was so successful that, in "the space of a few years, history had been comprehensively rewritten. The 1970s were painted in hues of blackest black, with Labour depicted as the evil ogre and Heath simply airbrushed out of the picture." (Tiratsoo 1998 p.186).

Thatcher's revisionism and break with consensus was of vital importance for three reasons: it provided a mandate for her monetarist policies, it provided impetus for her avowed mission to eradicate socialism from British politics and, on a more personal level, it corrected what she perceived as one of the greatest historical injustices – the 1945 defeat of Churchill by Atlee. Indeed, these latter two points are indissociable: if socialism could be eradicated, if history could be moulded so that a new line of continuity could be created from the Victorian era to the Thatcher era, and if the root of all of Britain's post-war problems could be laid at the door of the socialist experiment, then both Thatcher's and Churchill's place in history could be firmly established, with Churchill receiving a posthumous apology from a repentant and 'wiser' British people whilst Mrs. Thatcher became the indisputable and unchallenged successor; a latter day Joshua in a blue suit delivering the Promised Land after the sterile deserts and wasted years of bondage inflicted by socialism. Thus, in her zeal to eradicate socialism from British politics, Mrs. Thatcher attempted a radical revision of British history by erasing the post-war period and creating a line of immediate continuity from the Victorians to the present. She was ably assisted in this project by the lack of any detailed and co-ordinated opposition from the Left, and it fell to the novelists of the 80s to oppose this move by counteracting the dynamic time narratives of the Right with a static relativist approach thereby preserving the reality of the present for the future and revealing history not as a linear chronology, nor as a textual effect, but as a project under constant construction: a project where historical revisionism can be both liberating and dangerous.

"There is," Benjamin argues, "a secret agreement between past generations and the present one" endowing each generation with "a weak, messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim." (Benjamin 1992b pp.245-6). Thus, Benjamin argues, history is inexorably bound up with a desire for redemption as

past generations, struggling for happiness, voice or representation, project their current problems into the future to create an imaginary, yet conciliatory, solution as the future becomes transformed into the past that is still to come. In this act of self-creation, in other words, every epoch engages in its own way with history: in the history of the past and, of course, with its relevance to the present. Certainly, within the discourses of the New Right and its opponents, there was a visible and painful struggle for history and legitimation through a series of complex revisions of and appeals to the past.

"History," Cunningham observes, "masticates texts, whether authors (or readers) like to notice the chewing or not" (Cunningham 1988 p.11) and there is nothing particularly new or revelatory about this claim. Historical fictions, using the term in its broadest possible sense to denote those fictions that are set at an historical distance from the circumstances of their productions, have provided a staple for the publishing industry since the birth of the novel. Although I will focus primarily upon those works Hutcheon (1988) accurately names "historiographical metafictions", it is sometimes forgotten that, within the 80s, there were a significant number of 'historical' fictions in the 'traditional' as well as in the non-traditional, postmodern forms. Even within the realm of popular fiction the historical novel retained some of its popularity. In addition to through the continuing *oeuvre* of Catherine Cookson, who we shall focus on here, there were a series of wide, sweeping dynastic sagas by Jeffrey Archer, Graham Masterton and Barbara Taylor Bradford.

Although a best-selling and prolific novelist from the 1950s onwards, Cookson's popularity soared during the 80s with her books accounting for a third of all fiction borrowed from public libraries in 1988 in the UK. Most of her novels were set in her native Newcastle during the late 19th Century and her *Bildungsroman* The Parson's Daughter (1987) is no exception. This novel,

covering the last quarter of the 19th Century, a significant period of British history, tells the story of a rural parson's daughter as she makes the transition from immature tomboy to womanhood. Precocious at first, Nancy Ann Hazel is sent to a school for young ladies where she is educated until she has to return to care for her ailing mother. During this visit, the wealthy Dennison, owner of the manor house and a man with an unsavoury reputation as a gambler and womaniser, visits the family. Dennison courts Nancy Ann, who marries him against her father's wishes. As the novel progresses, Nancy Ann has to overcome the deaths of two husbands, bankruptcy, the wrath of Dennison's vengeful mistress and the loss of both her children (one through drowning, one through estrangement) before finally finding happiness with David, the illegitimate son of Dennison's brother who has made his fortune in Australia.

The text's relation to its historical background is an interesting one. Providing little more than deep background to the personal relationships and struggles, historical events, even when they are directly referred to, are of little or no importance. They perform either a series of deictic markers which help create a controlling frame to contain the narrative, or they provide convenient alibis for character's actions. This history-as-alibi strategy, which provides a convenient way of eliding thorny problems, is established early in the text and continues throughout:[96]

> If Jed Winter hadn't got one excuse for leaving the village he
> would have found another because he had known he was going to
> be stood off on the farm and would lose his cottage, for things
> were bad all around and corn wasn't selling. It was them
> Americans, Cook said, who were sending the cheap stuff over
> here and taking the bread out of decent people's mouths. But
> Peggy said the real reason the Winter family had left was
> because Nellie had got a baby and her husband who went to sea
> had been gone these twelve months.
> (Cookson 1987 p.12)

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Thus, the abrupt and violent transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy, Disraeli's aggressively expansionist foreign policies, parliamentary reforms, the Corn Laws and the processes of urbanisation as cottage industries and small-holdings collapsed, are rarely mentioned during, and are almost certainly divorced from, the central story. Despite being set within an historical frame, the Cookson novel neuters history.

Adopting all the conventions of the magical endings of C19 realism The Parson's Daughter (1987) never opens itself up to, or allows a dialogue with history, preferring to view and present the past as a closed and frozen time frame which can be reflected back.[97] History, in short, becomes romanticised to the point of irrelevance. Said (1994) makes a similar criticism about Jane Austen. Despite the fact that "Sir Thomas, absent from Mansfield Park, is never seen as *present* in Antigua, which elicits at most half a dozen references in the novel", Said works the Austen text to "show that the morality in fact is not separable from its social basis" (Said 1994 pp.108-110). Similar historical effacement occurs in other canonical works from Forster's refusal to deal with the lower classes in Howards End to Heathcliffe's rise to wealth and power in Wuthering Heights. Cookson's is not an isolated case. A major factor in her popularity is that she belongs to this strong tradition of writers who eschew realism in favour of romantic escapism. Within this tradition, both history and social reality are little more than commodities to be exploited and appropriated: actions that, whether wittingly or not, confirm and support the revisionist agenda of the Right. Before discussing the full implications of this, however, it is worthwhile to examine the way historical contexts are utilised in another novel from the period.

Although the time-span in this novel is restricted to a single year, in An Awfully Big Adventure (1989) Beryl Bainbridge also deals with a similar,

young girl's passage to maturity theme. Stella, a precocious and imaginative stage-struck teenager joins a local repertory company, develops a crush on the handsome, yet homosexual, director before having an affair with the leading man, who commits suicide when he discovers he is her father. Set in Liverpool in 1950 when everything, including happiness, is severely rationed, this novel, on the surface at least, absents itself from history. There are no significant nods towards the historical background, no temporary foregrounding of major events to act as deictic markers and yet, unlike the Cookson novel, Bainbridge engages with her historical period despite its apparent absence. Stage crews and actors chart the war and inter-war years with their reminiscences of fellow thespians: from Mr Boristan, Stella's piano teacher with the "shell-shocked leg" to the "commercial traveller with skin grafts", the walking wounded from the two recent world wars are omnipresent throughout the text, providing a convenient and compelling metaphor for its historical context. Like the time scarred individuals who haunt almost every page, Bainbridge conjures up a post-war Britain crippled and disfigured by its recent experiences: although, in this pre-Suez limbo, it has yet to discover its diminished status. Thus, whilst Cookson foregrounds and immediately dismisses the historical context, Bainbridge saturates her text with it, offering the provincial repertory theatre as a microcosm of England in 1950. With all of its grandiose intentions and poignantly humorous limitations, the company's final, grandstand gesture – the production of Peter Pan – and its collapse into chaos and cries of misery when the police intrude, prefigures the impending Suez crisis.

Significantly, the moments of drama and conflict within the novel all occur offstage and are imparted as information, rather than as direct events. It is, Bainbridge shows, impossible to contain the present or the past, because time exists only when it has been emptied or exhausted. This point is reinforced when the voice of Stella's mother, a voice on the phone that brings wisdom and

peace to her, is revealed as the talking clock.[98] Despite Stella's attempts at intimacy, at connection, she discovers that time cares for no-one, that it has already begun its inexorable movement forward, bringing further disillusionment and despair, countering optimism with inevitability. History is, in a sense, and also in essence, moving faster than the speed of life.

> "It wasn't my fault," Stella shouted. "I'll know how to behave
> next time. I'm learning. I'm just bending down to tie a shoe-lace.
> Everyone is just waiting round the corner."
> "The time," pretty mother said, "is 6.47 and 20 seconds
> precisely."
> (Bainbridge 1989 p.193)

Indeed, the loss of innocence, privilege and the subsequent falls from positions of exaltation or invulnerability which mirror an Empire in decline, occur throughout the book. Meredith's seduction of Geoffrey, the latest in a long line of young boys, reveals the self-serving corruption within the highest levels and O'Hara's seduction of both Stella and her mother, along with his rapid descent from noble hero to incestuous father, serves to remind us that the age of the heroic adventurer is over, whilst emphasising our capacity for self-delusion.

Although these signs are initially private, they culminate in the public 'death' of Tinkerbell towards the end of the novel: a death which creates a communal and social sense of loss, a loss which no amount of rhetoric, hand-clapping or political posturing could compensate for:

> Stella heard about O'Hara from the child playing Slightly.
> 'Captain Hook's downed hisself in the river' he babbled.
> Presently Tinkerbell drank the medicine intended for Peter. It was
> an affecting moment. '*Why Tink,*' cried Peter. '*it was poisoned
> and you drank it to save my life. Tink, dear, Tink, are you dying*'
> Stella's hands were trembling as she held the torch. She could
> hear Mary Deare droning on: 'Her light is going faint, and if it
> goes out that means she is dead. Her voice is so low I can scarcely
> hear what she is saying. She says – she says she thinks she could
> get well again if children believed in fairies. If you believe, clap
> your hands.'
> Stella dropped the torch and let it roll into the wings as the

children brought their palms together to save Tinkerbell. The light
swished from the back-cloth. For a moment the clapping
continued, rose in volume, then died raggedly away, replaced by a
tumult of weeping...
(Bainbridge 1989 p.192)

Though it is always possible to read this novel purely as an entertainment, as a
tragicomic greasepaint story, it is only when one grasps metaphorical
connection between the private dramas and the invisible backdrop of the A
bomb, the Korean War, the declining Empire, the fear of Communism and the
formation of NATO period, that the sense of exhaustion and defeat become
unmistakable. "Life is full of conflagrations" O'Hara informs Stella's guardians
as he realises that the future, and any hope of redemption, is sealed off from
him. "We can never be sure when we'll be consumed by the past (Bainbridge
1989 p.189). Thus, whilst Bainbridge offers a degree of self-reflexivity and
engages with the lived effects of history, Cookson seals herself, and her readers,
off from it.

It would, of course, be relatively easy to account for the difference between
these two novels by insisting that Bainbridge is a better writer, that her work is
obviously denser, richer and less formulaic than Cookson's. To adopt this
seductive line of least resistance would, however, be a grave error. The
difference between the two is not simply a difference of literary quality, but of
the ways in which history is utilised. It is in art Williams argues, "that the effect
of the totality, the dominant structure of feeling, is expressed and embodied"
(Williams 2001 p.33) and this statement best exemplifies the difference between
the two texts. Cookson, despite the fact that her novels frequently deal with the
voiceless, frequently disenfranchised, working classes of Victorian England,
writes outside of time, from a point beyond history, working within and
conforming to the romanticised Conservative traditions of Englishness and
Empire: traditions which are highly effective in silencing and marginalising the
very people she writes about. At no time does Cookson interrogate the

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dominant narrative or acknowledge the fact that there is a story (other than her own) that is being told, nor does she question the genre conventions which require such compliance. Thus, in Cookson's novel, history is available for representation and exploitation without uncertainty. Like artefacts on display at a museum, the past is offered for consumption in strict teleological order to inform the reader of a temporal shift and her approach can best be described as annalistic rather than analytic.[99]

The 1980s were rich with historical constructions and constructions of history. from Catherine Cookson to Salman Rushdie, from the distant historical past, through the two world wars and into the 60s. Barry Unsworth's Pascali's Island (1980), for instance, offers a relatively conventional tale of love, guilt and betrayal against the rich historical backdrop of a decaying Ottoman Empire and, similarly, Isabel Colgate investigated a decaying British aristocracy prior to the Great War in The Shooting Party (1981). Peter Ackroyd displayed his virtuosity exploring the simultaneous co-existence of past and present in The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde (1983) and Hawksmoor (1985), a strange and fascinating mystery which alternates between the 18th Century and the present day. A century of Australian history is offered by Herbert Badgery, the unreliable narrator of Peter Carey's Illywhacker (1985) and Carey's engaging novel about two hopeful, romantic gamblers Oscar and Lucinda (1988) is Victorian in both subject and style. Victorian London and pre-Revolutionary Russia provided the setting for Angel Carter's magnificent Nights at the Circus (1984). J.G. Ballard, as we saw in the previous chapter, recounted his childhood experiences during and after the fall of Shanghai in Empire of The Sun (1984) whilst Timothy Mo reviewed the 60s from the perspective of the immigrant Chinese community in his novel Sour Sweet (1982). Although conventional historiography and historical fiction were available in the 80s, it is undeniable that there was a significant shift in the way history itself became transformed

from a narrative of past events into a textual effect. Nor was this textualisation of history solely the product of post-structuralist sophistries: it was, as we have seen, *essential to the ideological project of the New Right in general, and Thatcherism in particular.*[100]

During the Thatcher years, history became a site of theoretical and political conflict, during which access to the past was always mediated through the present for specific purposes. It is this tension, this idea of history as *a lived site of conflict*, which the Bainbridge novel raises and the Cookson novel denies. Stella, like Cookson, desires nothing more than a sense of permanence and continuity with the past. She tries to enforce this fantasy by blocking off and impeding the new reality, but unlike Cookson's characters, Stella finds herself unable to separate the public and private spheres of her existence. Indeed, the more she tries to romanticise, to exist within a dream-like introspective state, the more forcefully reality intrudes. Her fairy-tale romances are disturbed by homosexuality and incest; her attempts to blot out the uncomfortable real are disrupted by the constantly scarred and disfigured survivors of the war and her attempt to mythologise the 'great' actors of repertory theatre is undermined by the stories told those around her. Perhaps the most effective symptom of this collapsing of categories, are the one sided conversations she has with her mother. When she is unable to function, Stella retreats into fantasy thus creating a temporary barrier between her social and imaginative realities, but her emotional outbursts whenever the past is disturbed, reveals how this barrier is always provisional, tenuous and fragile. Bainbridge writes:

> He hadn't forgotten her histrionics following the removal of the
> half basin on the landing. He'd had to bite on his tongue to stop
> himself from blurting out that in her case this was all to the good.
> There are worse things than the disappearance of basins. It had
> brought home to him how unreliable history was, in that the story,
> by definition, was always one-sided.
> (Bainbridge 1989 p.20)

Like Uncle Vernon, historian Hayden White suggests that history is indissociable from narrativity and imaginative reconstruction. Historiography is, White argues, driven by an "impulse to organise and orchestrate events "with respect to their significance for the culture or group that is writing its own history" (White 1980 p.10). Thus, the historical narrative, or history proper, is constructed not simply on the basis of what happened, when it happened and how it happened, but also on the invisible history, the omissions and repressions that are an inevitable part of any process of selection. No matter how complete and convincing any historical narrative may appear to be, White argues, every narrative "is constructed on the basis of a set of events which *might have been included but were left out*" (White 1980 p.10).[101] This approach has led to some criticisms of White. Norris, for example suggests that it is "a short step from the claims of postmodern sceptical historiography – as exemplified in the work of Hayden White – to the arguments of proselytising right-wing historians who more or less openly advocate a return to the teaching of history as a vehicle for Thatcherite values and principles" (Norris 1990 p.40). The problem here is that, proselytising right-wing historians will make any steps, short or long, to make their case. By dismissing White so easily, therefore, Norris – whose prime concern is to debunk the entire postmodern-poststructuralist canon with the exception of Derrida – fails to see how theorists such as White can be used to destabilise the official, party-line historical discourses of the ruling bloc.

White vehemently denies the pure relativist assumption that history can be rewritten at a whim. Any historical discourse, he insists, has to be validated externally. For each interpretation, or structuring of events, a mandate is sought and given. Thus, "narrativity, whether of the fictional or factual sort, presupposes the existence of a legal system against or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate" (White 1980 p.13). Narrativity, in other words, is never neutral but carries within it an immanent desire to

moralise and, without such an appeal, without the transition from one moral order to another, reality cannot be invested with meaning. White writes:

> The demand for closure in the historical story is a demand, I
> suggest, for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real
> events be assessed as to their significance of a *moral* drama.
> (White 1980 p.20)

It is this moral authority which provides the impetus for explanation, selection, and determination of context, thereby transforming events in time into human experience and this act of foregrounding the moral authority neutralises its attempts to promote itself as objective and unquestionable knowledge.[102]

Thus, there are two clear, definable approaches to history, both related to the temporal disjunctions that dominated the era. On the one hand there is the straightforward, diachronic approach to history which Fukuyama uses to draw a straight line through the 20th century and the Thatcherites used to connect the high Victorian era to the Thatcher revolution. On the other hand, there is the approach suggested by White and Foucault (1997) which offers a disruptive and critical approach, both to the actual history and to those who supply its mandate. This latter approach provided the focal point for most of the fiction of the 1980s. Bradbury writes:

> It has also increasingly been observed that writing history is more
> like writing novels than we often choose to think ... Certainly
> exploring past and recent history at a time when its progress
> seemed either ambiguous or disastrous, and many of the
> progressive dreams of the earlier part of the century had plainly
> died, did become a central theme of eighties fiction.
> (Bradbury 1994 p.432)

To write the past, Connor suggests, is to historicise the present as well as to read from it , thus "making it possible to inhabit or belong to one's present differently" (Connor 1994 p.140), and in the 1980s two particular modes of historical writing were available. The first, which we have already seen in both

the Cookson and Bainbridge novels, is the historical writing which "seems to assert in its form and language the capacity of the present to encompass the past", whilst the second form, historicised writing, offers the past as a ruptured, flawed and broken translation "displaying the lack of fit, or ironic incompatibility, between past and present viewpoints and languages" (Connor 1994 p.142). The problem with such a separation, however, is that many texts operated from both perspectives and we shall examine these briefly beginning with Ishiguro's novel The Remains of the Day (1989).

On the surface at least, The Remains of the Day is a simple, pastoral tale. Stevens, Lord Darlington's butler, offers his master a lifetime of loyalty and devotion, happily oiling the wheels of state offstage while Darlington pursues his naïve and misguided political aims. Stevens's attentiveness to detail and his dedication to duty comes at a great personal cost: he loses the opportunity of love and personal happiness with the housekeeper, Miss Kenton, he overworks his ageing father and, even when informed that his father is dying, Stevens persists in his pursuit of dignity and professionalism:

> Let me make clear that when I say the conference of 1923, and
> that night in particular, constituted a turning point in my
> professional development, I am speaking very much in terms of
> my own more humble standards. Even so, if you consider the
> pressures contingent on me that night, you may not think I delude
> myself unduly if I go so far as to suggest that I did perhaps
> display, in the face of everything, at least in some modest degree a
> 'dignity' worthy of someone like Mr Marshall – or come to that,
> my father. Indeed, why should I deny it? For all its sad
> associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so
> with a large sense of triumph.
> (Ishiguro 1989 p110)

Throughout his unreliable and self-delusional narration, Stevens continually attempts to repress the truths his recollections raise; truths that his revisionist history seeks to deny. In much the same way as Bainbridge submerges the public historical forces and events beneath the private experiences of the

individual, Ishiguro has "constructed a tale which examined the Fascistic implications of the moral and political uses of a code of honour in modern and technologised societies" (Waugh 1995 p.34) and it is worth examining the surface and hidden histories Stevens offers us, before discussing the historical frame which, though considerably effaced, contains the narrative.

Ishiguro foregrounds Stevens's unreliability as a narrator, both with the constant revisions Stevens makes - "Indeed, now that I come to think of it, I think it may have been Lord Darlington himself who made that particular remark" (Ishiguro 1989 p.60), and with the ease in which he is seduced into wearing any mask available, adopting any role that is offered, to protect himself from any degree of self-awareness. Stevens's favourite role is to pose as an English gentleman at every available opportunity, and at times one feels as though he has absorbed his former master. It is only when he is challenged directly by Dr. Carlisle (Ishiguro 1989 pp.207-8), that he abandons the imperfect mask he most cherishes. Even though he is in a position of unchallenged superiority when he is mistaken for a gentleman acquainted with Churchill, Eden and Halifax, Stevens is publicly impotent. Unable to assert himself in any meaningful sense, he is referred to by the Taylors as "our gentleman" and thus he is owned, possessed and forced to perform (Ishiguro 1989 p.191). This is a trait he seemingly shared with his previous master, Lord Darlington:

> It was a ploy of Lord Darlington's to stand at this shelf studying the spines of the encyclopaedias as I came down the staircase, and sometimes, to increase the effect of an accidental meeting, he would actually pull out a volume and pretend to be engrossed as I completed my descent. Then, as I passed him, he would say 'Oh, Stevens, there was something I meant to say to you.'
> (Ishiguro 1989 p.60)

Darlington's little ruses, his ability to be manipulated and indoctrinated, all suggest that the code of honour and fair play demanded of an English gentleman

unsupported by a strong moral centre and self-reflexivity, coerce him into a continual performance. In much the same way, Stevens's tragic and flawed assumption that dignity is located in professionalism forces him into accepting the duplicitous role of perpetual performance, even and especially in the private areas of his mind, as a natural state of affairs. After being challenged by Miss Kenton to abandon his puppet existence and be himself, Stevens confesses that "A butler of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role, utterly and fully ...There is one situation and one situation only in which a butler who cares about his dignity may feel free to unburden himself or his role; that is to say when he is entirely alone" (Ishiguro 1989 p.169).

