

Educational Afterworlds in Neoliberal Britain:  
Class, Politics and Sexuality

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## Abstract

There is a widespread sense that Britain is an unfair society with an unfair education system, and that this ought to change. Yet the prescribed panacea of 'equality of opportunity' is bound up with new extensions of middle-class privilege. In an attempt to historicise the social basis of that paradox, this thesis offers the 'educational afterworld' as a theoretical framework for prising open the determinations formal schooling exerts in adult British society. It is written from a Marxist perspective and treats the Blairite mantra of 'Education, Education, Education' as part of an ideological history in which structural inequality has been reproduced through the three-tier school system that emerged in the late Victorian period.

As a point of entry into the educational afterworld, this project explores long-established categories of culture as they were articulated at key moments in this unfolding history. The legacies of three major *Kulturkritikers*—Matthew Arnold, F.R. Leavis and Richard Hoggart—and their preoccupations—class, politics, race, the city and commodified life—entered the 80s as a repertoire of motifs, patterns and axioms. I am interested in how these cultural co-ordinates were reconfigured by critiques of and collusions with the mercurial socio-political changes of the period on which I focus. Moving through the 80s and 90s, and with periodic glances back to earlier episodes of British life, the chapters map 'high' and 'low' culture onto the hierarchy of educational institutions that continues to produce the gulf between exquisite prose and 'underclass' illiteracy. A focus on sexuality is a notable feature of each chapter, honing discussion of these educational afterworlds through consideration of the ways in which gay male sexuality and an emboldened female sexuality mediate social status and distinction (in Bourdieu's sense). For these reasons, the texts selected are Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988) and *The Line of Beauty* (2004), the BBC2 drama serial *This Life* (1996-97) and, with his BBC sitcom *Gimme Gimme Gimme* (1999-2001), Jonathan Harvey's 'feel-good' play *Beautiful Thing* (1993).

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## Introduction

Education legitimises British society. Read from one perspective, the worlds of business, the professions and the civil service are filled with the most highly skilled and able of citizens. According to this view, the rewards those people receive are personally deserved and socially necessary: they incentivise individuals, and therefore society. School is a neutral space from this vantage point, the platform from which young people project themselves into the tough yet benign status quo. Where people find themselves in society after education is then a matter of personal merit, or demerit. Education is discussed as the silver bullet for all social ills, the engine of 'social inclusion'. There is no alternative: the last forty years or so have confirmed the false premises of all socialist experiments, the obsolescence of class as a meaningful frame of reference for the world, and its lingering presence as the self-imposed straitjacket of pessimists hostile to change. Class only exists in the minds of those who hate.<sup>1</sup> Class dismissed, so they say.

Read from a different perspective, that belief in education is wrong. 6 ½ hours a day, 195 days a year for 12 years amounts to 15,000 hours of compulsory education. Dispositions and possibilities are structured by and within those limits. The higher up the social scale, the more likely educational attainment is regarded as a reflection of a person's capacity to work, invest and defer gratification; according to these self-justifications, those of the self-made capitalist, people reap what they sow. Conversely, the lower down the social scale, the greater the belief in natural 'talents' or 'gifts' as an explanation of educational outcomes. The sad reality is that the greater the educational inequality, the more people 'believe they are stupid'.<sup>2</sup> The consequences are drastic. It is no accident that the British education system produces the mass political and economic illiteracy that renders

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<sup>1</sup> 'Class only exist [sic] in the minds of people that hate [...]. hating [sic] people just because they have done well for themselves, is every bit as evil as racial hatred'—a 'Comment Is Free' response to Ian Jack, 'General Election 2010: A touch of class is still an issue', *Guardian*, 9 April 2010, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/apr/09/general-election-2010-class>

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton, 'Doxa and Common Life,' *New Left Review*, 1/191 (1992), 111-21 (114)—all further references for this journal are abbreviated to *NLR*.



the majority incapable of seeing Britain as *capitalist*, dedicated to the production of capital rather than the ‘public interest’, ‘freedom’ or even ‘money’. Neither is it too far-fetched to say that withholding from successive generations the histories and critical tools that might connect personal intuitions, misgivings and tragedies into transformative action enacts a form of violence.