It is difficult, throughout the novel, to feel anything but sympathy for Stevens. Here is a man who has devoted his life to a master who has failed him, who has sacrificed personal happiness and familial duties for a cause without understanding it, a man incapable of being himself in any social situation. There is little wonder that some critics see Stevens as the perfect, colonised subject incapable of defining "himself outside of his subordinate relation to Lord Darlington" (Guttmann 1991 p.1). Towards the end of the novel Stevens seems to accept and confirm such a position:

> How can one possibly be held to blame in any sense because, say,
> the passage of time has shown that Lord Darlington's efforts were
> misguided, even foolish? Throughout the years I have served him,
> it was he and he alone who weighed up evidence and judged it
> best to proceed in the way he did, while I simply confined myself,
> quite properly, to affairs within my own professional realm. And
> as far as I am concerned, I carried out my duties to the best of my
> abilities, indeed to a standard which many may consider "first
> rate". It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have
> turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste-and it is quite
> illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own
> account.
> (Ishiguro 1989 p.201)

Appearances can be, and frequently are, deceptive and, like Thatcher's 'sick man of Europe' mythology, or Fukuyama's explanation of history, once the surface rhetoric has been pierced an entirely different story begins to emerge. To begin with, Stevens's claims that he is only absent from performance, that he can only be himself in private, is worth reconsidering once the reader becomes aware that Ishiguro delicately undercuts Stevens's account throughout the novel. Despite being cued for audibility, for instance, Ishiguro draws attention to the fact this is a *written* narrative and, as such, it was composed by Stevens when alone, for a purpose and to a presumably sympathetic reader (Ishiguro 1989 p.60). Furthermore, Stevens's self-righteous claims that he was proud to serve Lord Darlington, that he was never remiss in his professional duties and he maintained his dignity at all times are exposed as blatant falsehoods. When Mrs Wakefield, a guest of his new master, the American Farraday, asks Stevens about Lord Darlington, Stevens denies that he worked for him, a denial that doubly betrays his profession: not only does Stevens give the lie to his claims that he was proud to work for Darlington, he also diminishes the man he is contracted to serve (Ishiguro 1989 p.123).[103] Similarly, whereas the perfect butler is invisibly visible and the soul of discretion, Stevens is constantly pushing himself forward, allowing both Darlington and guests to see his public weeping (Ishiguro 1989 p.105) and he is forever eavesdropping for titbits of gossip which he cannot wait to share with his reader:

> Although of course I made no deliberate attempt to overhear, I
> could not help but get the gist of what was being said and was
> surprised by the extent of my employer's knowledge
> (Ishiguro 1989 p.122)

When we allow history to intrude into his personal valediction, a truer picture of Stevens begins to emerge. First, his protestations of innocence, and his assertions that he was unaware of any complicity in Darlington's collaborations, are seriously undercut, not only by his pride in being privy to the private

discussions of Darlington and his guests (Ishiguro 1989 p.80), but even more importantly, through the unrelenting warnings of his fellow servants and visiting butlers. Even Lord Darlington's godson, Mr Cardinal, whose opinion Stevens ought to consider, boldly asserts that "Over the last few years, his lordship has probably been the single, most useful pawn Herr Hitler has had in this country for his propaganda tricks" (Ishiguro 1989 p.224).

Stevens, however, was not just a passive observer of the events that led to Darlington's downfall – *he was a prime mover in them*. More than any other event, the 'success' of the 1923 'Peace Conference' hosted by Lord Darlington provided the direction for the future, and Stevens's role in this conference is pivotal: Stevens deliberately spies on the private conversations between the American and French delegates and reports these discussions to Lord Darlington who, armed with knowledge he would not otherwise have had, is able to launch a series of effective counter-moves (Ishiguro 1989 pp.95-9). Similarly, Stevens claims that it is the quality of the service, and the superbly polished silver, that affected a positive outcome between Lord Halifax and Ribbentrop at Darlington Hall. Even with the benefit of hindsight, Stevens cannot prevent himself from insisting that "one has a right to feel ... the satisfaction of being able to say with some reason that one's efforts, in however modest a way, comprise a contribution to the course of history" (Ishiguro 1989 p.139).

These claims, that Stevens contributed to, and served the higher purpose of history, give a clear indication of Stevens's active affiliations although they are not, on their own, conclusive. When one brings into consideration the hawkish, militaristic language and metaphors Stevens uses to describe his preparations at the Peace Conference (Ishiguro 1989 p.77), and the way he describes his pantry as "a general's headquarters" (Ishiguro 1989 p.165), the case becomes

somewhat stronger and is finally clinched when the post-war Stevens blatantly

voices his anti-democratic politics:

> But life being what it is, how can ordinary people truly be
> expected to have 'strong opinions' on all manner of things--as Mr.
> Harry Smith rather fancifully claims the villagers here do? And
> not only are these expectations unrealistic, I rather doubt they are
> even desirable. There is, after all, a real limit to how much
> ordinary people can learn and know, and to demand that each and
> every one of them contribute 'strong opinions' to the great debates
> of the nation cannot, surely, be wise. It is, in any case, absurd that
> anyone should presume to define person's 'dignity' in these terms.
> (Ishiguro 1989 p.194)[104]

Like McEwan, Ishiguro offers his readers two conflicting and competing

narratives. The reader can either uncritically accept Stevens's account of events

and see him as a flawed, tragic and misguided character or allow a different

construction of this complex character to emerge by taking into account the

many and varied clues to his unreliability, his constant revisionism, his hidden

ideological agenda and his ability to manipulate and coerce. Once the moral

authority underwriting Stevens's history is exposed, the epitome of the perfectly

colonised subject is erased, leaving in its place the now familiar figure of the

sinister servant. In other words, once the tensions between the author and the

narrator are uncovered, the passive Stevens becomes transformed into a

confident and subtle schemer who actively participates and manipulates his

'master' for his own ends, always aware that what "occurs under the public gaze

with so much pomp and ceremony is often the conclusion, or mere ratification,

of what has taken place over weeks or months" (Ishigro 1989 p.115) in the

private, secluded spheres of the great houses.[105]

Questions of history and narrativity are also problematised by William

Golding's novel Rites of Passage (1980). The novel is structured around the

chronicle of Talbot, a refined English "gentleman who is going to assist the

governor in the administration of one of His Majesty's colonies" (Golding 1980

p.4). Talbot, always self-conscious of his class, position and privilege, begins his narrative exuding an arrogant confidence, promising a day by day narrative of the journey for his godfather. What is striking about Golding's novel is the way that both temporal and spatial limits are collapsed as the journey continues and Talbot becomes increasingly aware of the power of his narration. As early as the fourth day of the voyage Talbot declares, "I find that writing is like drinking. A man must learn to control it" (Golding 1980 p.29). Having come to this realisation Talbot also becomes aware of the power he holds. Talbot, however, is not the only person on board who is keeping a journal.

After his death, Colley's journal is also discovered, and this journal casts a different and varied perspective on the crew and passengers. Captain Anderson, who in Talbot's account is a despotic tyrant, receives a much more sympathetic hearing from Colley, despite the fact that Colley is frequently the focal point of Anderson's rages. Although existence of Colley's journal gives Golding's (and Talbot's) readers a deeper sense of moral outrage at the persecution and sexual abuse suffered by Colley, the juxtaposition of the two accounts also allows Golding to interrogate the construction of history by examining the addressivity of both. Both accounts are personal testaments addressed to specific people (Talbot's godfather and Colley's sister) and they both transgress the boundaries initially set for them. Colley, for instance, realises that his narrative would prove "too painful for … her eyes" and subsequently offers his chronicle up to God. Talbot, on the other hand, makes his initially private and anecdotal account available to a wider readership. He begins to see his journal as a force of power, a testament that, in his godfather's hands, might bring the Captain and crew to justice. This realisation further collapses boundaries as the narrator becomes consumed by his account in much the same way that he subsumes Colley's narrative (Golding 1980 pp.183-4).

What is particularly interesting here, however, is how the change of addressivity empowers one account and renders another impotent. Colley, who addresses his account to God, neutralises any impact his account might possess by removing it from the limited public sphere of his close family and turning it into an exclusively private confessional. That his withdrawal of his narrative from the eyes of mortal men fails is, by and large, irrelevant: any real effect it generates will be produced solely because of its place within Talbot's account. Talbot, on the other hand, takes the opposite course and moves his quasi-private journal into the public sphere, thus enabling it to provide a counterpoint to the official history recorded in the ship's log. This movement, from the private to the public sphere, empowers Talbot's account and, throughout the journey, other people attempt to influence Talbot's record. "You have a journal" Summers points out when Talbot raises the question of justice for the death of the parson (Golding 1980 p.182). The matter of the journal is raised again by Captain Anderson toward the end of the novel, when he seeks to influence Talbot's testimony by insisting "that whatever may be said of the passengers, as far as the people and my officers are concerned this is a *happy* ship." (Golding 1980 p.258).

In the construction of an historical narrative, Golding suggests, the audience will always predetermine its importance and its relevance. Although one sympathises more with Colley than Talbot, and indeed one is more inclined to believe Colley when the accounts contradict each other, it is Talbot's account that is given historical importance because he both survives and, even more importantly, he is the one empowered to offer the final moral judgement. It is, however, worth noting that Talbot's account is also limited because the novel ends before the journey is completed.

Rites of Passage (1980) takes place during the Napoleonic Wars and this knowledge, in conjunction with the already established unseaworthiness of the

vessel, creates a strong ambiguity: there are no guarantees that the ship will make it to its final destination or, even if it does, that the manuscript will make the return journey in safety. Then, of course, there are other significant problems that might render Talbot's narrative impotent. Talbot, as we see throughout the novel, is inconsistent, vain and arrogant and it is conceivable that he might amend or revise his account. Furthermore, it is equally likely that its addressee, and the person with whom final justice rests, may die before the account reaches him. Throughout the novel, the rigid confines of space within the vessel are continually and tragically transgressed, while time slips away from its desired chronological order to the point where Talbot confesses that "Nothing is real and I am already in a half-dream" (Golding 1980 p.184). Without these structuring frames of space and time history, Golding suggests, becomes both unreadable and unwriteable.

Rather than the admittedly popular historical fictions of authors like Catherine Cookson, who took their subjects *from* history, many authors throughout the 1980s made history their subject, challenging the "reconstituted unity" of a continuous history that provides "the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it" (Foucault 1997 p.12). Some, like Bainbridge, Golding and Ishiguro placed their subjects *within* history to challenge the revised and reframed continuous histories offered by both Fukuyama and Mrs. Thatcher. Others such as Rushdie (1982;1983), Swift (1983) and Barnes (1989) overtly discussed and problematised the concept of history, revealing its ambiguity through a textualisation strategy which revealed both its construction and the possibilities of its perversion. "History," Rushdie declared, "is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge" (Rushdie 1992 p.25). An

example of this form of fiction can be found in Penelope Lively's novel <u>Moon Tiger</u> (1987).

"The voice of history," Claudia the narrator declares, "of course is composite. Many voices; all the voices that have managed to get themselves heard. Some louder than others, naturally" (Lively 1987 p.5) and the novel lives up to this initial promise. As Claudia, a popular if somewhat controversial historian, lies dying in hospital, she attempts her greatest project - a history of the world. Both her mind and her history, however, refuse the demands of chronological time and order. Like Saleem Sinai in <u>Midnight's Children</u> (1982), Claudia is handcuffed to history, shackled to a "bit of the twentieth century" and is determined to resist this imprisonment. Lively writes:

> Chronology irritates me. There is no chronology inside my head. I
> am composed of a myriad Claudias who spin and mix like sparks
> of sunlight on water. The pack of cards I carry around is forever
> shuffled and reshuffled; there is no sequence, everything happens
> at once ... The Palaeolithic, for me, is just one shake of the pattern
> away from the nineteenth century – which effectively first noticed
> it, noticed upon what they were walking.
> (Lively 1987 pp.2-3)

As Claudia attempts her history, and the recreation of her past, other voices such as her lover, Jasper, her brother Gordon with whom she has, at best, a sexually ambiguous relationship, and even Tom, the love of Claudia's life and her private secret, is given voice at the end as she reads his journal. In the end, Lively argues, history is always and only accessible through the present, through those personal and "vital inessentials that convince one that history is true" (Lively 1987 p.31). Throughout the novel, Lively builds up the tensions between history and memory, with the personal conducting its own military operation on the public domain. Lively writes:

> I arrived in Egypt alone in 1940; I was alone when I left in 1944.
> When I look at those years I look at them alone. What happened
> there happens now only inside my head ... Mine – ours – is the

only evidence.

The only private evidence, that is. So far as public matters go -- history -- there is plenty. Most of it is in print now ... I've read them all; they seem to have little to do with anything I remember.

(Lively 1987 p.70)

Although it is easy to dismiss fictional historians like Claudia, or historical theorists such as White as pure relativists, to do so is to vacate a potentially valuable sphere of political resistance. When the dominant historical discourse is controlled and written by the 'victors', those other voices clamouring for recognition need any vehicle available for them or, in much the same way as Colley's journal is appropriated by Talbot, they will be assimilated, neutered and silenced.[106] In order to fully understand the political importance of this intervention through and with history it is necessary to examine how the interrogation of history was combined with a savage critique of the Thatcherite neo-Victorian utopia and the destabilising of the concept of Englishness that provided the New Right's moral authority in 1980s England.

6 - DISUNITED KINGDOMS – THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND AND THE COLLAPSE OF ENGLISHNESS

Although we have discussed the impact of Thatcherism with respect to the nuclear debate and the revision of history in previous chapters, a more detailed examination of the social and political realities of this epoch is unavoidable. Through the texts already discussed, with their representations of lawlessness, selfishness and social decay, it is possible to extrapolate a vision of Thatcher's Britain: a Britain of dystopian disintegration, urban decline and social stagnation.[107] This chapter will begin by discussing the vision of national identity Thatcherite policies sought to impose upon the nation and history, before examining the absence of effective political opposition and the various strategies of resistance offered by the very cultures she sought to deform and dominate.

When Mrs. Thatcher entered the history books in 1979 as Britain's first woman Prime Minister, she delivered her vision by quoting Saint Francis of Assisi. As her two nation Toryism, based upon the contradictory ideals of unfettered individualism, invisible hand economics and Victorian morality, brought wealth and privilege to a few at the expense of millions, this quotation came back to haunt her throughout a long, discordant and divisive decade. In her memoirs, Mrs. Thatcher attempts to counteract her critics by adding

> St Francis prayed for more than peace; the prayer goes on: "Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope." The forces of error, doubt and despair were so firmly entrenched in British society, as the 'winter of discontent' had just powerfully illustrated, that overcoming them would not be possible without some measure of discord.
> (Thatcher 1993 p.19).

Although she was undoubtedly successful in creating "some measure of discord", this brought little benefit in the areas of truth, hope and doubt, and hers "was not the message of saintly benevolence but the jarring note of conflict, belligerence and confrontation" (Morgan 1990 p.440).[108] Even if one were inclined to recognise her albeit limited achievements, it is the dark side of Thatcherism's social policies (homelessness, bankruptcies, civil disorder, disintegrating social services, the poll tax, etc.) that instinctively comes to the fore in any discussion of the Thatcher decade, particularly when that discussion involves the cultural production of the period.

Described by Martin Amis as a 'dry' mother, incapable of inspiring any emotions other than guilt and nostalgia for the societal values she was intent on destroying (Amis 1994 p.23), resistance to Thatcherism created a cultural unity unseen since the 30s. Social, cultural and political critiques of Thatcher's ideological revolution were rampant from the gritty new soap-operas and serial dramas such as The Boys From The Blackstuff (1985) and The Singing Detective (1986), to the poetry of Tony Harrison, Carol Ann Duffy, Michael Hoffman and Eleanor Brown. Theatre also contributed to this engagement, with playwrights such as Howard Brenton, David Hare and, of course, Caryl Churchill, who effectively captured the mood and ideology of Thatcherism in her play Serious Money (1987).

When the deregulation of the Stock Market in 1986 abolished the divisions between jobbers and brokers, along with the fixed scale of commissions, and allowed existing 'member' firms of the Stock Exchange to be bought by banks, insurance companies and overseas investment firms, the personalised trading that had dominated the City since the 17th Century disappeared overnight and "the old spectacle of brokers milling around on the Stock Exchange floor was replaced by silent, almost computerised networks for dealers, reflecting the new

internationalism of the stock market" (Morgan 1990 p.476). It is this eruption of activity and new order of economics that provides the setting for Churchill's satirical and savage attack. The play begins when the sedate, antiquated and personal method of trading illustrated by the brief scene from Thomas Shadwell's The Volunteers, explodes into the manic, simultaneous exchanges in the dealing rooms of Shares, Gilts and Paper. In these frenetic exchanges, the audience experiences a vertiginous sense of the unreal as time and space collapse into a single moment: social engagements and selling are compressed into a nanosecond while dialogue becomes little more than a dislocated monologue or commentary as the human agency is erased. It is impossible to witness or read the immanent bedlam of this short multi-scene without conjuring up the spectre of Marx and Engels.[109]

The plot revolves around a cartel's scheme to take over Albion, but the take-over goes awry when trader Jake Todd is shot and the Department of Trade and Industry are forced to intervene. The play focuses on Scilla, Jake's sister, as she investigates the death of her brother but, true to the spirit of an age where everything has a price and nothing has value, she is motivated by naked self interest alone.[110] Truth, justice, even a desire for revenge have no place in the new scheme of things. Human agency is erased, characters meld into one another as everybody is chasing the serious money at an accelerated pace. "The traders are coming down the fast lane" Zackerman, a banker, declares confidently, a sentiment that is also echoed by Grimes, the gilt dealer who insists "A good dealer don't need time to think" and Merrison who perverts the Aristotelian view of humanity declaring that "Man is a gambling animal" (Churchill 1987 pp.20-25).

Churchill's dialogue continually strives for unity. Her use of metrical rhyme gives the play a surface beauty and cohesion, although this surface is undercut

by the constant splutterings and discordant, fragmented interjections. What Churchill offers is a dazzling display of how form is not merely determined, but completely subverted, by content. Poetry, the highest form of language, becomes annexed by the materialism of the new Romantic heroes who have eschewed any vestige of humanism. Described by Scilla as a "cross between roulette and space invaders", the world belongs to the new age computer cowboys and, in their hands, money has become totally abstracted from its social function of exchange. "You can buy and sell money" Scilla announces, "You can buy and sell the absence of money" (Churchill 1987 54). It is this erection of abstracted money as a transcendental signifier, as an absolute guarantor of meaning, that underpins the 'sexy greedy' creed of the 80s.

In the era of AIDS, economics became the new erotics. Everything from business deals, inter-personal relationships, discussions of AIDS and sex are filtered through the lens of money as it permeates every aspect of private and public life.[111] Characters in the play are unable to relate to anyone or anything unless it is mediated by the touchstone of serious money. Bradbury writes:

> If the Fifties had largely read culture with a moral vocabulary, the Sixties with a sociological one, the Seventies with the language of personal consciousness, the Eighties quickly introduced a new discourse founded on myths of money ... "monetarism" came to dominate not only the economic and political but the cultural spirit of the day.
> (Bradbury 1994, pp.395-6)

Although monetarism was a cornerstone of Thatcherism it was not synonymous with it. Monetarism was an economic means towards a political end, and this conflation of terms is both confusing and unproductive. The economic theory of monetarism is based upon the assumption "that excessive increases in the supply of money ... cause inflation, a case of too much money chasing too few goods" (Kavanagh 2002, pp.9-10). It was a policy that worked better in theory than in practice however, and even its most strident adherents had to

acknowledge that there is no internationally accepted standard for monetary supply. Thus, without a stable base from which to measure the monetary supply, the whole fiscal policy was based on a wing and a prayer: any attempt to impose Friedman's economics almost immediately brought disaster to any economy that implemented it.[112]

The problems of a monetarist agenda were compounded by the free market ideology which carried the vain hope that, in times of crisis the market would correct itself, that an "invisible hand" would carry out a series of checks and balances. It is this 'responsible free market' logic, rather than monetarism, that Churchill's play critiques. "Being in debt is the best way to be rich" Corman advocates, while most of the characters live by Boesky's maxim that "Greed is all right. Greed is healthy" (Churchill 1987 pp.42-5). With the exception of Frosby (the jobber whose actions initiate the unsuccessful DTI investigation) they all seem to prosper under this belief. Even when the human costs of this lifestyle are exposed, when characters suffer from cocaine addiction, physical burn out or imprisonment, these outcomes are disregarded as occupational hazards, allowing the play to end, not with any sense of revelation or personal growth, but in the hollow, yet triumphal song of Thatcherism:

> Pissed and promiscuous, the money's ridiculous
> Send her victorious for five fucking morious
> Five more glorious years.
> (Churchill 1987 p.111)

Money, Martin Amis asserted, is "a totally unexplained confidence trick" (Haffenden 1986 p.6), and this is a perfect summation of his most acclaimed novel. The plot of Money (1984) is, like any good confidence trick, both transparent and opaque. John Self, a late twentieth-century Everyman who is addicted to pornography, trash TV, junk food and of course, money is a rich hedonistic director of commercials who has been hired to make a big budget

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Hollywood film. Self, blinded to the manipulations of everyone and everything (including author Martin Amis whom he hires to write the screenplay) loses everything. The novel, subtitled a suicide note, lives up to the logic of money by failing to produce anything real: even the promised suicide fails to materialise. What it does produce, however, is a savage critique of 80s greed. "Self's obsession" Edmonson writes, "his beginning, his middle, and end, and his distancing delusion is money… Self's ontology equals money. Period." (Edmonson 2001 p.148), an observation that is obvious to even the most casual reader. Friends, past, future, work, sex, love, stress, acts of God and human tragedies are all commodities (Amis 1984 p.189). Everything and everyone (with the possible exception of the two author figures, Martin Amis and his fictional twin Martina Twain) has a price tag. Money is uncontrollable, uncontainable and omnipresent. Cars come "sharking" out of lanes and the only books on Self's shelf are fixated with money. When Self meets Martina Twain he is captivated by her normality, onto which he immediately projects the seductive aura of money:

> Yes, she sounds sane, doesn't she, among all these other people
> I'm working around? But then she has always had money. Money
> is carelessly present in the cut and texture of her clothes… Her
> smile is knowing, roused and playful, but also innocent because
> money makes you innocent when it's been there all along.
> (Amis 1984 p.134)

This is one of the few moments of true perceptiveness Amis allows his narrator. It is only when one manages to escape the matrix of money that humanity can flourish. Observing a fracas on the street Self immediately conjectures "I bet money was involved. Money is always involved" (Amis 1984 p.19). Even the impoverished, the poor and the destitute are touched and condemned by money. Their lack of money, their money deprivation, is as destructive as the pursuit and acquisition of it:

> The dole queue starts at the exit to the playground. Riots are their

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rumpus rooms, sombre London their jungle-gym. Life is hoarded elsewhere by others. Money is so near you can almost touch it, but it is all on the other side – you can only press your face up against the glass. In my day, if you wanted, you could just drop out. You can't drop out any more. Money has seen to that. There's nowhere to go. You cannot hide from money. You just cannot hide out from money any more. And so sometimes, when the nights are hot, they smash and grab.
(Amis 1984 p.153)

Amis, like Churchill, reveals the connection between the yobification of society and the free market where money circulates according to its own pervasive logic. In the face of these critiques, it is hardly surprising that Croft remarked that the best talents, "are critical ones, the brightest texts are taking sides, are *on our side*" (Croft 1990 p.341). Taylor, although less effusive, made a similar observation, declaring that the "late 1980s were remarkable for the degree of unanimity among the literary community, and for the existence of a literary opposition more vocal and coherent than at any time since the 1930s." (Taylor 1994 p.269). Although there are considerable problems with Taylor's analysis of 80s fiction and the effectiveness of its opposition to the Thatcherist discourse it would be prudent, in the light of his complaints that this opposition was superficial and made "the fatal mistake of not even trying to comprehend the basis of Mrs. Thatcher's attraction or to appreciate the concerns of the constituency that brought her to power" (Taylor 1994 p.269), to examine the moment of Thatcherism and the identity and agenda it sought to project.

There can be little doubt that Mrs. Thatcher's triumphant claim to have irrevocably "shifted the agenda of British politics" (Lacquer 1993 p.471) has a great deal of veracity. What is debatable, however, is whether Thatcherism provided a coherent and cohesive ideological framework, or whether it was an instinctive, anti-theoretical series of responses to situations conditioned by a Victorian "Little Englander" mentality and enforced by an abrasive, dictatorial style of leadership. Certainly there is substantial evidence to suggest that the

latter is the case, and most of the concerns and interests we associate with Thatcherism are, in reality, little more than borrowed plumes. It was, after all, the Labour Government under the direction of the IMF, which initiated the introduction of the monetarist policy she is credited with (Gamble 1990 p.126). The aggressively pursued privatisation programme can be seen as reactive, as a reversal of post-war policy rather than a proactive, forward thinking agenda and again, this policy had its roots in the Callaghan government's BP sell-off. Similarly, Mrs. Thatcher continually associated her politics of individualism with return to the Victorian values of entrepreneurial style, civil order and family values, conducting a Christian crusade against the 'debilitating consensus' and 'moral bankruptcy' of post-war Britain:

> I was an individualist in the sense that I believed that individuals are ultimately accountable for their actions and must behave like it … I never felt uneasy about praising 'Victorian values' or – the phrase I used – 'Victorian virtues', not least because they were by no means just Victorian. But the Victorians also had a way of talking which summed up what we were now rediscovering – they distinguished between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving poor'. (Thatcher 1983 pp.626-7)

Thatcherism, then, seems to have provided nothing new or revolutionary, offering little more than a rediscovery of the 19th century liberal economy coupled with an evangelical moralism respun through the libertarian discourses of the sixties. It was a form of reactionary Ceaserism in which a charismatic or heroic figure emerged during a hegemonic crisis thus enabling reactionary forces to triumph (Gramsci 1996b pp.219-23). Hutton certainly confirms this view:

> Mrs. Thatcher was a conviction politician whose good fortune was to become the leader of the Conservative Party at the right time and it was her emergence during a period when the Butskellite consensus was in crisis, the world was in recession and Britain was enjoying the benefits of North Sea oil that allowed her to appear as a unifying force inventing "a rhetoric which appealed as much to the England of ducal estates as to a suburban Basildon, constructing an alliance which won three successive elections and

> proved durable enough to allow her successor to win a fourth in
> exceptionally unpropitious circumstances.
> (Hutton 1996 p.27).

Similarly, the election of John Major, and his attempts to move from a confrontational to conciliatory leadership style framed around a new consensus, adds weight to the notion that Mrs. Thatcher and Thatcherism were little more than the fortuitous combination of a political style and historically specific circumstances. There are, however, considerable problems with treating Thatcherism as an historical aberration based upon a cult of personality, not the least of which is the fact that this was a "dry mother" incapable of generating love, a figure who inspired antagonism rather than admiration, a woman who "remained an imperious figure, respected, perhaps feared, but rarely viewed with affection" (Morgan 1990 p.503). Furthermore, Thatcherism has continued and flourished in a modified form under the auspices of New Labour and Blairism. It is also worth remembering the deep, underlying move towards the Right, had been a continual process from the 60s onwards. More than a figurehead, yet less than the movement to which she gave her name, Mrs. Thatcher provided a focal point and motivational force for Thatcherism which, Kavanagh suggests "is both a matter of style and policies" (Kavanagh 2002 p.12). Because the policies her governments pursued attempted to recreate Britain in her own image, an image that was increasingly influenced by her adherence to those very same policies, one aspect cannot be dissociated from the other.

Thatcherism, as an agenda, focuses and unites three potent elements of the liberal political economy: the nation, the economy and the family. These elements, Thatcherism suggested, were not separate issues but fundamentally interconnected values, and can be formulated thus: a strong healthy nation is one that is economically and morally sound; a strong economy is one that is unregulated, one that allows the entrepreneurial spirit to flourish; this

entrepreneurial spirit is connected to the desire to provide for oneself and one's own. Thus, family drives the economy, which supports the nation, which, in turn, rewards the family by providing the conditions of freedom for it to flourish. Taken in conjunction, Thatcherite policies combined to overthrow the "creeping socialism" of the post-war years with a virulent brand of Whiggist Social Darwinism in which the strong were no longer handicapped by the weak "moaning minnies" and "social security scroungers" who had held Britain back for so long.

The 'sick man of Europe' myth discussed earlier was absolutely essential to the Thatcherite project. Before Thatcherite reforms could be initiated, it was necessary to create a pervasive and negative association of the State. Thus, rather than being an instrument of the people, the Thatcherite creed suggested, the State was just an incompetent and destructive meddler, corrupting the ineffable spirit of the British people with a dependency culture based on incessant handouts, restrictive regulations. Of course, the argument continues, it was the Labour movement, whose contempt for individual freedom was matched only by its inflationary avarice and incompetence, who created the post-war State. Hall writes:

> It is precisely this abstract state which now appears transformed in the discourses of Thatcherism as the enemy… in any polarisation between state and people, it is *Labour* which can be represented as undividedly part of the power bloc, enmeshed in the state apparatus, riddled with bureaucracy, in short, 'with' the state; and Mrs. Thatcher, grasping the torch of Freedom with one hand, who is undividedly out there, 'with the people'. It is the Labour Party which is committed to things as they are – and Mrs. Thatcher who means to tear society up by the roots and radically reconstruct it!
> (Hall 1990 p.34)

Essential to this reconstruction was the need to break the traditional ties of class and community, to move from a caring society to a shareholder culture. By selling off council houses, by cutting the basic rate of income tax in favour of

punitive, indirect taxation and selling off nationalised industries, Thatcherism began to create a cult of individualism. The "creeping socialism" of the state was the "enemy within", the source of all the nation's ills from football hooliganism and escalating crime to schoolgirl pregnancies and the destruction of the family unit. This anti-collectivism, this attempt to recreate the Victorian virtue of a strong Britain playing a dominant role in world politics while its economy, driven by *laissez-faire* economics, was unshackled from the Trades Unions and organised labour movements, provided the template for her vision: a vision she pursued with a unique blend of populism, patriotism and persistence. Mrs. Thatcher's economic policies, and the ensuing unemployment they created, were not driven by a thorough economic analysis: they were motivated by an ideological desire to curb and control the Trade Unions who had contributed to the defeat of the Heath government. In this respect, monetarism was a political, if not an economic success. The rise in unemployment caused a significant drop in Trade Union membership and made its leaders increasingly cautious, whilst the rank and file were either struggling with unemployment or, for the first time in their lives, benefiting from the opportunities to own their own homes. On its own, however, this was not enough. The cult of the individual had to be draped in the righteous flag of the nation, and the Falklands conflict provided the perfect opportunity to drape the Union Jack over the born-again Boadicea and her agenda.

To the rest of the world, the Falklands conflict was a relatively minor affair in which the Argentineans reclaimed a small South Atlantic island of no military or economic significance. This provided Thatcherism's with its greatest moment, offering a golden opportunity to unite the nation through a combination of moral outrage, Blitz spirit and a nostalgic appeal to the heady days of Britannia ruling the waves. Suddenly, a nation suffering from crippling unemployment, urban riots and economic despair was allowed a euphoric, post-

victory moment of unification. The Falklands Conflict was not foreign policy, it was domestic policy transposed onto the international stage. Aided and abetted by her friends in Fleet Street, Mrs. Thatcher proceeded to connect the dots and compare the battles in the South Atlantic and the battles on the domestic front against the 'enemy within'. It was a high-risk political manoeuvre, but Mrs. Thatcher's gamble paid off and the Falklands Factor played a major part in her second general election victory. Morgan writes:

> The Falklands War totally changed the public and political
> climate. Its mood of self-confident chauvinism galvanised the
> nation ... Mrs. Thatcher turned from being the least popular Prime
> Minister of modern times to becoming an Iron Britannia, a new
> Boadicea, the very embodiment of toughness, triumph and grim
> resolve.
> (Morgan 1990 p.461)

Tough, triumphant, fiercely individualistic, and chauvinistically patriotic, this then was the identity Thatcherism created for both its figurehead and for the nation. "One of Thatcherism's most startling gifts to British society," it has been argued "is to have thoroughly politicised it" (Young 1984). Credit for this anti-democratic turn, which has effectively reduced Britain to an oligarchy, to a one party state for the past twenty three years, should not be given exclusively to the Thatcherites, however, because they were ably assisted in their ambitions by the failure of the Left to provide a cohesive, coherent and effectual opposition.

Strong, determined, unshakeable and patriotic, Thatcherite rhetoric seemingly addressed not only the economic crisis caused by a world recession and burgeoning oil prices, but also a crisis in national consciousness. "The long crisis in British imperialism," Gray suggested, "is reflected not simply in economic decline, but also in a crisis of national identity, of the re-definition of Britain's position and role in the world" (Gray 1990 p.278). If any opposition was going to be effective then it also had to address these two concerns. The problems for the Left were twofold. Within the Labour Party, an insular and, for

the most part irrelevant, debate was taking place. Confident that Thatcherism was merely a temporary blip exposing the contradictions in British capitalism the Left concerned itself with democratising the party and shifting the locus of power away from the Parliamentary Labour Party to the National Executive Committee, the Trades Unions and constituency parties. While its political machinery was indulging in self-obsessive sophistry, the industrial arm of the Left, after contributing to the downfall of the Heath and Callaghan administrations, were overly confident in their abilities to influence or destabilise governments. So, within the opposition ranks there was a double self-deception which assumed that the Thatcher government could not be re-elected and, if it was, that the Trades Unions could successfully mount a challenge to it.[113] To further complicate matters, certain members of the PLP, concerned about the Left's changes to the party's constitution, jumped ship. Under the leadership of the returning European Commissioner and former Labour Chancellor Roy Jenkins, a centre party (the SDP) was formed. Although never more than a political novelty, the SDP seriously weakened the opposition by drawing votes from traditional Labour supporters and allowing the Tory-biased media ample opportunity to point towards the internecine warfare within the Labour Party, thus declaring it unfit to govern.

It is interesting to note that both the Thatcherites, and its opposition, all claimed their authority from the sacred, mythic mode. For Thatcherism the mandate was the high Victorian era of Empire and enterprise, the SDP and the Labour right wing appealed for a return to the consensual politics of the 50s and 60s and, the mandate of Left, was provided by the collapse of capitalism in the 1930s and the 'wasted years' of the 1950s. Thus, the 30s were resurrected again and again as a political strategy to undermine and expose the harsh and heartless realities of Thatcher's vision. Marches, lockouts, structural unemployment and soup kitchens provided the semiotics of resistance, but very few people were

listening. In his 1983 essay Salman Rushdie expressed the disbelief and bewilderment of the Left as, in the wake of the Falklands and a Labour Party manifesto described by one Shadow Cabinet Minister as "the longest suicide note in history", Mrs. Thatcher prepared for a landslide victory. Satirically outlining the history of Thatcherism as a plot for a novel Rushdie writes:

> The hapless novelist submits his story, and is immediately submerged in a flood of rejection slips. Desperately, he tries to make his narrative more convincing. Maggie May's political opponents are presented as hopelessly divided. The presence of alleged 'full-time socialists' amongst her foes alarms the people. The leader of the Labour Party wears a crumpled donkey-jacket at the Cenotaph and keeps falling over his dog. But still (the rejection slips point out) the fact remains that for Mrs May to hold anything like the lead the polls say she holds, the unemployed – or some of them anyway – must be planning to vote for her; and so must some of the homeless, some of the businessmen whose businesses she has destroyed, some of the women who will be worse off when (for instance) her proposal to means-test child benefits becomes law, and many of the trade unionists whose rights she proposes so severely to erode.
> (Rushdie 1992 p.160)

Just as Amis failed to deal effectively with nuclear weapons in his essays as convincingly as he did in his fiction, Rushdie belabours the point that he is so obviously missing. It is ironic that, of all people, he failed to understand the appeal of the mythic, the absence of militancy in the British working class and the over-riding historical precedent that revolutionary periods in which the left achieve a temporary advantage normally result in a reversal that initiates a prolonged period of reactionary right-wing rule (Ahmad 1994 p.163). Thus, through a combination of moral outrage, political naiveté which mistakes rhetoric for analysis and wishful thinking for action, Rushdie failed to address the circumstances surrounding the second Thatcher victory.

Despite the huge rise in unemployment and bankruptcies, inflation was falling, which allowed the government to proclaim that the pill, though bitter, was working and slowly but certainly the 'Great' was being put back into Britain.

The victory in the Falklands had exorcised the ghosts of Suez, while the fairy-tale romance of Charles and Diana served up in generous helpings by Mrs. Thatcher's tabloid allies created a general 'feel-good factor'. Furthermore, the perceived and real conflicts within the opposition suggested that they weren't capable of organising themselves, let alone a country: an opinion seemingly confirmed by Labour's chaotic, shambolic, and lacklustre election campaign. The tabloids also obliged by providing daily side dishes of 'Loony Left' excesses, thereby creating just the right amount of fear. In itself this would probably have been sufficient but, by 1983, Thatcherism's reactionary modernisation programme had successfully polarised North and South. This is particularly significant because the first past the post electoral system meant the battle had to be won, not throughout the country, but only in certain key constituencies, most of which were in the South and were already benefiting from the government's acquisition, rather than production, policies. Wollen writes:

> Thatcherism is a modernising movement in a very specific sense. It aims to modernise the finance, service, communications, and international sectors of the economy, but not domestic manufacture of civil society. New 'core' industries, largely dependent on international capital, are consolidated in the South, while the North of the country is left as a peripheral, decaying hinterland.
> (Wollen 1993 p.36)

Despite their landslide and overwhelming parliamentary majority, the Conservative Party only won 42.9 per cent of the popular vote which, at the time, was their worst electoral performance since the war. Thus, although the evidence suggests that anti-government support *was* strong, the divisions between the various factions were even stronger, and in a tragicomic replay of the Chartist movement, a common, united front proved impossible.

Relatively unopposed, Mrs. Thatcher consolidated her position. Through patronage, boundary changes, the taming of the civil service, quangos, the politicisation of the police, intensive centralisation and selective privatisation, Mrs. Thatcher tightened her grip on parliament, party and civil society by continuously exploiting "the extraordinary powers that Britain's unwritten constitution gives the majority party in the House of Commons to achieve her ends" (Hutton 1996 p.29).[114] This politicisation of society, and the lack of a strong united opposition did have one benefit. There were some considerable successes surrounding single issues like the poll tax or the nuclear debate, whilst significant cultural interventions such as Live Aid and Rock Against Racism revealed that, although many felt themselves estranged and isolated by traditional parliamentary politics, the creed of strong individualism promoted by Thatcherism had inadvertently fermented a strong sense of activism and commitment in specific areas of interest unseen since the 1960s.

If the political opposition was ineffective and fragmented how successful was the novel in providing a social and political critique? Although there was a distinctly partisan nature to many of the fictions, a fact repeatedly pointed out by the Conservative Central Office throughout the decade, many commentators see the 1980s novel as insular, self reflective and apolitical. Morgan, for example, cites Anita Brookner's novel Hotel Du Lac (1984) as a representative text for an epoch in which writers "were increasingly prone to introspective analysis without a social cutting edge" (Morgan 1990 p.439). If any text were capable of proving this point, then Brookner's story is a perfect choice, particularly as Brookner herself denies any political content to the novel, insisting that she was writing a simple romance in which "love triumphed over temptation" (Haffenden 1985 p.73). Yet, as we shall see, this simple and bleak romance inadvertently carries within it the seeds of social critique.

<u>Hotel Du Lac</u> (1984) tells the story of Edith Hope, a middle aged romantic fiction writer hiding in an out of season Swiss hotel after leaving her fiancée stranded at the registry office. As she observes and gets drawn into a series of relationships with the other guests, Edith writes passionate letters to her married lover and tries to work on her latest novel. Offered a marriage of convenience by one of the guests, Edith is tempted, but, when she observes Mr Neville leaving Jennifer's bedroom, she returns home to England and her married lover.

Edith, a typical Brookner's heroine, is well educated, successful, financially independent and thus cloistered from any social, political or economical problems. These factors allow the author to frame her narrative around the quiet, emotional dramas she excels in. Edith is also exiled, which creates a further distance from the turbulent crisis of IRA bombing campaigns, industrial action and Greenham Common protests that are taking place in her native England. Despite this political exclusion zone, a certain, if somewhat reactionary, ideological content begins to seep through. In theory, if not in practice, Edith is a Victorian who has little time or space for feminism and, like Mrs. Thatcher, she is scathingly resentful of the 1960s sexual liberation, contemptuously dismissing those *Cosmopolitan* reading "multi-orgasmic girls with executive briefcases" (Brookner 1984 p.28) preferring the power of myth:

> "And what is the most potent myth of all?" she went on, in the slightly ringing tones that caused him to make a discreet sign to the waiter for the bill. "The tortoise and the hare," she pronounced. "People love this one, especially women. Now you will notice, Harold, that in my books it is the mouse-like unassuming girl who gets the hero... The tortoise wins every time. This is a lie, of course," she said pleasantly, but with authority, the kiwi fruit slipping back unnoticed onto her plate. "In real life, of course, it is the hare who wins. Every time."
> (Brookner 1984 p.27)

It is a short step to transpose Edith's emotional myth onto the Thatcherite economic myth of work hard, save hard and you will prosper, and yet it is

hardly necessary to do so. Mrs Pusey and Monica, who have been antagonistic throughout, find a moment of togetherness in the language of materialism and designer labels (Brookner 1984 p.109) and people are viewed, catalogued and confirmed not as individuals but as indicators of wealth. "That man had a price on his head the minute he walked into the hotel" Monica informs Edith as they discuss Mr Neville. Mr Neville is an entrepreneur, a recently wealthy man riding on the back of the microchip revolution and through his misogynism and sadistic hedonism, the sexy greedy cult of the eighties which dominates the Thatcherite ideal, is evoked. Indeed, one can almost hear the strident shrillness of Mrs. Thatcher's tones behind his persuasive discourse:

> You cannot live someone else's life. You can only live your own.
> And remember, there are no punishments. Whatever they told you
> about unselfishness being good and wickedness being bad was
> entirely inaccurate. It is a lesson for serfs and leads to resignation.
> (Brookner 1984 p.96)

Mr Neville praises Mrs Pusey for her "simple greed", and just as we saw in the discussion of Serious Money, it becomes impossible to separate economics and erotics. Neville's acquisition of women and wealth is, in his mind, one and the same. When he proposes to Edith, for instance, his appeal is framed in the language of the city and distinctly anti-humanistic. He proposes a "partnership" based on "self-interest", and refers continually to "payment" suggesting this is less a proposal of marriage and more of a friendly take-over (Brookner 1984, pp.166-7).

That there should be a political element to Hotel du Lac (1984) should come as no surprise to anyone but Brookner herself. After all, no literary text is ever produced in a vacuum, and no text can fully extricate itself from the forces of its production. One could, for instance, read this novel through the filter of feminism and post feminism to uncover how romance "is portrayed as infantalised projection of women who have never been allowed to grow up"

(Waugh 1995 197), or as an example of "the post-feminist determination to fly by the nets of gender opposition and to promote a world-view that is not required to be partisan in gender terms" (Head 2002 p.108). Similarly, one could take Edith's statement that "The facts of life are too terrible to go into my kind of fiction" (Brookner 1984 p.28) as an open invitation to view the events in the novel as allegorical and see the conflict between Edith and Mr Neville as symptomatic of the dialogue between the soft Victorian sentimentalism and the hard neo-Victorian rhetoric of the Thatcherite movement which encroached upon the most private and exclusive areas of our lives to create a psychological sense of institutionalisation.[115] Thus, Morgan's implied criticism that 80s fiction lacked a "a social cutting edge" is flawed, but his argument is similarly undercut by the simple fact that Hotel Du Lac was far from being a representative text. Furthermore, as we have seen in previous chapters, the "introspective analysis" novel did serve a political purpose in an epoch when, more than anything else, the political agenda was framed and conducted around a series of struggles for identity. Of course, part of the problem could simply be one of perspective: Morgan is an historian rather than a literary critic. However, the argument that 80s fiction lacked a serious "cutting edge" and was incapable of functioning as a form of social critique was also offered by Taylor (1994).

Taylor's attitude towards 80s fiction is slightly contradictory. On the one hand he complains that the literary response to Thatcherism "makes the fatal mistake of not even trying to comprehend the basis of Mrs. Thatcher's attraction" whilst simultaneously avowing that literature's engagement, such as it was, "was all very well when it came to making political capital; artistically it tended to have a wholly vitiating effect" (Taylor 1994 pp.270-1). Taken together, Taylor seems to be asserting that, during the 1980s, the novel formed a self-debasing, uncritical collaboration with the Left, sacrificing its aesthetic and ethic

imperatives as it blandly reproduced the ideological caricatures disseminated by the opposition. Taylor writes:

> The novelists of the 1980s, you feel, did their 'research' in the cutting libraries of national newspapers; their 'observation' was of headlines and government statistics, their conclusions could be found in the leader-page articles in the Guardian.
> (Taylor 1994 p.286)

Significantly, Taylor avoids discussing those texts that might prove more problematic and disturb his comfortable thesis, such as Barry Unsworth's Sugar and Rum (1988), the novels of Graham Swift or even Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses (1988). Among the texts he finds particularly culpable are three condition-of England-novels: Ian McEwan's The Child In Time which "makes its points with the grace of a meat cleaver" (Taylor 1994 p.270); Margaret Drabble's The Radiant Way (1987) which, he asserts, "swiftly reduces itself to the view from a Hampstead dinner table, sectional and stage-managed" (Taylor 1994 p.286) and, finally, David Lodge's Nice Work (1988) which substitutes characters for "blocks of opinion put into suits of clothes and allowed to wander through their meticulously constructed playground" (Taylor 1994 p.292). Before looking at other novels, it is worthwhile to examine the three books Taylor has selected.

The Child In Time (1987) offers a bleak, dystopian view of Thatcherism. The public transport system has been under-funded to the point of extinction and the city is choked with congestion. Licensed beggars line the streets, the Prime Minister uses the Security Services as her own personal police force, children are abducted in broad daylight and Stephen is involved in the Official Commission on Childcare which seeks to legislate how children should be raised to procure a "desirable citizenry" for the nation. The problem with Taylor's "meat cleaver" assessment is that it overlooks the fact that McEwan's view is satirical and fantastical, rather than realistic. This is a novel that bends

time in on itself, shaping and reshaping reality according to perceptions. The ambiguous ending, for instance, is undercut by the prefacing of each chapter with a quotation from the handbook Stephen's committee are ostensibly writing. Thus, the future is already written, already projected onto the back of the present, which is shifting, with each revision of the past. Essential to the Thatcherite construction of identity, as we have seen earlier, is the revisionist moment that airbrushes the post-war consensus out of history to create a new continuity from the Victorian Age, through Churchill to Mrs. Thatcher and it is this revisionist moment that forms the crux of McEwan's critique. Just as past and future intersect in the present, so do the negative aspects of Victorian Britain and Thatcherism. The poverty and squalor amidst pockets of affluence familiar to readers of Dickens or Gaskell are omnipresent in McEwan's text, but these are juxtaposed with a declining power, which over-compensates for its international impotence by politicising, dominating and controlling every aspect of private life in the name of freedom, clearly illustrating that the seeds of fascism are sown within this fatal mixture of jingoism, imperialism, economic depression and the erosion of civil liberties. Thus, rather than being researched from newspaper leaders, as Taylor suggests, McEwan's novel is driven by an extension of, and investigation into, Thatcherite rhetoric, exposing the overwhelming sense of social stagnation and moral ennui that would be the final result if there really were "no such thing as society". Although the satire is neither as savage or covert as McEwan's, David Lodge offers a similar critique of Thatcherite revisionism and its implications in his novel Nice Work (1988).

Like The Child In Time (1987), Nice Work (1988) places Thatcher's Britain in a dialogue with Victorianism, providing "a late twentieth-century version of the industrial novels of the nineteenth century" (Connor 1996 p.74). Lodge prefaces the novel with a quotation from Disraeli's Sybil, which refers to the existence of two nations "between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy". These

"two nations" are represented by Robyn Penrose, the left-liberal intellectual child of the 60s, and Vic Wilcox, the hard headed, fiercely patriotic, pragmatic businessman of the 80s. The two are forced together when Robyn, who is a Temporary Lecturer at the University of Rummidge, is coerced into participating in a 'Shadow Scheme' with a local industrialist. Although Wilcox is dissatisfied with his life through a combination of marital and business difficulties, Robyn leads a relatively contented life teaching and writing about Victorian Literature, and the only fly in her ointment is the government cutbacks in Higher Education which threaten her position. Though initially antagonistic the two develop a grudging respect both for each other and for their viewpoints. If this was all the novel had to offer, Taylor's comments might have been justified. Lodge, however, adds various layers to this initial premise. On the level of critique, Lodge systematically attacks the Thatcherite transition of Britain from a production to a service economy. While Vic struggles to rationalise and modernise industry, his efforts are thwarted both by his Marketing Director who is moonlighting for a sunbed firm, and his company chairman who, despite the success of Vic's rationalisation and modernisation program, sells off the company to a rival group for a paper profit and clean balance sheet. Similarly Charles, an academic with whom Robyn has enjoyed a "non-phallic" relationship since their student days, deserts the field of academia to become a broker in the City. This is a crucial development in the novel and one that projects the all pervasive ideology of acquisition onto the intellectual sphere. Charles explains his decision lucidly:

> Well, I see no fundamental inconsistency. I regard myself as
> simply exchanging one semiotic system for another, the literary
> for the numerical, a game with high philosophical stakes for a
> game with high monetary stakes – but a *game* in each case, in
> which satisfaction comes ultimately from playing rather than
> winning, since there are no absolute winners, for the game never
> ends.
> (Lodge 1988 p.313)

It is ironic that the intellectual revolution within the academies unconsciously the Thatcherite revolution in the political and social spheres, and yet there is a direct correlation between the two. One can look at the way the critical consensus, forged by liberal humanism was challenged and overthrown by the 'rise of English' discourses on the one hand, which "installs Matthew Arnold as "the legendary law-giver of literary studies, in English, the man who framed the moral constitution for literature in liberal education" (Mulhern 1996 p.77), as a means of challenging the Leavisite mandate as its foundation while, on the other hand, the radical critics, anxious to challenge the fundamental assumptions of English and Englishness sought to disassociate themselves from their political opponents, and therein lay the attraction of continental theory: structuralism and semiotics which offered a profitable detour away from Leavisite criticism. Thus, rather than offering a critical engagement on the traditional terrain, scientific objectivism promised to displace the empiricist approach completely. The radicalism of this move, however, was severely retarded by the absence of any real purpose. The haste in which theory was introduced, and the subsequent explosion of texts, frequently published without any regard for chronology which would allow a sense of momentum and coherence to develop, created a schism between the new theory and the political function of criticism. This confusion and lack of purpose was reflected in Campbell's survey of theory and pedagogy:

> It was a very confusing time...There were new books with odd
> covers in the shops with foreign names being bought in ever-
> increasing numbers by people looking for intellectual ammunition
> to reassure themselves that they [the Leavisites] weren't right.
> (I3 *cited in* Campbell 1997 p.142)

Thus, a free market culture developed within the intellectual sphere, a game with no possibility of conclusion and one in which the production and circulation of ideas was governed by external forces and a programmed obsolescence which insisted that the always new must be accommodated at the

expense of the old.[116] This preoccupation with methodology, combined with a desire to remain at the cutting edge has, Frye argues, led to a certain absence of perspective and purpose. This absence, this abstraction of the theoretical from the physical, is Robyn's shield against involvement, allowing her safe distance from subjective, human emotions after her one night stand with Vic.[117]

After an abortive attempt to initiate Vic into her way of thinking, an attempt which is repudiated by Vic's apologetic "I'm a phallic sort of bloke", Robyn withdraws from the physical and material, rejecting Vic's declarations of love with a mini-lecture on anti-essentialism (Lodge 1988 pp.291-3). In this scene, Taylor's assertion that the novel contains clothed ideas rather than characters is confronted and challenged, both by Vic's assertion of his agency and by Robyn's conscious withdrawal from hers. Furthermore, Lodge populates his novel with characters both familiar and unfamiliar: Philip Swallow and Maurice Zapp from Lodge's earlier campus novels make cameo appearances, Vic's wife, Marjorie slowly disintegrates through boredom and neglect while Marion Russell, unable to devote time to her studies because of swingeing cuts in student grants, transgresses the boundaries of academia and industry by subsidising her income as a kissogram girl.

Like McEwan, Lodge points towards the problems of attempting to reconstruct the Victorian era, comparing the growth of industry in the earlier epoch with the stagnation and dismantling of Britain's industrial base in the 80s (Lodge 1988 pp.31-3), but his critique does not stop there.[118] The anti-60s backlash, the Westland crisis, the problems of immigration and institutional racism are all manifested in the text. Nor is Lodge's critique one-sided. The impotence of the Left driven by "the appropriation of working-class politics by middle class style" (Lodge 1988 p.117) also features strongly in a text which condemns the carnivalesque approach to dissent:

> What fun it had been! Stopping cars and thrusting leaflets through
> the drivers' windows, turning back lorries, waving banners for the
> benefit of local TV news cameras ... Robyn had not felt so exalted
> since the great women's rally at Greenham Common.
> (Lodge 1988 p.111)

Despite the political rhetoric Robyn displays in the lecture theatre, and with

Vic, here we see the full effects of her abstraction from the real. The protest, a

protest against the cuts that threaten her with unemployment, becomes a

spectacle rather than an issue. Campaigns for women's choice over abortion, the

legalisation of marijuana, support for the miners or the Campaign for Nuclear

Disarmament are, like everything else in Robyn's world, empty signifiers.

Rather than functioning as marks of her ideals and goals, the badges and the

causes they represent exist only as fashion accessories: they are chosen to

compliment her appearance, rather than make a specific ideological statement.

Thus, although we are invited to see Robyn as the theoretical abstraction devoid

of character, we are also challenged to move beyond the surface, to see her as a

character who has alienated herself from the material, as someone who has

reconstructed herself as a discourse gleaned exclusively from the theoretical

texts she devours, struggling to maintain her non-identity as reality intrudes into

her life - a reality that cannot be dismissed through a deconstructive turn or

paraphrased political platitude.

At the end of Nice Work (1988) Lodge offers Robyn all of the magical endings

of Victorian fiction: a death produces an inheritance, Zapp offers her a job in

America and she receives a proposal of marriage, all of which are rejected, and

Robyn's problem is solved because Philip Swallow is finally able to decode the

bureaucratic language:

> 'Ah, well that's what I wanted to talk to you about. You see I've
> found out what "virement" means.'
> 'Virement?'
> 'Yes, you remember... I found it in the revised Collins.
> Apparently it means freedom to use funds that have been

> designated for a particular purpose, in a budget, for something
> else. We haven't had virement in the Faculty before, but we're
> going to get it next year ... there's a chance that we may be able to
> replace Rupert after all, in spite of the new round of cuts.'
> (Lodge 1988 p.383)

The third, conciliatory way, the middle ground which was once located in human agency has been displaced by the banality of the Quango and Committee. Yet the novel's move to the present tense, and the hesitancy of the "may" in Swallow's discourse, undercut any sense of real closure and satisfaction, illustrating once again that the condition-of-England in the 1980s is one of uncertainty, vagueness and a fearful, all too temporary, stasis.

Of the three novels singled out for discussion, the most conventional, and therefore the one in which Taylor's critique may have the most validity, is Margaret Drabble's novel The Radiant Way (1987). Yet Taylor's assertion that Drabble, like most contemporary writers "have lost the ability to assimilate much modern experience: a loss that these occasional dramatisings of *Whittaker's Almanac* can only intermittently disguise" (Taylor 1989 p.55), has been challenged by Head, who opines that "a more convincing reason for the constrained earnestness of Drabble's novel may be the tension between the drive towards a panoramic social inclusiveness and the narrower focus on the middle class lives of the three central female characters" (Head 2002 p.31), and Connor, who interestingly argues that the condition of England is played out, not so much by the characters and their lives but by the very refraction of private spaces which Taylor holds up as a failing. Connor writes:

> Britain, poised at the beginning of the 1980s as the novel opens,
> can still be pictured as an hospitable house, connecting, if only
> temporarily, the different areas of national life. By the end of the
> novel, this ideal image has shrunk back, as we see Alex, Liz and
> Esther 'becalmed, enisled' in the back room of Esther's flat, while
> the police move in to arrest the Harrow Road murderer ... who
> occupies the upstairs flat.
> (Connor 1996, pp.67-8)

Throughout Drabble's novel, which follows the lives of three successful women from 1979 to 1985, there is a search for a connection, for a middle way which can protect and insulate the characters from a society which seems to be shedding optimism and values. As students in the 1950s, the three women express their desires for the future:

> "I would like," said Liz Ablewhite, after midnight staring into the white, flaming chalky cracked pitted flaring columns of the gas fire, "to make sense of things. To understand." By things, she meant herself. Or she thought she meant herself. "I would like," said Alix, "to change things." By things, she did not mean herself. Or thought she did not mean herself. "You reach too high," said Esther. "I wish to acquire interesting information. That is all."
> (Drabble 1987 p.85)

Thus, between Liz's personal and Alix's political ambitions, Esther offers a third way: a way of understanding and connecting through knowledge. The novel is structured around the tension between the private and public spheres combined with the faint, almost nostalgic, hope for a sense of balance and unity between them. Ironically for the women, all three wishes come true.

The novel begins at Liz and Charles Headland's New Year's Eve party, a moment when Liz's personal life is at its Olympian heights. Their marriage, however, is also analogous to the politics of post-war consensus, one that is described as "a solidity, a security, a stamp of survival of two decades, a proof that two disparate spirits can wrestle and diverge and mingle" (Drabble 1987 p.9), and one that is soon shattered as the new year is rung in and the decade of Thatcherism begins. As distinctions between home and work, private and public spheres collapse into a single dream of social, financial and emotional upward mobility, Charles abandons both his wife and his liberal views. Just as the British economy under Thatcherism moved from a production to a service industry, Charles abandons his role as a producer of programmes for the role of

media manager, and he is eventually driven mad, hearing a "sky full of voices" (Drabble 1987, 353) as the satellite boom he fails to predict or control, destroys him. Charles is not the only victim, however. As she helps her sister sort through her dead mother's belongings, Liz is forced to confront the past and repressed memories of abuse by her paedophile father.

If the Liz and Charles axis represent the soft centre of social and family life impacted by the Thatcherite agenda, then the Left receives equal scrutiny through the examination of Alix and her second marriage to Brian, a socialist academic. Just as Liz is forced by a changing world to 'make sense of things' that she would have preferred to have remained in ignorance of, Alix's desire to 'change things' also has unwelcome repercussions. Alix, her second husband, Brian, and his friend Otto, all begin as socialists fuelled by utopian dreams of social justice and equality. Otto drifts away to the SDP (a movement that had already lost both its credibility and its identity by the time the novel was published), while Brian drifts further to the equally utopian and impotent Left whose self-deception "has reached the proportion of mass psychosis" (Drabble 1987, p,391).

Alix's interventions are all significantly negative. On the wider political front she remains inactive, preferring the quietism of the spectator to the activism of the involved. As with Robyn in <u>Nice Work</u> (1988), politics are fashion accessories, something one wears as a means of identification rather than a sphere of involvement and commitment, and there is a direct correlation between her estrangement from her husband Brian and his activism which jeopardises his career, their lifestyle and the illusions she has taken for granted. The text suggests that Brian's fall into fantasy might have been averted by Alix's involvement, but she 'changes things' by doing nothing, by failing to exert her influence. Even on the small, localised level, Alix's involvement, or

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selective non-involvement, has strong repercussions. Acting as a mentor to Jilly Fox, an inmate of a woman's prison where she teaches, Alix offers neither the commitment necessary to influence Jilly's self-destructive nature, nor the professional objectivity to remove herself from Jilly's existence once her job is done. It is little wonder then, that Alix finds herself staring into the abyss:

> Once, thought Alix, I had a sense of such lives, of such peaceable, ordinary, daily lives. I could envisage interiors, clothes drying on fireguards, pots of tea in the hearth, a pot plant on a window sill. Now I see them no more. I see horrors. I imagine horrors. I have courted horrors, and they come to greet me. Whereas I had wished not to court them but to exorcise them. To gaze into their eyes and destroy them by gazing. They have won, they have destroyed me. (Drabble 1987 p.337)

This is a pivotal moment for Alix who realises, however temporarily, that her wish has also been granted. She has changed things, but changed them through a lack of resistance, through gazing at the changes instead of opposing them.

Head argues that "The narrator leaves Esther's more modest ambitions unmolested" (Head 2002 p.32) but this is hardly the case. Although the novel strives for a third way, for a sense of balance and stability between the past and the present, it fails. Esther's wish to possess "interesting information" is also granted: she is among the first to be given the information the country has been obsessed with, the identity of the Harrow Road murderer. This serial killer, she learns, is her insignificant, plant-loving neighbour, Paul Whitmore and Esther is finally driven away from her home by tabloid journalists in search of the "interesting information." She may possess. Through her characters, and through the chronological approach to current affairs, Drabble offers a critique of the society Thatcherism denies exists: a society of fear, decay, self interest and self-destruction. Thus, Drabble shows how Thatcherism's fusion of public and private spheres impacts negatively on those it is most concerned with, and it

is relatively easy to extrapolate its impact on the areas of society, the North and the inner-cities, for which it had little interest or sympathy.

While it is easy to condemn the focus on the middle class trio of friends, the view from "a Hampstead dinner table" as Taylor does, to do so is to miss the main thrust of the novel. It was, after all, this particular social and cultural formation that elected and supported the Thatcher regimes. The problem with Taylor's perspective is that he is enthralled by the Victorian period and is only able to see a legacy of literary greatness corrupted by the postwar period. "We read Dickens and George Eliot" he writes, "at school and we know, we just *know*, that no modern writer – certainly no modern *English* writer – can hold a candle to them" (Taylor 1994 p.xiv). This is a bold claim, and one that is easily repudiated by discussing literature with the average fifteen year old who is in the process of being persuaded by the academic establishment that Taylor's assertion is true, but the veracity of this statement isn't as important as the reasons for this, and for the exclusivity and singularity of Taylor's discourse. His impatience with 80s fiction which he once described as "a sprawling landscape of underachievement" (Taylor 1989, 131), is reasonably well-documented, but this impatience needs to be viewed in relation with his ideological agenda if one is to understand how and why he misreads the period and its texts so convincingly. Like Mrs. Thatcher, Taylor laments the loss of greatness and sees the postwar period as one of failure, in which English Literature has become a pale, grey facsimile of itself with the ghosts of Eliot, Thackeray and Dickens constantly being raised to point their accusing fingers at this decline. Constrained as he is by his inability to understand how the questions of identity and the location of power and authority in the modern world are addressed, Taylor is forced to impose a sacred, univocal realist discourse onto the texts he reads, without fully allowing for the mutation and development of the novel, or indeed the concept of realism. Thus, when the

condition-of-England novel in the 1980s cannot be coerced into conformity with the industrial novels of Dickens, Gaskell *et al*, they are dismissed as aesthetic and political deformities. Even subtle variations on this theme, such as Drabble's novel, are posited as noble failures, whilst the more radical experiments with the condition-of-England novel are ignored completely.

Perhaps the best example of the new, radical, condition-of-England novel is Barry Unsworth's <u>Sugar and Rum</u> (1988). Written at the fag end of Thatcherism, Unsworth's novel focuses on Clive Benson, a disillusioned child of the 60s suffering from writer's block as he tries to research a novel on the slave trade whilst teaching a motley group of "fictioneers" how to write. "We come into this world equipped with a special membrane that separates our own silence from the silence outside" Benson declares. "Mine has rotted away, that's the point I'm trying to get across" (Unsworth 1988 p,15). This sense of a nation collapsing from within, losing all sense of perspective, decency and vision, saturates the novel. Suffering from insomnia, haunted by wartime memories, Benson wanders the streets of Liverpool connecting his personal depression with the economic depression ravaging the city, as history, contemporary reality, memory and fantasy all coalesce.

> How much of this is truly remembered? he wondered. How much
> embroidered, how much invented? Does it matter? Memories have
> to be aided by invention or they could not be formulated at all.
> (Unsworth 1988 p.106)

The landscape of a decaying Liverpool dominates the novel. This, we are shown, is a city built upon the slavery that was structural to imperial expansion, which is now being destroyed by a government pursuing the same rhetoric of Empire and Englishness: a rhetoric defended by Hogan, one of Benson's fictioneers who has been advised to take up writing as therapy. Hogan resists Benson's advice to deal with the present, to see how the political impacts on his life as the shipyard he works in closes and his life and mind disintegrate. Hogan

hollowly replicates the party line until Benson, in exasperation, declares "That is *their* language. You are using the phrases they use against you" (Unsworth 1988 p.22).

Although the text is littered with descriptions of inner-city England in the 1980s, the feelings of entrenchment, of living in a war-zone where hope is extinguished along with the fabric of society, where unemployment has become the norm and the suicide rate has risen dramatically, "since that woman came to power" (Unsworth 1988 p.55), the novel, always aware that any attempt at erecting a totality, a unified vision is exclusive and doomed to failure, resists the panoramic view. "It's the gaps that are dangerous", Benson declares to himself (Unsworth 1988 p.16), and Unsworth exploits these gaps between rhetoric and reality, speech and silence, to great effect. In one scene, Benson visits his old army officer who is mounting a pageant to celebrate the rebirth and renewal of England and entrepreneurial endeavour. Benson combats this celebratory perspective by exposing the hidden history and unspoken implications as he promotes his own darker spectacle:

> The thing about the notion of a property owning democracy is that it can come to seem like a definition – only the people that own the property have a share in the democracy, and the more they own the bigger their share. To see it in all its beauty you have to go back to the eighteenth century. As a matter of fact the Liverpool slave trade provides the best example of a property owning democracy that I know. If you had a bit of extra cash you could buy into it quite easily... Some had as little as a one thirtieth share – say five slaves. Just a flutter really. Like buying a few shares in British Telecom.
> (Unsworth 1988 p.188)

Unsworth never leaves his readers in doubt that the struggle against Thatcherism is a struggle for meaning against the language that denies it. The epigraph for the novel is the OED definition of metaphor, and throughout the text, the reader is invited to see life on a slave ship as a metaphor for the condition of England. Like the slave-ships, a system of fear and systematic

brutalisation for commercial and economic reasons allows a minority to control the majority in 1980s England. Dissent, as Head accurately observes, is quelled both by the state apparatus and, more importantly by an aggressive ideological rhetoric which posits ideological opposition as treachery:

> The authoritarianism of the Thatcher years was marked by intolerant and repressive responses to dissident groups, for instance. Dissidence, however, was broadly defined, so that responsible individuals, believing themselves to be acting according to their moral conscience, were hailed as part of Thatcher's 'enemy within'.
> (Head 2002 pp.34-5)

The nation as slave ship metaphor feels, at first, a little too strident and too clumsy. It is only when one begins to sift through the fragments of Unsworth's narrative that one can appreciate the subtlety of it. Haunted by descriptions of Negroes compelled to dance in their chains, towards the end of the novel Benson observes that the "essence of slavery is having a role imposed on you, being made to perform" (Unsworth 1988 p.221). This an astute, and accurate, observation of Mrs. Thatcher's disunited kingdom. At every level of the social spectrum, roles are enforced upon people: wets, yuppies, social security scroungers, militants, terrorists, 'us and them', hooligans - the list is endless.

The sense of reality as fabrication, of life as theatre and identity as enforced performance, overwhelms the text. Benson's old commanding officer invests his time and energy in a celebratory circus of Thatcherism. The 'Fictioneers', despite their overwhelming lack of talent, play at being writers and, at the end, terrorists. Along with the looters and rioters in the streets, dressed in Mickey Mouse and Margaret Thatcher masks, the police are also performing, as they are forced into their destructive dance by the erasure of hope and the presence of the TV cameras (Unsworth 1988, pp.210-13). Although Benson, who spends most of the novel talking in monologues, appears to occupy an outside position he, too, is forced to adopt and conform to certain roles: he is a reporter, a writer,

a tutor and, most importantly, a critic sitting in front row. When a white owl emerges from his chimney, Benson immediately invests it with deep symbolic meaning while the suicide which opens the novel becomes an immediate metaphor for Benson's failure to write. A shattered Prufrock shoring fragments against his ruin, Benson's role as audience-commentator-critic is both enforced and destructive. His wife left him because of his obsessive compulsion to subordinate people to the demands of his imagination, to constrain them with his fictions, and his new friend, Alma also berates him for this when he suggests that the suicide was a sign intended for his benefit:

> She was looking at him attentively. "Are you really saying that he
> did it for your benefit?" she said, in a tone of incredulity and
> anger. "Are you really saying that?"
> "Benefit, I'm not sure," Benson said. "In the sense of
> illuminating-"
> "I've never heard anything son monstrously self-regarding in my
> life. So all the pain and despair he must have felt, all that waste of
> a life, it was all simply to provide you with a metaphor?"
> (Unsworth 1988, pp.37-8)

The loss of individual identity and the demands of performance are visible throughout the canon of 80s literature: Joanna May substitutes one role for another, Adrian Mole switches identities not out of choice but because of the demands of others becoming a cultural chameleon, whilst in Graham Swift's Waterland (1983), Henry Crick performs as storyteller, teacher and advocate of history. These issues, along with the more traditional condition-of-England elements, emerge even amongst popular fictions by staunch Conservative supporters.

Jeffrey Archer, who in the year before he was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, wrote the risible political potboiler First Among Equals (1984), found himself unable to disguise the problems of a disintegrating and selfish society. Archer finds himself repeatedly having to excuse the failures of Thatcherism by pointing to external influences from the world political and

economic communities. Tired and exhausted after her struggles to implement policies which fail due to world recessions, European intransigence and obstinate Arabs, Mrs. Thatcher is persuaded by Dennis to step down for a younger man (who happens to be a bright highly admired politician who almost ruined his political career by unwisely investing in the Stock Market) after failing to win an overall majority in the 1987 election.[119]

Michael Dobbs who acted as an advisor to both Mrs. Thatcher and John Major and also occupied the Deputy Chairmanship of the Conservative Party, has similar problems. His novel House of Cards (1989), tells the story of the rise and fall of Francis Urquhart, a Conservative chief whip who steals, blackmails, coerces and murders his way to power. At best the novel is a lacklustre and unimaginative projection of Macbeth onto the parliamentary stage, but it is significant inasmuch as it once again reveals the failure of Thatcherism whilst seeking to defend it. Though there is praise for Mrs. Thatcher throughout the novel as a strong leader, a visionary who got things done (Dobbs 1989 p.137), this praise is undercut by the narrative demands. Collinridge, the modern Duncan, has to be weak and deposable and so he was chosen as Mrs. Thatcher's successor primarily because his style was "less abrasive, less domineering" (Dobbs 1989 p.21). Similarly, because Urquhart's scheming has to carry with it some sense of achievement, Collinridge is a decent and competent man whose authority is challenged by riots in the inner cities, a decaying National Health Service and swingeing cuts in public spending due to an economic recession. Both novels dance in the chains of a dilemma: not only do they highlight the problem of surrendering individual identity through enforced performance (in this case the rigours and demands of the political life) but, in order not to be dismissed as propaganda and fantasy, they have to inject some realism into their narrative as background, and this token realism destabilises and undercuts their ideological allegiance to the Thatcherite discourse and vision of Britain.

Thus far, however, we have examined the condition-of-England novel and discovered that the dominant themes are myth making, repression of dissidence, madness and a crisis of identity. This, however, is hardly surprising. As Mrs. Thatcher and her government sought to resurrect the idea of England and Empire, the concept of England and Englishness was beginning to collapse under the pressures of multi-culturalism and regionalism. The 'Englishness' of the 'English novel' was, as Q. D. Leavis, asserted, in its death throes:

> The England that bore the classical English novel has gone
> forever, and we can't expect a country of high-rise flat dwellers,
> office workers and factory robots and unassimilated multi-racial
> minorities, with a suburbanised countryside, factory farming,
> sexual emancipation without responsibility, rising crime and
> violence and the Trade Union mentality, to give rise to a literature
> comparable with the novel tradition of so different a past.
> (Leavis 1981 p.144)

One of the more glaring contradictions between the reality of Conservative rule in the 1980s and the idealised vision of Victorianism it offered as a mandate, was the schism between Church and State. Throughout the decade, Mrs. Thatcher's governments came under increasing pressure from a clergy dismayed at the authoritarian excesses and always already absented heart of the government: Bishop Jenkins of Durham stated "This Government also seems to be indifferent to poverty and powerlessness" (*cited* in Kavanagh 2002 p.288); a report on the inner cities by the Archbishop of Canterbury was equally condemnatory and the traditional bastion of Toryism, the Church of England was frequently denounced as Marxian. This irony that was not lost on novelist Brian Moore, who projected the tensions between Church and State onto an Eastern European background for his novel The Colour of Blood (1988). The novel opens with an assassination attempt on a Cardinal who desperately tries to balance political pragmatism with the demands of his faith. Taken into protective custody, the Cardinal discovers that his captors are not the Security

police, but militant Catholics who are planning a confrontational showdown with the State and need the conciliatory Cardinal out of the way. Through a tense, almost Hitchcockian sequence of chases, unmaskings and counterplots, the Cardinal circumvents the proposed rebellion and their repressive repercussions before he is assassinated by the girl who failed in her attempt at the beginning of the novel. The Colour of Blood (1988), like Drabble's novel, searches for a middle way, a space where conciliation rather than confrontation is possible and, like all the fictions of the period, it ends with the destruction and dissolution of this possibility. Although set in a fictitious Communist Eastern European regime, the issues it deals with – terrorism, religious and political schism, a divided and embittered nation governed by an uncaring and pragmatic regime – have a resounding resonance both with the condition of England and Moore's native Ireland. The problems of religious and political affiliations merged with the Irish troubles in Moore's later novel Lies of Silence (1990). When an important conference is taking place in his hotel, Michael Dillon is confronted by the IRA, and given a simple choice: he either plants the bomb that will destroy innocents, or he contacts the police, in which case his wife will die. An Irishman by birth and a Canadian by choice, Moore's ambivalent hostility towards Ireland seems to prevent him getting close to it or its problems via the direct route. Although both novels are tense, gripping dramas, Colour of Blood (1988) convincingly explores the moral ambiguities in the tension between Church and State, the individual and society, thus exposing chimeric notions of national and personal identities whilst Lies of Silence (1990) provides little more than a cinematic thrill populated by genre stereotypes. This accusation, however, could not be laid at the door of Bernard MacLaverty's novel Cal (1983).

Cal McLusky, the eponymous hero of the novel, is a young Catholic living in a Protestant area. Unable to get a job, and burnt out of his home through sectarian

discrimination, Cal is haunted by guilt and love: guilt for his part in the death of an RUC reservist and love for the murdered man's widow. Unlike Moore's Ireland, MacLaverty's portrayal is populated by dense, complex psychological beings who exist in the shadowlands between borders. Although the novel replicates the vision of a divided and divisive country unable to agree on anything other than the destruction of innocents that was promoted by Central Office, the newspapers and television news, it also allows space for the participants to offer their own accounts and interpretations. Skeffington's criticism of the British, and his personalised account of Bloody Sunday, is both telling and disturbing (MacLaverty 1983 p.67). Similarly, throughout the novel, Cal is squeezed by social and political forces he can neither control nor trust as he, like the Cardinal, moves towards his own predetermined Calvary.

Religious and crucifixion motifs saturate the novel as it explores the grey zones between religion and politics, between concrete and complex individuals and abstracted simplified causes. Arrested on Christmas Eve, Cal is relieved that the torment of his war-zone Gethesmane is over, and he is overwhelmed with relief now that "at last someone was going to beat him up within an inch of his life" (MacLaverty 1983 p.154). Despite the religious and redemption motifs offered, the reader is always aware that his suffering will benefit no-one. Cal is no mythic Jesus figure: his torment and crucifixion is individual and local, a meaningless sacrifice to a pointless cause. Like Moore in The Colour of Blood (1988), or Alix in The Radiant Way (1987), MacLaverty sees only the abyss: a bleak and unrelenting vision of waste and futility where the search for solutions at best blinds one to the overriding problems and, at worst, contributes to them. MacLaverty writes:

> People were dying every day, men and women were being
> crippled and turned into vegetables in the name of Ireland. An
> Ireland which never was and never would be. It was the people of
> Ulster who were heroic, caught between the jaws of two opposing

ideals trying to grind each other out of existence.
(MacLaverty 1983 p.83)

Paradoxically, Thatcherism contributes to the decline of the 'Englishness' it seeks to promote. The thrust of its social policies divided and fragmented the nation it erected as its mandate, its economic policies rejected nationalism on a monetary level for the free floating multi-nationalism of the money markets, while its immigration and regional policies simultaneously rejected multi-culturalism and racial diversification. These contradictions within its agenda created several pressure points, which were explored and exploited by the fiction of the period. Irish, Welsh and Scottish writers challenged the idea of a 'united' kingdom extensively from a peripheral, 'inside-out' regional viewpoint, whilst others such as Mo, Ishiguro and Rushdie wrote from the 'outside-in' migrant's perspective.

In Scotland, Alisdair Gray delved into the mind of an alcoholic security supervisor unable to separate and control depressing memories of childhood, Conservative propaganda, the seductive Atlantic discourses of Hollywood and a bizarre sado-masochistic fantasy in his novel 1982 Janine (1984) whilst James Kelman gave voice to the drunk, disaffected and alienated elements of Glasgow. In Kelman's novel The Busconductor Hines (1983) Robert exists in a claustrophobic one room flat, dreaming of emigration as he struggles against poverty, boredom and the bureaucratic mentality of head office. Similarly, A Chancer (1987) offers a stark, despairing yet ordinary and totally believable portrayal of life on the dole whilst A Disaffection (1989) takes us inside the disturbed and disturbing mind of a comprehensive schoolteacher. Wales provided another pressure point, another margin from which to write. In her novel Resistance (1985), Mary Jones revealed the conflicts between English and Welsh speakers in a somewhat dilapidated hotel, as Anne Thomas, her Anglo-Welsh heroine, returned to Wales to discover her roots. Anne is also suffering

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from cancer and the novel draws strong parallels between the disease, the hotel and the colonisation of Wales by the English. The voice of Wales also dominates Bruce Chatwin's <u>On The Black Hill</u> (1982) which traces Welsh history through a family whose farm exists, like them, on the border of England and Wales. Nor was Irish fiction wholly confined to doomed love beyond the barricades and 'the Troubles'. Roddy Doyle's portrayal of working class Dubliners in novels such as <u>The Snapper</u> (1990) and <u>The Commitments</u> (1988) is convincing.

<u>The Commitments</u> (1988), which was also a successful film, tells the story of an ill-assorted group of misfits who are formed into a group by Jimmy Rabbitte. Jimmy's credentials are established very early by Outspan who points out "Jimmy had Relax before anyone had heard of Frankie Goes To Hollywood and he'd started slagging them months before anyone realised that they were no good" (Doyle 1988 p.7). Throughout the novel, this initial impression of Jimmy is confirmed. Jimmy is a hustler with his finger on the pulse of the zeitgeist, and, with the able assistance of the bald, ageing yet legendary horn player Joey 'The Lips' Fagan, he preaches the gospel of soul. "Soul is the rhythm o sex," Jimmy informs them. "It's the rhythm o' the factory too. The working man's rhythm. Sex an' factory" (Doyle 1988 p.38). Jimmy turns the motley crew into a raw and raucous soul band who reach the fringes of success before they quickly self-destruct. In many respects, <u>The Commitments</u> (1988) is just another variation on the 'a star is born' theme, although it does open itself up to a deeper reading. For all of his political posturing, Jimmy fails to commit to anything. The idea of soul as a democratic and unifying force is, like Relax, a disposable commodity, a temporary fad. The novel ends with Jimmy forming a new group, a country-punk band, that will fare no better than the original, whilst Joey 'the Lips' is exposed as a fraud. Like Cal's Ireland, and Thatcher's Great Britain, The Commitments are an idea that can never be fully realised because

the initial hybrids, the mongrelised components of the band are placed in a confrontational, rather than a complementary, constellation. The more Jimmy attempts to rehearse and polish them, the more he tries to turn the many into one, the more fragmented and divisive they become. Thus, the problems facing The Commitments are the same problems facing Ireland: the myth of music, like the myth of nation, leads to spontaneous violence and the destruction of the very ideals that underwrite its mandate.

Although the condition-of-England novels written from within the tradition of English Literature looked and failed to find a third way, such a possibility was rejected from the outset by the regional novels. Here, the simple dichotomies, and clear-cut boundaries are unsustainable from the start as the profane not only confronts but coalesces with the sacred. There is a moment in Cal (1983), which epitomises this collapsing and disintegration of categories. After Marcella has told him of her sense of pain when she viewed Grundwald's crucifixion painting whilst on a school trip, Cal buys her a book with it in, and catches them both within his glance:

> She was sitting on the floor with her back to the couch, her legs
> open in a yoga position and the book facing him, just below her
> breasts. Cal looked at the flesh of Christ spotted and torn, bubonic
> almost, and then behind it at the smoothness of Marcella's body
> and it became a permanent picture in his mind.
> (MacLaverty 1983 p.153)

The scene is striking, similar and yet considerable tensions are held together: Protestant and Catholic, male and female, sexual desire and sacred icon, art and cheap reproduction, the physical and the abstract, victim and killer, sacred and profane all join, merge and become one before the police arrive and reconstruct the moment, enforcing the unsustainable outside/inside, them/us, right/wrong authority of government. Yet, even after the interruption, the reader is left with a longing, a desire for that moment of coalescence where differences are not

submerged but are coexisting, creating a newness and renewal which is far superior to the nostalgic and brutal belonging offered by any of the alternatives the novel raises.

Amid the contradictions of Thatcher's desire for a United Kingdom, which excludes the industrial North, fails to represent Scotland and also large groups in Northern Ireland and Wales, disenfranchised, discordant and dissident voices manifested themselves, challenging the centrality of England and Englishness from the periphery. Although an exhaustive discussion of 'Englishness', nationalism and nation is beyond the remit of the current project, it is important to touch upon it in order to show how, within the writing of the period, the condition-of-England critiques we have seen were complemented and, at times, counteracted by other voices.[120] Throughout history, English language and literature have been inexorably linked to the cultural project of "Englishness." Baldick (1983) charts a straight and continuous line from Matthew Arnold to the Leavises to reveal how English, as an academic subject, became little more than a reflection of bourgeois (Baldick 1983 p.234). Although Baldick's argument has become something of an orthodoxy with students and academics falling over themselves to adopt his missionary position, there are some considerable problems with it. The conclusion that Baldick arrives at, for instance, that criticism was somehow gutted and "turned into its very opposite – an ideology" is partly dictated by his relatively simplistic definition of ideology as a form of false-consciousness: a supposition that would assume, at some phase, a state of true consciousness, whilst his attention to a particular line of critical thought frequently replicates the picture of undisturbed continuity and "natural" transition he seeks to challenge. Furthermore, there are other constructions of "the rise of English", and the history of English studies, that differ radically from this particular genealogy.

Brian Doyle's work, which pre-empts Baldick's, draws attention to the fact that to centre the rise of English debates around Oxford and Cambridge is to miss the point altogether and that the "accepted focus upon Oxbridge also misses the key fact that institutional initiatives there were *responses* to a 'well founded national demand' for English in education" (Doyle 1982 p.18). For Doyle, the hidden history of English studies emerges from a complex nexus of class, gender and cultural struggles from the middle ages onwards, and he focuses on how a protean C19 version of cultural studies which sought to create an historical map of language and literature for the working classes, colonial subjects and women - all of whom were marginalised - became transformed, with the rupture between language and literature in the early 1900s, into a middle class masculine profession with a quasi-scientific approach to the object of study: the literary text. Within this transformation, English and education became inexorably connected to a national mission of cultural engineering:[121] Indeed, the basic Arnoldian assumption, that the study of literature is a civilising subject, and one that can replace religion as a vital form of social cement, was both recognised and utilised much earlier than is commonly known. Batsleer *et al* show, in their reconstruction of events, how the effectiveness of such a programme was tested abroad much earlier than is customarily acknowledged:

> The period of this major settlement runs in England from, say,
> 1860 to 1930. The whole repertoire had already been rehearsed,
> however, *almost a century before the liberal education debate in*
> *England,*[*italics* mine] in the establishment of a curriculum for the
> imperial dominions. For 'English literature' was born, as a school
> and college subject, not in England but in the mission schools and
> training colleges of Africa and India.
> (Batsleer *et al* 1985 p.20)

Irrespective of which construction one accepts, however, it is this myth of a civilised and civilising common tradition, it is the sacred identity located in the terms "Englishness" and "the English novel" valorised by both Leavis and

Taylor, that is challenged by many of the marginal and marginalised novels: novels which frequently inscribe their resistance within the field of language, as well as that of ideas and representation.

"The 'locality' of national culture" Bhabha points out, "is neither unified nor unitary in any relation to itself, nor must it be seen as simply 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity" (Bhabha 1993 p.4). Thus, dialect, colloquialisms, syntactic and lexical deviations from the normalised, central, 'English' language became something of a norm. From Doyle's Dublin and Kelman's Glasgow to Rushdie's Bombayspeak and the poetic rhythms of the aboriginal voice in Keri Hulme's novel <u>The Bone People</u> (1985) this articulation of difference, both in content and in style, opposed the imaginative politics of Thatcherism and her vision of Britannia revised with the political imagination of the mongrel, of the hybrid who, unlike The Commitments, accentuated rather than sought to eliminate and polish away their difference.[122]

CONCLUSION

When discussing how her own party "undemocratically" ousted her from power, Mrs. Thatcher always describes the act as "Treachery. Treachery with a smile." This, perhaps, is the most acute definition of Thatcherism and the condition-of-England in the 1980s. Like Unsworth's Negro slaves, British subjects were forced to dance in their chains, to accept the smiling benefits of privatisation and home ownership, while the very foundations of society and freedom were systematically eroded. Her smiling homage to individualism undercut the concept of the social individual, leaving in its place a frozen, enforced stereotype of masculinity, avarice and jingoism. In these intricate and constant struggles for both authority and identity, the novels of the period had to be introspective if they were to adjust to a new and reconstructed realism: a realism which could understand the conditions that created this circus of enforced performance.

Realism, as a mode of representation, came in for considerable criticism in the 1980s, primarily because it was ideologically associated with the liberal-humanist philosophy that the post-Sausserean theorists sought to displace.[123] Yet, as Williams (1975) argues, realism is not a static aesthetic form, it is organic. The greater the complexity and interiority of human experience, the greater the demands on realism to evolve, to adjust and reformulate itself to represent the correlation that is intrinsic to the novel: the relation of the individual in society and that of society within the individual. Lodge, however, took a more formalistic approach and offered a pattern of oscillation within British fiction between modernism and realism. Lodge's claim that "the process cannot be accounted for by fortuitous external circumstances alone, but must have some cause within the system of literature itself" (Lodge 1981 p.9), is an

interesting one, but one that remains undeveloped, while his conclusion that "each mode operates according to different and identifiable formal principles, and that it is therefore pointless to judge one kind of writing by criteria derived from another" (Lodge 1981 p.15), offers nothing but another sterile schism.

Rather than accept Lodge's convenient separation between modernist and realist prose, it is worth examining, however briefly, the assumptions that underpinned modernism to search for a continuity, or possibility of dialogue, between the two. In her essay 'Modern Fiction' Virginia Woolf (1986) makes a convincing case for realism, but a realism reconstructed from the new, modern experience which reveals the internal rather than merely reflecting the external. D. H. Lawrence makes a similar point when he argues that the novel must "present us with new, really new feelings, a whole line of new emotion, which will get us out of the emotional rut" (Lawrence 1986 p.137). Rather than seeing this moment as ruptural, which Lodge invites us to do, it is more productive to see it as a crisis, as a moment of morbid tension which occurs, when the old will not die and the new cannot break through (Gramsci 1996b pp.275-6). Indeed, Lodge's pendulum theory begins to gain credence through this tension, through this acknowledgement that, although one mode may be, albeit temporarily, dominant, this ascendancy is always partial and incomplete. Both modes, perhaps best defined as external/materialistic order and internal/psychological disturbance, can lay claim to the term realism. "At the heart of the realist's conscious agenda," Kearns explains, "is a desire and an expectation to communicate effectively using the shared markers of materiality" (Kearns 1996 p.5). It is the very real, external forces that Lodge neatly discards which determine the mode of address based around a principle of effectivity. This, however, is not a passive relationship between the world and the text, but an acknowledgement of the dynamic between the two. Content determines form, and this content is determined through engagement on the social and

psychological arenas. The voice of the political imagination is the voice of realism, not as a fossilised formalism, but as a desire to challenge the dominant ideology and commonsensical perceptions of an epoch, illuminating the aporias within its mandate as it exposes the stable sense of identity it offers as a chimera. Of course, in seeking to define the political imagination this way, there is still considerable work to be done examining the relationship between literary production and the complex matrix of political, cultural and economic concerns that create a sense of social identity in each era. To understand the reconstructed realism of the 80s for instance, it is essential that one acknowledges the fact that, although the condition-of-England was one of despair, stagnation, fear and divisiveness, it was also one of diversity, renewal and multiculturalism, creating works that threatened and exposed the sacred discourse of homogeneity with the dangerous, heterogeneous voices of the profane.

Like most epochs, the 1980s both invites and repels a tendency to organise its events into a single, understandable and easily internalised diachronic order, an order that will mask or efface the complex contradictions, and multiplicity of possibilities that emerge. Memory, as Bromley asserts "is not simply the property of individuals, nor just a matter of psychological processes, but a complex cultural and historical phenomenon constantly subject to revision, amplification and 'forgetting'" (Bromley 1988, 1). It is, for example, all too easy to view the 1980s as a decade of greed but such an exclusive generalisation is both misleading and dangerous. One must also remember that a spirit of generosity was equally dominant throughout the decade. Charity telethons such as the BBC's Children In Need and Comic Relief were launched raising millions for the needy at home and abroad. Bob *Geldof's Band Aid* and *Live Aid* projects were enormous successes. Indeed it could be argued that the 'greed is good' individualism of the Thatcherites was rejected through the wallet and chequebook long before it was through the ballot box. Similarly, in an era

where many government excesses were validated through the expropriated discourses of freedom, the Ponting, Spycatcher and Rushdie affairs all bore testimony to an overwhelming and rigid structure of censorship.[124] During the 1980s, there was a widespread disinterest in parliamentary politics which, through live radio and televised broadcasts had become little more than a sound bite spectacle, but this ballot box apathy was countered with a new activism, normally over a single issue such as nuclear weapons, the poll tax, racism or gender equality. As parliamentary politics became less central to the lives and concerns of the British people, these engagements were not only effective on the domestic front, they also bore fruit on the international stage through charity and volunteer work in Ethopia and in the concerted campaign to free Nelson Mandela.

Likewise, the cultural and national identity that was promoted both through the post-Falklands, anti-European rhetoric of the government, was similarly undercut by the sense of internationalism necessary to the Thatcherite's economic and foreign policy and a growing regionalism, as vast areas of the United Kingdom were, through the vagaries of the electoral system, being governed by a party and leader they had overwhelmingly rejected. Of course, by bringing these and other problematics into play, by emphasising both continuities and discontinuities without privileging one or the other, the very task of concluding, of seeking closure, becomes impossible, and therein lies the attraction of the sacred discourses. Within the realm of the sacred, loose ends are conveniently tucked, snipped and hidden: within the questions that are allowed to be asked, the answers are always already implied and contained.

Selective memory and organised forgetting are the essence of the sacred, which provides freedom from fear, uncertainty and doubt and therein lies its attractiveness to ideologues, revisionists, fundamentalists and politicians of all

persuasions. The sacred is the embodiment of an authority demanding unquestioning acquiescence in the name of order, stability and the Law. This stability, however, is gained by a terrorist attack against time. The sacred enforces and legislates a specific identity by petrifying a revised past and predetermining the future. The political imagination, on the other hand, is engaged whenever and wherever the balance between the sacred and profane is disturbed. Existing at the nodal point between ideology and desire, it emerges in contradistinction to the dominant discourse, challenging the homogenous, univocal assertion of authority with the cacophonous clamour of chaos, heterogeneity and indeterminacy. It provides, not opposition in any meaningful sense of the word, but *oppositions*: the political imagination raises the spectres of other possibilities, other potentials, opposing ontological certainty with a hauntological uncertainty that challenges the Word of the believers with the words of the world. In the 1980s, no text illustrated this better than Salman Rushdie's novel The Satanic Verses (1988).

One of the problems when dealing with The Satanic Verses, is that it becomes difficult to separate the book from the controversy that surrounded it. The novel, as we saw in the first chapter, was a site of contention from the moment it was published, and it disappeared almost completely after the Ayatolla Khomeni issued the fatwa on 14th February 1989: an edict that gave a new and sinister twist to the popular 'death of the author' discourse. In the furore that followed, Rushdie found himself "in the worst possible situation: his stated intentions are not considered relevant to his work, but the text is used to ascribe intentions, desires and crimes to its author. By an ironic reversal of the intentional fallacy, the author becomes the creation of the text" (Fhlathuin 1995 p.277). Irony saturates the novel and simultaneously dominates the 'Rushdie Affair'.

Although support for Rushdie within the literary establishment was overwhelming, it was by no means unanimous. While Graham Swift wrote movingly about the author's enforced transformation into "the many and monstrous" Salman Rushdies who were created by the various disputing factions (MacDonogh 1993 p.63) some popular novelists, such as John Le Carrè clamoured to condemn the book as "unreadable," denouncing Rushdie as a bad artist and a traitor to his people. Shortly after the first anniversary of the fatwa, Roald Dahl wrote in his letter to The Times:

> With all that has been written and spoken about the Rushdie affair,
> I have not yet heard any non-Muslim voices raised in criticism of
> the writer himself. On the contrary, he appears to be regarded as
> some sort of hero... To my mind he is a dangerous opportunist.
> Clearly he has profound knowledge of the Muslim religion and its
> people and he must have been totally aware of the deep and
> violent feelings his book would stir up among devout Muslims. In
> other words he knew exactly what he was doing and he cannot
> plead otherwise.
> (Dahl in Appignanesi & Maitland 1989 pp.217-18)

To a certain extent one can sympathise with Dahl's position. Readers familiar with Rushdie's work see in the 'Rushdie Affair' an ironic phantasmagoria, a display of excess, authoritarianism and perverted farce that the author himself would have been pleased with, had it existed solely as fiction. Cat Stevens, a 70s hippy, peacenik, pop singer who had converted to Islam, accused the immigrant writer of, racism, blasphemy and publicly demanded Rushdie's death. The British government, who had always ridiculed the idea of 'dealing with terrorists', protected Rushdie whilst simultaneously denouncing him as they sought to re-establish diplomatic links with Iran, despite this act of state-sponsored terrorism. Add to this melange the counter-fatwa, issued in 1989 by Robert Maxwell (the man who plundered billions from his employees' pension fund) who offered ten million dollars he didn't have to the person who could 'civilise' Khomeni, or the Sunday Sport, a publication which rapidly created a new low for the tabloid press, announcing a £1 million reward for the person

who brought Rushdie's 'assassin' to justice. Then there were the actions of MP Keith Vaz, who phoned Rushdie to support him only to appear at a public meeting denouncing the book as offensive, and demanding that it should be banned. It is only when one realises that life is echoing art, and that the threat to Rushdie was, and to some extent still is, frighteningly, harrowingly real, that any sympathy for Dahl's position dissipates.

On numerous occasions, Rushdie eloquently defended his position, treading a precarious line between apologising for any offence caused whilst defending both his novel and his right to write:

> It's true that some passages in *The Satanic Verses* have now acquired a prophetic quality that alarms even me… But to write a dream based around events that took place in the seventh century of the Christian era, and to create metaphors of the conflict between different sorts of 'author' and different types of 'text' – to say that literature and religion, like literature and politics, fight for the same territory – is very different from somehow knowing, in advance, that your dream is about to come true, that the metaphor is about to be made flesh, that the conflict your work seeks to explore is about to engulf it, and its publishers and booksellers; and you.
> (Rushdie 1992 pp.407-8)

That Rushdie's views, both about his text and intentions, should be given precedence is self-evident, particularly in view of the pronouncement of guilt and culpability by Khomeni, and the Le Carrè/Dahl insistence that he knew what he was doing but, as Burke (1995) argues, this commonsensical notion has a strong philosophical foundation. There is, Burke argues, an unwritten contract between the author, society and time. Attribution is, he suggests, essential to the circulation of discourse, an agreement that the author bears some ethical responsibility for his text, not only in the present but also in the future. "The primary function of the signature" Burke argues, is "to set up a structure of resummons whereby the author may be recalled to his or her text" (Burke 1995 p.289). Without this implicit agreement between the originator of the text and

its present and future readers, any meaningful dialogue between them is impossible.[125] Thus, discounting Rushdie's statements regarding The Satanic Verses is akin to calling forth the testimony of an expert witness and promptly gagging him prior to his testimony. All too frequently, however, Rushdie's statements were discarded whilst thousands of others were voiced, creating a thick, impenetrable cloud around this important book which seemed to prefigure the controversy it caused. Indeed, one has to wonder whether it is possible to read about a satirist who is sentenced to death for mocking the Prophet or stumble across a line such as "Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven" (Rushdie 1988 p.374), without stepping outside of the book and into the very real terrors and issues raised by the 'Rushdie Affair'. Has the book, in short, become so handcuffed to history that it *has* become unreadable?

Because one cannot check one's memory at the door, and it is debatable whether one should desire to do so, this is a serious and significant problem for readers of The Satanic Verses. Nor can one pretend that the 'Rushdie Affair' did not exist. Either of these acts of selective amnesia would be as damaging reading exclusively through the filter of the 'Rushdie Affair'. The only way into The Satanic Verses that neither diminishes the text nor the controversy and important issues it raised, is to examine it on its own terms: as the satirical appropriation of the sacred by the profane, as an almost perfect example of the political imagination and the dynamics between word and world. When we take this approach, it becomes possible to see that there is no issue raised by the "Rushdie Affair" that wasn't already raised by the novel. One can, and should use the novel to discuss the 'Rushdie Affair', but the fatwa and political manoeuvrings that emerged after its publication are, to a great extent, irrelevant when discussing a novel which already fully addresses them.

The ethics of signature and the totalitarian impulse of the anonymous and unsigned text, for instance, are foregrounded in both the Jahlia and the Arabian

Sea sections. After being tempted by a compromise to accept three Goddesses as minor deities in his pantheon a disturbed Mahound returns to Mount Cone to wrestle the truth out of the Angel Gibreel. After a titanic struggle, Mahound comes to the realisation that the earlier verses were the work of the devil, whilst the subsequent denunciation of them came from the angel. Rushdie writes:

> 'It was the Devil,' he says aloud to the empty air, making it true
> by giving it voice. 'The last time, it was Shaitan.' This is what he
> has *heard* in his *listening*, that he has been tricked, that the Devil
> came to him in the guise of the archangel, so that the verses he
> memorised, the ones he recited in the poetry tent, were not the real
> thing but its diabolic opposite, not godly but satanic ... but
> Gibreel, hovering-watching from his highest camera angle, knows
> one small detail, just one tiny thing that's a bit of a problem here,
> namely that *it was me both times, baba, me first and me second.*
> From my mouth, both the statement and the repudiation, verses
> and converses, universes and reverses, the whole thing, and we all
> know how my mouth got worked.
> (Rushdie 1988 p.123)

The ethics of signature addresses the problem raised in the first chapter – the question of authority, of whose word controls and legitimises the discourse and the world-view that it promotes and dominates. In this case, although Mahound is the originator of the text, he adopts a pseudonym (the archangel who is little more than a ventriloquists dummy), and allows the text to hide in anonymity (it is the word of an untraceable God). Thus, Mahound detaches himself from the text twice; an act that allows him to exercise authority and power without restraint or responsibility. It is this double distancing, this guaranteed autonomous anonymity, which prevents any and all claims to accountability. The "profound interrelation of ethics and the signature" Burke argues, "is borne out by the fact that questions of signature are among the first to be raised in the context of an ethically troublesome text. 'Who wrote this discourse? At what point in history? Under what circumstances?'" (Burke 1995, 289). This struggle between the anonymous Word and the attributable words, with all of their philosophical and ethical implications, is enacted throughout the novel.

When Salman the Persian becomes increasingly disenchanted and disillusioned by the monologic imposition of the sacred text and the pragmatism of an angel who confirms Mahound's viewpoint on every occasion, he attempts to summon up the anonymous author by altering the text during transcription. "But, good heavens, if my poor words could not be distinguished from the Revelation by God's own Messenger, then what did that mean?" Salman declares to the satirist Baal (Rushdie 1988 p.367). The difference between Mahound's text and Salman's revisions is a significant one: whereas Mahound effaces himself completely from the text, hiding behind both archangel and God, Salman claims a degree of authorship and thus enters the realm of accountability. Indeed, it is the desire to be held accountable, to open up a dialogue and debate, that prompts his act of 'blasphemy' in the first place. Salman's revolution against the Word is only partial, however, because even though he lays claim to the words, Salman-as-author is hidden behind the pseudonym Mahound. It is a secret and private rebellion, and, when he is caught, Salman barters for his life by offering the satirist Baal to the Prophet. Unlike Salman, Baal marks his dissent with the signature, an act that Mahound finds intolerable for two reasons. First, Baal's verses provide a focal point for resistance, not by offering an alternative but through humour and ridicule. Secondly, Baal accepts that which Mahound must refuse: the immortality granted by the signature. Thus, whereas Mahound is forced, by his act of double distancing, to freeze both himself and his discourse in time, Baal enters history at the very point Mahound exits it. Rushdie writes:

> "In the old days you mocked the Recitation,' Mahound said in the
> hush. 'Then, too, these people enjoyed your mockery. Now you
> return to dishonour my house, and it seems that once again you
> succeed in bringing the worst out of the people."
> Baal said, "I've finished. Do what you want.'
> So he was sentenced to be beheaded, within the hour, and
> as soldiers manhandled him out of the tent towards the killing
> ground, he shouted over his shoulder: "Whores and writers,

> Mahound. We are the people you can't forgive."
>   Mahound replied. "Writers and whores. I see no difference here."
> (Rushdie 1988 p.392)

Mahound's comment that he sees no difference between the writer and whore is extremely perceptive. Apart from the obvious point that both writers and whores ply their trade for money, they are also both transgressive figures: weavers of secret, unspeakable and frequently uncomfortable fantasies. Writers and whores, Mahound recognises, are the uncontrollable outsiders who seduce us into acts of role-playing and mask-wearing. More importantly, however, when the fantasies are over we discover that what we had previously accepted as the 'real world' is never quite the same again. It is this indeterminacy, this ability to mutate and change that exposes the fear at the heart of all orthodoxies, because it denies the permanence of identity, the 'freedom from' which provides the mandate for all sacred discourses. During Baal's testimony nothing from the "bullwhips and scimitars" of the soldiers, to threats of eternal damnation can stop the mocking laughter of the crowds. "No imperium is absolute, no victory complete" Baal discovers (Rushdie 1988 p.378). When Baal persuades the prostitutes to adopt the names and personas of Mahound's wives, this intrusion into the profane onto the sacred undermines it to the point of destruction. The profanity of the brothel does not resist the sacred aura of the temple, it embraces it, and from its source it spins a thousand fantasies so effectively that the aura of the original dissipates into nothingness. Thus, the dishonour to Mahound and his house is very real. Through playful misappropriation, Baal has turned the whores into the wives of the prophet and, correlatively transformed the Prophet's harem into a brothel. Ayesha, Mahound's favourite wife, challenges his rule and his visions and becomes an object of scandal herself – a scandal which is only driven underground by the convenient testimony of the archangel to Mahound: "And this time, mister, the lady didn't complain about the convenience of the verses" (Rushdie 1988, 387).

It is not only in the Jahlia sections where this transformation and metamorphosis occurs. Saladin Chamcha finds himself transformed through the racial prejudices inherent in British society and, after being beaten up by the police and immigration officers, he finds himself in a strange, experimental hospital where immigrants are altered into beasts and mythical creatures. "They describe us" a manticore informs him, "That's all. They have the power of description and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (Rushdie 1988 p.168). Both of the protagonists, Saladin and Gibreel are capable of transformation and mutation. Gibreel Farishta is a movie star, famous for playing all of the deities in Bollywood's theologicals, whereas Saladin Chamcha, also an actor, is forever hidden. He is the man of 'one thousand voices and a voice', bestowing personality onto packets of detergent and tubes of toothpaste. Saladin's major breakthrough, playing an alien in a TV show, requires him to be permanently masked. Unlike Gibreel, Chamcha is an anonymous idol, "the big star whose face is the wrong colour for their colour TVs" (Rushdie 1988 p.61).

Before the aircraft explodes, Rushdie equates his characters with the sacred and the profane and, after they fall to earth, this equation is exemplified as Saladin sprouts horns and a tail, whilst Gibreel acquires wings and a halo although this equation is simultaneously disturbed from within. In the public sphere, Gibreel represents all that is sacred, angel, icon, portrayer of Gods, national hero whilst Chamcha embodies the profane depths of the satanic goat, TV commercials, funny aliens, and other "Uncle Tomfoolery" Englishness that denies his heritage. Behind the social masks, however, things are radically different: Gibreel is a libertine, an apostate and a deceitful coward, whilst Chamcha is monogamous, a devout Anglophile, trustworthy and principled. Thus, Rushdie both sets up and deconstructs the savage either/or dichotomies that impose

themselves on all relationships, creating instead a site of contention, an arena of dialogue and potentiality.

This idea of transformation through dialogue, of hybridisation through exchange, of metamorphosis through perception and evolution through tolerance, is the intricate thread that holds The Satanic Verses together. Disaster occurs, newness fails to come into being, when irreconcilable oppositions refuse the possibility of such co-existence. Mahound forgives all but Baal, forcing their confrontation whilst overlooking the dangers offered by the grotesque Hind who eventually poisons him because there is no room for dialogue between his Al-Lah and her deity Al-Lat.

This primary opposition is mirrored throughout the text: Ayesha and Mirza Saeed are locked in a similar struggle, as are the exiled Imam and the Empress Ayesha and, at the centre of the wheel Gibreel and Chamcha wage their personal war of becoming and non-becoming. At some point in the novel, all of the protagonists are asked two questions: the first, when they are weak, is will you compromise? The second, when they are strong, is will you be tolerant and merciful? Newness, Rushdie's novel suggests, emerges into the world when the answer to both questions is yes. This is hardly surprising, considering they are really the same question, which is perhaps better framed as, 'will you accept difference without fear or favour?' The acceptance of difference, the text asserts, is an invitation to dialogue, it is a way of escaping from the totalitarian impulses of the sacred into the democratic spheres of the profane, without sacrificing either. Mutability, The Satanic Verses implies, is the only way forward, the only way out of the apocalyptic impulses of the unchangeable, and the text manifests this not only in content but also in style.

Although he rarely makes an appearance, Satan narrates the novel and his intrusions are always telling. "Is it possible," the narrator asks, "that evil is never total, that its victory no matter how overwhelming, is never absolute?" (Rushdie 1988 p.467). This question, like so many other aspects of the novel, is mirrored throughout and within the text. Power is always restricted, authority always transgressed, and even the omniscience of potentially the most omniscient of narrators, is limited. The refrain "It was so, it was not so" (Rushdie 1988 p.544) claims and undermines the authority of the narrator, while the use of the devil-name for the Prophet Mahound performs a similar function:

> Here he is neither Mahomet nor MoeHammered; has adopted, instead, the demon-tag the farangis hung round his neck. To turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn; likewise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil's synonym: Mahound.
> (Rushdie 1988 p.93)

Here Rushdie treads exceptionally thin ice. By giving the Prophet the devil-name, the text opens itself up to the very accusations that were laid upon it, and yet there is an affectionate playfulness throughout the Jahlia sections that runs counter to the hysterical shrieks of blasphemy. It is only by following the trajectory of association between the sacred and the profane within the novel that it is possible to comprehend why The Satanic Verses chose this name, this course of action.

Throughout the novel the various apostles of death who place secular power above spirituality profane the idea of religion, which ought to occupy the realm of the sacred. The exiled Imam, a self-declared "enemy of images", preaches that the devoted must "burn the books and trust the Book". He is determined to "unmake the veil of history" because it offers the delusion of knowledge when "the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al-Lah finished his revelation

to Mahound" (Rushdie 1988 pp.210-11). The Imam is thus driven by ambition, rather than faith, and his *Jihad* against history becomes little more than an attempt to impose himself upon it, to make it subservient and obedient to him. By becoming the creator of the end, the man who made history stop, the Imam places himself at the "centre of the wheel." Similarly, Ayesha the butterfly girl is offered several chances to stake claim to the spiritual 'holy' ground of the sacred, but her single-minded devoutness, her inability to be tolerant and her unwillingness to compromise absents her from any meaningful spiritual progression. "They dug their own graves," she callously asserts after a freak flood traps and drowns miners of a town that tried to bar her way (Rushdie 1988 p.493). Driving her pilgrims forward with the solitary message "everything will be asked of us", a mantra that is repeated when she fails to intervene in the stoning of a baby (Rushdie 1988 p.496), Ayesha is relentless and inhuman. All three, Ayesha, the Imam and of course Gibreel are inflexible, intolerant and single-mindedly arrogant in their assumptions of greatness, and Mahound is offered as their prophet because they, like the conquering Christians who coined the name, are corrupt crusaders.

"The closer you are to a conjurer," Salman tells Baal with some bitterness, "the easier to spot the trick" (Rushdie 1988 p.363) and The Satanic Verses draws very close to the prestidigitations of power in all of its manifestations, particularly with regard to racial-cultural politics within Britain. Rushdie occupies a strange position within the English literary establishment. As a respected and admired author he is central to the modern canon, and yet, as an immigrant, his position is marginal, a paradox that is not lost within the novel. One of the strongest textual strategies within The Satanic Verses is the reversal of the Orientalist impulse within western, and British in particular, literature. The "relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination" (Said 1993 p.133) and, even after the heady days of Empire and

'Englishness', the white, male, European sense of identity and the tradition of literature it produced, remained central. It is this centrality that Rushdie challenges in <u>The Satanic Verses</u>. In a suitably satanic perversion of the Orientalist discourse, Rushdie defamiliarises England, treating it with the same combination of exoticness and inferiority that the Empire builders constructed around the East. This Vilayet (foreign country), whose capital city is the mysterious Ellowen Deeowen, is a strange and peculiar land where "there was only paper in the toilets and tepid, used water full of mud and soap to step into after taking exercise". It's a place where the natives ate strange "bony fish" and slept "beneath mountains of wool" (Rushdie 1988 p.43): a primitive land where strangers spat on other people's food (Rushdie 1988 p.441), a country whose people were divorced from a history that always happened overseas (Rushdie 1988 p.343) and, most of all, "a demon city in which anything could happen, your windows shattered in the middle of the night without any cause, you were knocked over in the street by invisible hands, in the shops you heard such abuse you felt your ears would drop off but when you turned in the direction of the words you saw only empty air and smiling faces" (Rushdie 1988 p.250). Throughout the novel, the guide to Vilayet is the disarming and frequently put upon Anglophile, the appropriately named Saladin Chamcha.[126] In an ironic aside, which creates a correlation between the institutional racism within British society and its interest in popularised zoology documentaries, Chamcha becomes an Asian Attenborough, slowly integrating himself within the primitive tribe of public schoolboys, fooling them "the way a sensitive human being can persuade gorillas to accept him into their family, to fondle and caress and stuff bananas in his mouth" (Rushdie 1988 p.43). When one considers the importance of missionary work, of the 'white man's burden' and bringing god to the 'godless heathens' of the globe, and of how the side of God has always already been appropriated and tainted with the discourse of European imperialism, there is little wonder that, in his parodic discourse of

Occidentalism, Rushdie allows the narrative voice to be that of God's counterpart and rival. The Satanic Verses does not, however, seek to displace one authoritarian or sacred discourse with another, and thus the critique of the English fundamentalism, which found its embodiment in 'Mrs Torture', is juxtaposed with a critique of Islamic fundamentalism. The question that the novel addresses from the beginning is "How does newness come into the world?" (Rushdie 1988 p.8) and, primarily through Chamcha, we are given the answer: through a slow and painful metamorphosis, through repudiation of extremes and accepting the spaces between the sacred and profane. Newness, the text suggests, occurs through hybridism and flexibility. In its incorporation of references from Swift, Sterne, Joyce, Shakespeare, the Arabian Nights, the movies of Buñuel and Godard through to the Mahabharata and the Bollywood film industry, Rushdie shows how the sea of stories, and the wealth of humanity, can be enriched through combination rather than confrontation.

From confrontations and critiques of authority, through the construction and decentering of the human subject, the foregrounding of the new sexual politics with strong, confident women and men who become acutely aware of the penalties imposed by traditional discourses of masculinity, through apocalyptic discourses, critiques of history, revisionism and the 'condition-of-England' novel, The Satanic Verses focuses on the tentative and provisional spaces where ideology and desire, where public and private, spiritual and secular, sacred and profane connect. It addresses all of the concerns of the political imagination, but there is nothing magical or mysterious about this. The Adrian Mole series, the works of Angela Carter and Graham Swift all address similar concerns, albeit in slightly different ways, because they are driven by the same impulse: the impulse to preserve memory for the future against the demands of a present insisting upon amnesia; the willingness to resist the monolithic and homogeneous identity demanded by the current power blocs, not with the

imaginative politics of opposition, but with an inherent willingness to reveal the masks beneath the masks, the shadows and spectres of the unseen and unsaid.

The political imagination occupies a mental space that is unlegislated and uncontrollable. Its value is its recognition that heretics are a society's greatest commodities, that there is an alternative, a point of balance and tension between the authoritarianism of the sacred and the chaotic relativism of the profane, that knowledge is always a partial and incomplete project and, essential to any concept of liberty, is the freedom to offend.[127] Without this no other freedom is possible: indeed, without this, no other freedom is *thinkable*

NOTES

1 There is, however, a chasm between a desire for impartiality and one's ability to achieve it. All positions are to some extent ideologically pre-determined, and my aim within the scope of this project was to remain 'open' to the potential readings by adopting as strategic and flexible approach to theory as possible.

2 See also Bloom (1973)

3 "From Pindar to the present, the writer battling for canonicity may fight on behalf of a social class ... but primarily each ambitious writer is out for himself alone and will frequently betray or neglect his class in order to advance his own interests ..." (Bloom 1995 p.27 -8)

4 "Precisely why students of literature have become amateur political scientists, uninformed sociologists, mediocre philosophers and overdetermined cultural historians, while a puzzling matter, is not beyond all conjecture. They resent literature, or are ashamed of it, or are just not all that fond of reading it ... The idea that you benefit the insulted and injured by reading someone of their own origins rather than reading Shakespeare is one of the oddest illusions ever promoted by or in our schools." (Bloom 1995 pp.521-2)

5 For a useful introduction to psychoanalysis see Freud (1991). See also Belsey (1980); Eagleton (1983) and Brooks (1994).

6 See Lacan 1980b pp.171-2.

7 Ironically, Lacan is becoming a foundational, father figure who is quoted and interpreted to validate or invalidate arguments as the Lacanian theoretical discourse develops.

8 A 20th century example of this can be seen by the adoption and execution of the anti-Semite legislation in Fascist Italy in comparison with the similar legislation in Nazi Germany or, indeed, the treatment of the Jews and the Kulaks under Stalin. See Payne (1995) for a very useful guide to this period of history.

9 See, amongst others, Baudrillard, (1983); Waugh, (1993); Belsey,. (1980); Harland, (1994); Foster, (1993); Owens, (1993); Mulhern, (1996) and Eagleton, (1991).

10 If some things are *absolutely* false then similar criteria must surely exist regarding truth-claims - although revealing the truth concealed by the ideological obfuscations produced by the various discourses throughout history is a much more complex, if not impossible, task.

11 See, for instance Adorno & Horkheimer (1992) pp.19-20.

12 Rushdie's close friend Martin Amis, for instance, writes: "I often tell him that if the Rushdie affair were, for instance, the Amis Affair, then I would, by now, be a tearful and tranquillised 300 pounder, with no eyelashes or nostril hairs, and covered with blotches and burns from various misadventures with the syringe and the crack pipe ... But Rushdie is unchanged" (Amis 1994 p.173).

13 Rushdie uses many Hindustani words throughout the novel. Khattam-Shud for instance means 'completely finished' or 'over and done with'; Gup means gossip, Chup quiet, Bezaban, the dark deity worshipped by Khattam-Shud and his followers means 'Without a Tongue' and Kahani means story.

14 When Haroun was published, Amis suggested that "purity of literary response is another privilege that Rushdie must resign himself to losing – for now" (Amis 1994 p.177).

15 Indeed Rushdie offers a popularisation of Jameson's historicisist approach within the novel, particularly during Iff's explanation to Haroun: "Nothing comes from nothing, Thieflet; no story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old – it is the new combinations that make them new" (Rushdie 1990 p.86). Khattam-Shud's assault on the sea of stories is only possible because the historical roots are ignored (Rushdie 1990 p.146).

16 In a modern factory, Benjamin argued, the industrial worker suffers from the same degree of alienation as the gambler (Benjamin 1992a p.173). Because each experience is disassociated from the previous one, and because each is an exact repetition of the previous one, experience is by-passed. There is no possibility of difference, of learning from one's experience and using the knowledge gained in future experiences. Everything works on a purely superficial level; the job is done, the hand is played, the shock absorbed without reflection or introspection. This lack of depth or perspective creates a sense of alienation, we no longer see the object, we become it. Similar motifs are also offered in Chaplin's movie Modern Times (1936) and Rene Clair's classic A Nous La Liberté (1931)

[17] Perhaps the most obvious example of this opposition is the Romantic movement. It is, however, worth remembering that despite the strong turn to Nature, the counter-thrust against the processes of modernity, Utilitarianism and extreme rationality, Romanticism was a political and social movement, as well as an aesthetic one. Watson (1985) draws attention the Romantics involvement with their real, historical situation as subjects in history. "In every case" Watson asserts, "the major Romantic poets allied themselves with revolutionary causes" (Watson (1985) p,76). Indeed, as Chase (1993) proposes, Romanticism is our living past and many of the institutions, ideologies and ideas that we regard as commonplace can traced to or through the Romantic movement. Similarly, Romanticism haunts many of the current postmodern debates, from Lyotard's strategic use of Kant to Waugh's claim that postmodernism is part of the Romantic aesthetic tradition which projects itself onto or invades moral and scientific fields of inquiry and knowledge (Waugh 1992). Thus, although they did not *invent* the political imagination, they gave it its most prominent form.

[18] The distinction between science and Scientism is an important one. Science in itself is merely the pragmatic and systematic cultivation of knowledge, whereas Scientism drawing from Darwinism and neo-Darwinist discourses works upon the assumption that the good life, that an ordered and beneficial society can be created through scientific means. Renan, perhaps, stated the Scientism manifesto most clearly when he wrote in 1849 that it "is no exaggeration to say ... that the future of humanity lies in science, that science alone can make known to a human being his or her destiny, that it teaches one the way and means to attain one's goal" (Renan *cited in* Gedo 1990). For further discussions of science, scientism and positivism see Bell (1973); Magee (1997) and Shils (1972) and Kuhn (1970).

[19] For an introduction to language and linguistics see Fowler (1996); Fromkin & Rodman (1993); Hawkes (1997) and Lodge (1966); (1986).

[20] See for instance Barthes (1972).

[21] For more detailed discussion of the Faurisson problem see Norris (1990); (1992).

[22] A kiss would still evoke a series of positive and pleasurable sensations, just as a slap in the face with a wet kipper dipped in custard would provide an equally negative and disagreeable impression. Even though we might find it impossible to understand or express what those two contrary experiences mean or what they are doing to us, we would instinctively seek to replicate the former, and avoid the latter.

[23] See also Tallis (1988) who, like Magee seeks to counter the linguistic turn with a Correspondence Theory to Truth.

[24] See Gramsci 1996a p.10.

[25] This, of course, does not apply to cultural studies which was born from the desire to escape from the prison house of value which confined the study of English for almost 100 years.

[26] For other useful discussions of popular fiction see Birch (1987) and Palmer (1991).

[27] One could, of course, point out the obvious - Literature differentiates itself from popular fictions on the level of linguistic innovation; but one could also counter this claim by objecting that "such purely technical forms of writing do not of themselves offer grounds for valuing one above the other." (Bennett 1982 p.221). Another possible distinction could be made at the level of consumption. The literary text is blocked, impeded, defamiliarised in a way that the popular text is not. The reader of Literature is forced, by the very construction of the text, into reading slowly and carefully in order to understand, whereas a primary feature of popular fictions is speed - they are 'page turners', 'compulsive reading' frantic', 'relentless', etc. This raises another important question, however. Why, when we spend most of our lives trying to save time, to make our workload easier and more pleasurable, should we throw this daily value system out of the window when it comes down to opening a book?

[28] It is quite conceivable, for example that the popular fiction of today is the Literature of tomorrow. There are several examples of such a transition. Critical engagements with Fleming, Verne, Conan Doyle, Poe and Chandler have already lifted them above the purely popular into a sub-literary category, whilst certain novels by writers such as John Le Carrè and Stephen King are increasingly being regarded as both popular and literary. Similarly, authors such as Jeanette Winterson, Margaret Atwood, Martin Amis and Fay Weldon are undoubtedly literary but they are also *popular*.

[29] Aesthetic preference ought to be included as a factor in such a choice, although as Eagleton (1990b) and Bennett (1990) show, the whole project of aesthetics is inexorably bound up with ideology.

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[30] Kundera's notion of the profane owes a debt, of course to Bakhtin's carnivalization of language and literature.

[31] Such restrictions can be found at either end of the scale. Finnegans Wake (2000) distorts and plays with language until the point of access is almost completely barred whereas Jeffrey Archer's novel, The Fourth Estate, takes the cause of banality to the utmost extremes, thus nullifying any desire to engage with it at any level whatsoever. Indeed, a close and careful reading of such 'rogue' texts would be required if this mode of classification is to be sustained, although such a project lies beyond the immediate remit of this thesis.

[32] Dealing with the hidden underclass, the disenfranchised, the corruption and decay of Britain from within its power structures, diaspora and the lack of social centre, the second play "Moonlighter", which focuses upon the Dean family, still remains fresh and contemporary This play deals less with unemployment than with the struggle of a family to stay together and the ethical problem Dixie faces: whilst moonlighting as a dock security guard he must choose between participating in a theft which will earn him sufficient money to support his family or remain true to his beliefs and convictions at the expense of his own well-being and the security of his family. The problem is further exacerbated when he discovers that the 'mastermind' behind the robbery is the head of security and the only authority he could possibly appeal to. Interestingly enough this is the only one of the five plays that the character Yosser fails to appear and the other regulars (Chrissie, Loggo and George) appear only fleetingly.

[33] See Bennett (1990).

[34] For a fuller critique of Bloom and the position of aesthetic innocence see Walmsley (1998)

[35] At every level of society, the authentic voice was problematised and this had a devastating effect on the collective psyche. Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) which, prior to the 1970s was exceedingly rare, reached almost epidemic proportions in the mid to late 80s, The diagnosis and treatment of MPD led to accusations of child-abuse as 'recovered memories', many of which later proved to be false, were unearthed by treatment.

[36] Bethany is both present and absent. She sees and hears the confrontation but, at this pivotal moment, her sight is impaired, her vision veiled by her ersatz-emerald contact lenses. Her function, as catalyst, has been performed and to both parties she is irrelevant. Indeed, as she tries to intervene, Carl pushes her against the window in an act that prefigures his pushing her into cooling pond. In both instances her life is saved (indirectly) by Carl's egoism. Having spared no expense on the windows, Bethany fails to plummet to her doom and, because he refuses to share centre stage with anyone, he pushes her into the accidentally irradiated pool which she then immediately leaves, wounded by another rejection (Weldon 1989 p.259).

[37] For critical engagements with horror see Moretti 1983 and Punter 1980.

[38] The political imagination cuts across all barriers, links itself within all discourses and offers an imaginative restructuring of reality through a principle of inclusion. Rather than offering an opposing alternative to the mode of authority offered, it undermines the legitimacy of that authority from within, by exposing the aporias, paradoxes and myths, by unleashing the multiplicity of possibilities, by coercing the dominant authority into a dialogue with its competitors. More than any other discourse, therefore, it manifests itself most clearly within the broad spectrum of feminism: feminism is, in a sense, the philosophical and sociological arm of the political imagination.

[39] This protest against the deployment of US Cruise missiles began when 36 women marched from their homes in South Wales. Amid media scorn and official harassment the momentum grew. Although the American air force left the base on 30th September 1992 the protesters remained fighting for the land to be returned to the people until January 1st 2000. The protestors still actively campaign against nuclear weapons in the media and the international courts. For a useful overview see http://newssearch.bbc.co.uk/low/english/special_report/1999/11/99/greenham_common/newsid_5030 00/503602.stm The protestors official website can be found at http://www.web13.co.uk/greenham/pledge99.html.

[40] See in particular Millett (1969); Showalter (1977) and Gilbert & Gubar (1979)

[41] Although Union Street (1982) encourages such a reading, it simultaneously resists it. Within the novel, the characters suffer as much from poverty as they do patriarchy, and its fragmented rather than linear structure, coupled with transgressive figures such as Kelly and Blonde Diana, both of whom achieve a degree of fluidity by escaping the gender trap through economic exchange, opens the text up to more radical readings. The Nietzschean epigraph chosen by Barker for her second novel Blow Your House Down (Barker 1984) is equally relevant here and, if it is difficult to fight monsters without becoming one, Barker reminds us, then we should also acknowledge that the monsters do not operate within the system: the system itself creates them. This message, that the suffering and oppression experienced by her characters is culturally and economically predetermined rather than being the product of any natural or biological imperative, is briefly suggested within Union Street (1982), particularly in the hounding of the unfortunate Mrs. Biggs (Barker 1982 p.186) and becomes the focal point for her second novel Blow Your House Down (1984).

[42] Robinson (1989), in her survey of feminist criticism and their approaches to literature raises several interesting points regarding the idea of a canon, female or otherwise. The canon, she argues, amounts to little more than a 'gentleman's agreement' about "established standards of judgement and taste" (Robinson 1989 p.616), and is lacking in any formal criteria or significant economic investment whatsoever. Furthermore, she argues, this 'agreement' doubly inscribes patriarchy through the initial selection of authors and the decisions that are made regarding what counts as great literature and the proliferation of female figures in the predominantly male-authored texts which "contributes to the body of information, stereotype, inference and surmise about the female sex that is generally in the culture." (Robinson 1989 p.617) Thus, within the canon, we are confronted with images of women within writing rather than encountering women writing images.

Feminists, Robinson suggests, deal with this problem in two specific ways: they either seek to re-read the tradition in much the same way that Belsey suggests, or through acts of literary recovery, they seek to force open the canon to include lesser known, newly discovered or frequently ignored women writers. Both strategies are undermined by a significant difference between the unlimited potentiality of a canon, and the restrictive practice of creating a syllabus.
We start to include writings from other ethnic minorities, working class women, lesbian literature, etc., and widen the scope to literary genres and sub-genres, we are forced to ask the question how many canons or traditions do we need or even want?

[43] The relationship between feminism and postmodernism is, however, somewhat problematic. Inasmuch as "the epistemological and ethical contradictions now confronting postmodernists and feminists are fundamentally issues about identity and difference" (Waugh 1992 p.120) the two discourses intersect but, whereas many postmodern trends celebrate fragmentation and an apocalyptic vision of the future, for feminists "the goals of agency, personal autonomy, self-expression and self determination, can neither be taken for granted nor written off as exhausted. They are ideals which feminism has helped to reformulate, modify and challenge" (Waugh 1992 p.125).

[44] Cixous does not distinguish between feminine and masculine on a biological, essentialist level. Feminine writing is available to men, providing they are open to their own bisexual nature, escaping from the homogenous trappings of culturally defined masculinity to connect with their own alterity (Cixous 1981 p.97).

[45] "In brief, we are read below the belt – men are at the glorious level of the brain." (Rochefort 1981. p.184).

[46] It is also worth noting that many women writers of the period with roots in feminism such as Iris Murdoch, Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood also began to distance themselves from the label of 'feminist writer' both with public statements and within the body of their work.

[47] Similarly, Judith Butler opened up the question of femininity as a performative act, a masquerade in which you become what is constructed by the discursive practices around you, an idea Rushdie used to great effect in The Satanic Verses to examine the perspective of the migrant.

[48] Pollitt (1984) continually expresses her discomfort and puzzlement, particularly with the Maggie segment which, she argues undermines the earlier sections. "Male protection," Pollitt argues "which the first three sections carefully show to be an illusion, is suddenly a woman's best hope". The problem here is that Pollitt is reading from a perspective that allows little room for indeterminacy and paradoxical strategies, and thus fails to see that Barker eschews the simplistic dichotomy for a more complex approach in which there are only provisional answers, while solutions are localised, impermanent and relational.

[49] No society, Lorde (1998) argues, is ever really equal. Equality is a cultural myth, a comforting illusion because all societies and cultural groups are, by their very nature, exploitative and repressive. To be accepted into a society or culture is meaningless unless two conditions are met; the group must be able to benefit from the inclusion of the one and the act of being included is given meaning and value in relation to those who are excluded. In order to protect the illusion of equality within this system of inequality, society strives towards a homogenising, universal ideal that can only be attained by silencing or ignoring difference, thus, creating gaps of distortion. Feminist universalising trends, therefore, become counter-productive if women are blinded to all other differences by the gender/biological difference.

[50] An example of this can be seen in Moi (1982), who, by adopting a strategic pluralism, draws upon psychoanalysis, Marxism and both traditions of feminism to assist her in unpacking three distinctive concepts that are sometimes conveniently conflated; female, feminist and feminine. To speak of female, Moi asserts, is to speak in purely biological terms whereas to speak of feminist is to enter into a political challenge against the ideological naturalisation of a biological difference. Of the three terms, the last (feminine) is the most problematic and important. Moi defines the feminine as a cultural discourse rather than a genetically coded sequence of sexual characteristics whilst always being wary of the fact that "the biologism and essentialism which always lurk behind the desire to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of the patriarch" (Moi 1982 p.210). Thus, the feminine Moi suggests, is a relational position of marginality from which political engagement and disputes claims that seek to privilege 'feminine writing' on the grounds that such a movement falls into the trap of reaffirming the biological essentialism that oppresses women. Moi writes; "Gratifying though it is to be told that women really are strong, integrated, peace-loving, nurturing and creative beings, this plethora of new virtues is no less essentialist than the old ones, and no less oppressive to all those women who do not want to play the role of Earth Mother." (Moi 1982 p.210).

[51] Woman's value under the current patriarchal system, Leclerc (1981) argues, lies not with herself, but with her potential to bring man to fulfilment, whereas men are valued in and for themselves. This inequality should not be challenged by direct confrontation, an act that confirms man's value for confrontation and war are linked directly to the patriarchal value system, but through subversive satire and ridicule. (Leclerc 1981 p.79). Paurturier (1981) follows a similar line of ridicule and deflation in her "Open Letter to Men". The arrogance and courage of men who challenge natural and scientific boundaries with impunity collapses, Parturier asserts, at the ovary's edge at which point men "become cautious, timid, respectful even pious" (Parturier 1981 p.59).

[52] A perfect example of this is Hornby's novel About A Boy (1998) which tells the story of Will, a bloke's bloke who invents a son so that he can join a single parents' group and date single mothers. Although his initial approach to life is cynical and opportunistic, his friendship with a 12 year old, Marcus, helps him uncover and reveal his softer side.

[53] Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (1974) and The Honourable Schoolboy (1977)

[54] "The figure of the bureaucrat is to be found either in the role of the villain or in the role of incompetent people who are, in some sense, on the same side as the hero" (Palmer 1985 p.82).

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[55] This destructive impulse of performance is also raised in the 'Historical Notes' section at the end of Atwood's novel. Moving from the hesitant, yet compelling oral narrative of Offred, to the authoritative Professor Pieixoto, provides a shock similar to that of Blow Your House Down. The reader is suddenly thrust into a sphere of uncertainty and ambiguity as the future historian undermines the previous 300 pages. Yet the Historical Notes emphasise the problems of freedom and authority Atwood investigates. Offred has risked everything to exercise her freedom *to* speak whilst Professor Pieixoto seemingly offers a more stable and secure freedom *from* ambiguity and uncertainty. Pieixoto's account, however, is undermined by his attempts at humour and his jokes. His performance reveals the authoritarian impulses that both brought Gilead into being and also imprisoned its Commanders.

[56] Of course, as gender roles are explored and redefined, as more realistic and identifiable masks are offered to the readers, it would, Knights argues, "be a bitter historical irony if all we could substitute for a discredited patriarchy were men as perpetual narcissistic consumers" (Knights 1999 p.224). There are signs, as I mentioned earlier, that this is not the case. More grounded and developed male role models have emerged in the mid to late 90s, but these new discourses of the male were only made possible by the unravelling of the stereotypes and ideals we have been examining.

[57] One could try to separate postmodern theory from 'cultural' postmodernism, but that presumes a radical break with modernism which, despite Baudrillard's assertion that we have reached a final and critical phase of development in which "Reality no longer has the time to take on the appearance of reality" (Baudrillard 1983 pp.146-52) is highly problematic.

[58] An interesting, and somewhat terrifying list of all reported accidents dealing with nuclear weapons and power plants can be seen at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation website http://www.nuclearfiles.org/nwa/80/1980.html.

[59] See Thatcher (1993) p.184 for the story of this exchange and Mrs. Thatcher's admission that Powell's two questions are framed and still hang on her office wall.

[60] See Myrdal (1980).

[61] Most notably The Unlimited Dream Company (1979) and The Day of Creation (1987)

[62] In a more traditional 'survivalist' novel Basie would offer some form of solace, comfort and security to the boy, providing a surrogate father figure but, throughout the novel, Basie reveals himself to be as much a threat to Jim as a saviour. He tries to sell him to the Chinese on numerous occasions and, once they are in Lunghau, this uneasy exploitation continues. Jim accepts this uneasy and unequal relationship, first with a naïve and finally with a stoic acceptance.

[63] Amis' attitudes to nuclear weapons are made both dramatically and metaphorically The use of darts as a metaphor for nuclear weapons is both simple and striking. As the world prepares for a nuclear apocalypse, Keith reads a book on darts which dates 'the sport' back to the first darters in 1500 BC. Amis' attitude to nuclear weapons and professional darts are strikingly similar. Both are bound by the same immutable logic (once launched they can never return), both are rooted in the genesis of warfare and destruction and both are beyond logic, beyond reason and utterly pointless. (Amis 1994c p.226).

[64] It is only at the end, as death approaches and it is too late to rewrite or revise his destiny that Sam begins to see the full pattern of events. In a footnote to his letter to Asprey he asks "You didn't set me up, did you?" and the answer is a resounding yes. Asprey and Nicola marked Sam for death at the beginning in a strange bargain: Asprey got a replacement novel (Sam's story) and Nicola got her murderer.

[65] Amis makes a better case in his report from Washington, also written in 1987. In this essay Amis restrains his anger and analyses the psychic effects of nuclear weapons from the heart of the 'Nuclear City'. Washington itself is a strange, phantasmogorical and dystopian land, a Chup on earth, populated by nuclear addicts and megadeath intellectuals who are trying to convert him to their cause of ultimate silence (Amis 1994b p.32).

[66] "War does not spring up quite suddenly, it does not spread to the full in a moment; each of the two opponents can, therefore, form an opinion of the other, in a great measure, from what he is and what he does, instead of judging of him according to what he, strictly speaking, should be or should do" (Clausewitz 1873, 1:7).

[67] Perhaps one of the most striking examples of this deformation of culture, Greenslade (2002) suggests, can be found by examining the conduct of *The Sun* newspaper during the Falklands. Bizarre, jingoistic and surreal, Britain's most popular newspaper ran headlines such as "Stick It Up Your Junta", "Britain 6 Argentina 0"and the infamous "GOTCHA!" headline announcing the sinking of the Belgrano.

[68] Public resistance was so strong that many local councils declared themselves as Nuclear Free Zones. Although Mrs. Thatcher scathingly describes such an action as a "gimmick" (Thatcher 1993 p.267), this strategy did have a considerable effect and in 1982 a nationwide exercise in civil defence, "Exercise Hard Rock", was abandoned. The government responded by amending the existing civil defence regulations, which demanded they were constantly updated, and all local authorities were compelled to participate.

[69] Interestingly enough, the show was so popular with Mrs. Thatcher that she penned and appeared in a four minute Yes Minister sketch which was broadcast 20/1/84. Script available at http://www.yes-minister.com/thatcherscript.htm.

[70] See for instance Barnes (1989) and Brooke Rose (1986) (1990).

[71] The opposing 'commonsensical' point of view is, however, given voice. Whereas agency is deleted with the protestors a short scene between the Russian assassin Petrofsky and a British motorist delayed by the march is offered to reinforce the hostility towards the marchers' (Forsyth 1984. p.399).

[72] For a novel in which the nature of photography provides the narrative framework, see Swift (1988).

[73] See in particular "The Survivor" section in Barnes (1989) and "The Immortals" in Amis (1987b).

[74] See, for instance, Virilio (1986).

[75] Although there are problems (the Falklands, the Gulf war, the Middle East crisis, etc.) regarding De Kerckhove's claims that we have completely abandoned territorial conquests, there can be little doubt that the nuclear proliferation, and on the back of this proliferation, the microchip revolution and information age, created a seemingly irreversible diachronic disruption which challenged the dominant dynamic theory of time; not by opposing it with the static theory but by placing the two in a continual and ambiguous conjunction.

[76] For an excellent survey of Holocaust memoirs and representations see Young (1990).

[77] See Arendt (1958).

[78] Amis also draws on his familiar nuclear metaphor of the baby to cement the relationship between the Nazi and nuclear holocausts. It has been suggested, for instance, that the baby Odilo eventually becomes "has a potential of evil so dreadful that one can think of it as a bomb" (Kermode 1991 p.11) and this connection is also invited by the text. "You naturally associate babies with defencelessness" Odilo comments. "But that's not how it is in the dream. In the dream, the baby wields incredible power. It has the power, the ultimate power, of life and death..." (Amis 1991 p.54).

[79] Irrespective of where one looks, questions of time and temporal paradoxes are foregrounded. Time bends and shapes the lives of the unforgettable Dog Woman and Charles I's Royal gardener in Jeanette Winterson's Sexing The Cherry (1989), and this opposition to temporal linearity and the problems facing both history and the historical also provide the focal point for Graham Swift's Waterland (1983). In Tony Harrison's excellent and controversial poem V (1985) the poet is forced to encounter and debate the nature of time and reality with a lager lout in a Leeds Cemetery and one of the most unlikely best sellers of the decade was Stephen Hawkings's everyman's guide to quantum physics, A Brief History of Time (1988).

[80] Of course, as Abercrombie *et al* (1980) suggest, any sense of unification or social cohesion is fraught with difficulties and Chrissie the pivotal character in Bleasdale's plays The Boys From The Blackstuff, echoes their argument that it is economic rather than ideological factors providing the cement for the social bond. Unlike Hogan in Unsworth's novel Sugar and Rum (1990), Chrissie, rather than internalising the dominant ideology of Thatcherism, rejects all ideology, including his socialist beliefs. This rejection is not, and never can be, an escape from it however, and his focus on balancing the books, his willingness to work for less are significant elements of Thatcher's monetarist policies writ small.

[81] The New World Order offered by the Bush administration and the political implications of Fukuyama's thesis were also scathingly attacked by Chomsky (1991).

[82] For a full and excellent investigation into the 'end of history' debates see Anderson (1992).

[83] Fukuyama does this first by dismissing Marx and subsequent commentators from any discussion as a perversion of Hegel, an action that is both against the spirit and the letter of Hegel's writings, which insist upon each epoch drawing upon and learning from the resources of the past. Secondly, Fukuyama confuses the liberal definition of freedom with Hegel's which acknowledged the difference between being subjected to the historical forces of our times and being able to control them.

[84] Unfortunately for Fukuyama, history has a longer memory. Recent events such as the electoral victory of Le Pen in France serve as a reminder that the spectre of fascism is a persistent one. Similarly, in the 2001 General Election in Britain, the BNP achieved its best ever results, saving five deposits. Even more alarming is that Le Pen got 17% of the national vote and, in the British election, three BNP candidates achieved 10% of the vote.

[85] For various historical, political and philosophical discussions of Fascism see Griffin, (1993), Payne, (1995) and Togliatti, (1976). Fukuyama is also a little premature in dismissing Marx, who suggested that the moment of socialism occurs when capitalism reaches its absolute limits, its moment of complete dominance (Marx 1996d pp.386-7).

[86] For more detailed discussions on ideology see Eagleton (1976); (1991).

[87] Jameson offers a similar critique. One of the defining features of the post-war world, Jameson argues, and one that we have already experienced in the fiction, is the collapse of categories or the dedifferentiation of fields to the point where "everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance has become cultural; and culture has equally become profoundly economic or commodity orientated" (Jameson 1998 p.73). The seeds for such a collapse of categories, Jameson astutely suggests, lie in the counter-culture 'end of art' movements of the sixties, which were "meant to suggest or to register the profound complicity of the cultural institutions and canons" (Jameson 1998 p.73) with the 'defence' of Western values epitomised by the Vietnam War. Although the Left sowed the revolutionary seeds, the slow and steady corruption and appropriation of this intervention was eventually reaped by the right, and manifests itself most notably in Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' discourse. Fukuyama's thesis, Jameson (1998) opines, reveals little more than an imaginative block in which the seemingly inescapable total system of information and commerce created and unified by the cybernetic age, coalesces with the moment when "the end of expansion and old fashioned imperialism is not accompanied by any viable alternative of internal development" (Jameson 1998 p.91). Thus, the world has reached the limits of expansion whilst simultaneously creating a limitless system of exchange and "these spatial dilemmas ... conjure up as their sequel the vision that Fukuyama calls the 'end of history' and the final triumph of the market as such." (Jameson 1998 p.92).

[88] For a valuable guide to the cultural conditions of Britain from 1960 to the present day see Waugh (1995).

[89] Like Mrs. Thatcher, Fukuyama combines a potent though questionable mix of neo-Victorianism, free market ideology and an impressive array of statistics, charts, etc. to investigate social trends. Unsurprisingly, Fukuyama also locates the sixties as a period of moral corruption, stagnation and declining standards arguing that "Norms governing the behaviour of both men and women changed dramatically after the 1960s in ways that ended up hurting the children: men abandoned families, women conceived children out of wedlock, and couples divorced for what were often superficial and self-indulgent reasons" (Fukuyama 1999 p.273).

[90] "Mrs. Thatcher's manifesto, unadventurously titled The Conservative Manifesto 1979, promised strict control of the money supply and a reduction in public spending; compulsory balloting in unions and firm action against secondary picketing and closed shops; a hands off policy towards pay settlements; and a limited amount of denationalisation." (Butler 1993 p.35).

[91] "After forming the core of a post-war consensus for over three decades since the Atlee period, the bitter legacy of the old order was now seen in the uncollected refuse bins and undug graves which popular credence (somewhat exaggeratedly) identified with the 'winter of discontent' ... The conventional wisdom of the pre-1970 period had perished in the 'stagflation' and social strife of the recent past." (Morgan 1990 p.437).

[92] From the strident, aggressive Cold War rhetoric that earned her the nickname "the Iron Lady" it was obvious from the outset that there was never any danger of abandoning the commitment to NATO, or weakening the independent nuclear deterrent. Thus, it was on every level of the domestic front that Thatcherism sought to create a culture of oppositional politics, and erect a simple Left/Right dichotomy by undermining the very idea of consensus and cross party support and co-operation.

[93] Indeed, if the post-war 'failures' of Britain have to be located, then it was in the thirteen years of Conservative government which followed Atlee: a period which included the Suez debacle, financial mis-management which resulted in a crippling balance of payments deficit, increased racial tensions and a significant lack of investment in industry and education. See Morgan, (1990).

[94] See also Currie, (1990).

[95] "Only a few British executives held any form of academic or professional qualification, and most operated by 'rule of thumb' methods which could often seem arbitrary and inconsistent. The general lack of finesse was no more apparent than in dealings with the shop floor. Many managers believed that they had only two options over labour relations: to be a 'bastard' or to be a 'hard bastard'. There was much talk in management circles of 'sorting out the peasants'. American visitors to British factories were appalled by the way employees were treated." (Tiratsoo 1998,p.181).

[96] Dennison, for instance, continually excuses his faults and failings by insisting that he is a man of his time and his class (Cookson 1987 p.154), and yet the text offers no real evidence for such a claim, and certainly Nancy Ann's second husband, Graham, though Dennison's equal, displays no such traits.

[97] Frequently writing herself into a corner where the real social and lived conditions of her characters threaten to impact, Cookson relies on the forced solutions of emigration, inheritance, death, and marriage. For more on Victorian fiction and the magical endings see Williams (1975).

[98] For an interesting elaboration on this perspective see Lyotard (1989).

[99] There are, White suggests, "three basic kinds of historical representation ... the annals, the chronicle, and the history proper" (White 1980 p.5). The annals, White contends, offer "no suggestion of any necessary connection between one event and another" but comprise of simple lists, organised on a perpetual timescale. Annalistic history, according to White prohibits the annalist from investing his account with meaning through "the absence of any consciousness of a *social* centre" (White 1980 p.11.) Although this assertion has been disputed by Mink who contends that, "while every story permits a moral interpretation, at least some stories do not demand or presuppose it" (Mink 1980 p.234). Thus, the annals, are not an alternative form of historiography but merely the first phase, the primary memories which comprise the raw materials which are then supplemented through interrogation and research. "The annals form" Mink asserts "reveals not the informing principles of a different world view but the absence of a concept of research." (Mink 1980 p 237). Waldman who illustrates the use of annals as a dominant feature in Islamic cultures, where there is obviously a strong social centre, also disputes White's propositions.

[100] Prior to the emergence of Thatcherism there existed "a broad-left liberal consensus in history, economics and political science, a nexus of Fabian and Keynesian ideas which more or less commanded the field. But since 1979 that consensus has collapsed..." (Norris 1988 p.100).

[101] Although it could be argued that history has always been a sight of contention. "History" Benjamin argued, is "the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now (Benjamin 1992b pp.252-3). When it is written, history always creates an empathy with the victor of past struggles: the unwritten histories, the discourse of the vanquished, is frequently lost.

[102] Of course, such an approach can, and has, been utilised by both radical and extreme factions of the Right but to vacate a sphere of possible resistance simply because it lacks theoretical purity is, at best, irresponsible. Yet, this is what the Left has done consistently since the 60s. After Mrs. Thatcher's 1979 electoral victory, the Left vacated the battle of ideas, focusing instead upon the past, attempting to account for and analyse the "wasted years" of the 50s and the failures of the 1920s. Caught up in endless, circuitous debates over ideological fine print, historical misreadings and internecine warfare, the Left failed to provide any sustained and meaningful opposition or alternative an unpopular and divisive government until the decade drew to a close. Even then, it was a reorganised New Labour movement, several degrees to the Right of the Heath administration, that emerged.

[103] Of course the fact that Darlington Hall is now occupied and owned by an American on the eve of the Suez crisis provides another layer of historical tensions to this novel.

[104] Although such a project lies outside the remit of this thesis there is considerable evidence to suggest that an investigation into the attractions of Nazism would reveal that Stevens was a prime candidate for recruitment.

[105] Such figures are, of course, commonplace in literature. Famous examples include Dickens's Uriah Heep and Pinter's Hugo Barrett.

[106] A further example can be found in the opening story of Barnes (1989).

[107] See Davies (1997) for a harrowing investigation of the effects of Thatcherism on the most vulnerable elements of society.

[108] Indeed, by the time she left office, her legacy of failure was astounding. Although, under her tenure, the economy grew by 25%,, it was the slowest growth in the developed world. Her privatisation initiative the state sold 2/3rds of industry into private hands, but the overall burden of taxation was 0.8% higher. The sale of council houses and her encouragement of home ownership was successful and private home owners rose by 34%, but homelessness doubled and mortgage repossessions went up twentyfold. Similarly, under Thatcher there was an 8% increase of policemen on the beat and 35% more criminals in jail, but recorded crime had more than doubled. Her greatest 'achievement' however, was her systematic and unfettered attack upon the democratic system, effectively destroying oppositional politics and creating a one party state in which the only effective disagreement emerges from within the party machinery. See among others Davies (1997); Hutton (1996) and Day (2000).

[109] "The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers. The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation into a mere money relation." (Marx & Engels 1996, pp.223-4).

[110] Although the play rarely misses, at times the savage parody does tend towards hysterical hectoring. Whilst this may be a deliberate strategy to expose the crassness and superficiality of the monetarist mindset, the image of Albion up for sale and plunder is a little too obvious and lacks the subtlety of Churchill's other analogies. This becomes more understandable when one considers that this critique was "written within the enterprise years rather than as a retrospective account of them" (Waugh 1995 20).

[111] "A deal like this, at the start you gently woo it/There comes a time when you get in there and screw it" (Churchill 1987 p.47).

[112] "Nevertheless, by the end of Mrs. Thatcher's first term of office, inflation had fallen from 20% in 1980 to 5% in 1983. This was achieved less by control of the money supply than by the loss of manufacturing output and rising unemployment" (Day 2000 p.7).

[113] There was some justification for this confidence. In 1981 Mrs. Thatcher's grip on her own party was tenuous, while her popularity in the country was at a record breaking low. Had the Left eschewed the constant wrangles over electoral colleges and party reform, which resulted in the Limehouse Declaration and the formation of the Social Democrats, it is unlikely, even with the Falklands victory, that she would have succeeded in attaining a second term.

[114] See Hutton 1996 pp.33-9.

[115] The sense of confinement, captivity and surveillance that became synonymous with society under Mrs. Thatcher is constantly evoked throughout the novel and is overtly expressed by Edith who declares that "Inmates of institutions quickly learn the rules" (Brookner 1984, 106).

[116] For further discussion of the theory wars see Davies (1996); Walmsley (1998); Eagleton (1981); Baldick (1983) and Doyle (1982;1989).

[117] "I read so many articles which *are* arguments, which don't seem to get anywhere in particular, but which are sufficiently co-ordinated to be publishable as arguments. One feels that the reason for their existence is simply to get them on a dean's list, and that the notion of the pursuit of a structure, or of knowledge, so that it gets clearer in the mind, is just something you haven't the time for" (Salusinszky. 1987 p.37).

[118] Significantly, Lodge also plays with time to make his point. Although a conventional narrative is adopted for most of the novel, Lodge begins and ends it in the present tense. This temporal disjunction creates a certain indeterminacy and lack of closure which is alien to the traditional condition-of-England novel and serves to remind the reader that the age of 'certainty' if it existed at all, has truly passed.

[119] The novel begins in 1931 and spans a period of 60 years. Although Archer is lamentably flawed as an historian and analyst of the past, his projections for the future are equivalent to that of the American 'psychic' Criswell who foresaw a plague of female baldness in St Louis in the 1980s. In one of the most engaging and ludicrous flights of fancy, for example, Mrs. Thatcher temporarily regains her flagging popularity by invading Libya to rescue kidnapped British sailors.

[120] The problem with equating nationalism exclusively with the reactionary, however, is that within this idea of nation and nationhood progressive, revolutionary forces are also at work, as the collapse of communism in Eastern European states and the rebirth of South Africa testify. For a study of the nation in the novel see Smyth (1997).

[121] "From Arnold to Newbolt, literature matters because of its indispensable relation to an evolving ideology of public education. And education matters, supremely, because more than anything else, more than the vote, the popular press, the management of political opinion, it must win the consent of those classes and groups dispossessed and subordinated by capital, and weld it, as capital vastly expands its field of exploitation, to a common conception of imperial nationhood." (Batsleer, J et al 1985 p.20).

[122] Interestingly, all of these novelists have won the prestigious Booker Prize. Hulme and Kelman's, which are the most linguistically challenging and variable are the two major Booker flops. See Todd (1996).

[123] See for instance Belsey (1980).

[124] This tension between freedom and censorship was also reflected in the government's policies towards television, where deregulation paved the way for the cable and satellite revolution at the same time as the government sought to impose content controls on the existing channels.

[125] This is not to say, however, that the author has the final and absolute say over his or her text. On the contrary, that privilege belongs to the future generations of readers who will either keep the text in circulation or abandon it to the farthest, dustiest corners of the cultural archive. For an intensive critique of the 'death of the author' position see Burke (1992).

[126] The balance between sacred and profane that dominates the novel is manifested in this name which places Saladin, the great Muslim hero of the Crusades, in juxtaposition with a surname that means both 'spoon seller' and 'yes man'. For an excellent guide to the various references and allusions in this novel go to http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/satanic_verses/contents.html.

[127] There is an important difference between being offensive and offending. A freedom to offend presumes, as in the case of Rushdie, the freedom to re-examine and criticise views that are held by their disciples to be inviolable. To be offensive, on the other hand, requires neither imagination nor intelligence. It is an emotive and visceral reaction brought about by irrationalism, prejudice and fear.

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