Taking the longer view, education keys into an ideological history extending as far back as the early permutations of the word itself. In *Keywords* (1976), Raymond Williams traced the connections that developed from its original meaning, the rearing of children. Specialised and organised schooling for the few, beginning in the seventeenth century, meant a clear-cut distinction between the *educated* and the *uneducated*; people were simply one or the other. Since the incremental extension of educational provision, however, to *educate* and to *bring-up* children *properly* became imperative; what people meant by *education* was now open to question, which is to say, politics. A point was reached in the mid-nineteenth century when the terms *over-educated* and *half-educated* entered the national vocabulary to preserve the categorical function of *education as proper*. ‘There is a strong class sense in this use’, Williams saw in 1976, ‘and the level indicated by educated has been continually adjusted to leave the majority of people who have received an education below it’. ‘It remains remarkable’, he concluded, ‘that after nearly a century of universal education in Britain the majority of the population should in this use be seen as uneducated or half-educated’.<sup>3</sup> A study of education should never lose sight of the fact that any definition of education cannot help but be a definition of human beings and their social relations.

I am using the term *educational afterworld* to denote the ‘place’ where the categorical function of *education as proper* presides. It is where the meaning of education really matters. The aim of the educational afterworld as a theory of that ‘place’ is to take the dominant assumption found there—that the *uneducated*, *half-educated* and *over-educated* are, like hell, other people—back to the class inequality of the education system that produces it. It is the contention of this thesis, then, that the real politics of educational inequality today operates in an educational afterworld where class has been dismissed. My reasoning is bound up with the role of education as a prism of advanced bourgeois societies and, in this nation-specific study, the idiosyncrasies of British political, social and cultural arrangements set in

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana, 1976), pp. 111-12.

train by the late-Victorian period. It is not hard to see cultural texts pushing themselves forward as candidates for a study on education, ‘occupying’, as it were, the bricks-and-mortar of educational institutions. But there are texts that appear to consider everything but the education system that are all the more interesting, challenging and productive for a study of education’s place in British society because the ideological positions they muster efface the privileges of educational inequality that lend them voice. I am more interested, then, in how texts resist being read through the system they are indebted to by performing cultural operations homologous to more general effacements of educational inequality found in British life.

The two novels, two television series and one play analysed in this study have been chosen because they do not present themselves as interventions in educational debates. The focus of Chapter 1 is Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988), a statement on Empire, sex and nostalgia at the cusp of the Aids crisis. Chapter 2 is a reading of Hollinghurst’s *The Line of Beauty* (2004), a novel that won plaudits as a neo-Jamesian satire of Thatcherite egoism and bad taste. The focus of Chapter 3 is the BBC2 drama serial *This Life* (1996-97), now remembered by ‘television people’ and a generation of viewers as a candid portrayal of ‘twenty-something’ lawyers at work, home and leisure. Set on a council estate, Jonathan Harvey’s ‘urban fairytale’, *Beautiful Thing* (1993), is the British ‘feel-good’ coming-out story. The play is considered in Chapter 4 alongside Harvey’s BBC sitcom *Gimme Gimme Gimme* (1999-2001), a show that went out of its way to flaunt a ‘post-issue’ bacchanal of ‘politically incorrect’ trash—it rejected the idea of meaning anything whatsoever. I do not want to suggest that these texts do not live up to these descriptions, but I do want to challenge their self-sufficiency by approaching the same set of issues from the perspectives that open up when due attention is paid to the role of education in British settings. To that end, this Introduction: (1) fleshes out the educational afterworld; (2) charts the development of the categories of culture that represent education-in-society; and (3) makes a case for why this is important to life in neoliberal Britain.

## THE EDUCATIONAL AFTERWORLD

In essence, the educational afterworld is about determining from where and on what terms within a structurally unequal society definitions of education are installed and exercised over others. It stands to reason that the dominant

understandings of education cultivated at school have to be re-told and modified when they encounter the so-called 'real world'. There is a test of plausibility as soon as the full force of the freedoms and unfreedoms of work and worklessness produced by State, market and civil society confront the school-leaver or graduate. For some it is the confirmation of an open door; most, however, will meet a wall. Justifications of educational inequality require intense ideological work to countenance this reality. Obfuscation is structural. All the positions that form the educational afterworld are determined by education, though this is to say that they acquire outward forms of expressions often far removed from any direct reference to formal schooling the more attainment is converted into the forms of social power education mediates. To discuss the educational afterworld, therefore, is to engage with the full breadth of social relations as they shift and determine history.

To illustrate this, consider a novel that would appear to occupy a space between schooling and a life after education, Jeanette Winterson's debut novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985). Fictionalised protagonist Jeanette extricates herself from a Northern Pentecostal education after the revelation of a female-female love affair. Binary-think is the laughable pathology of the mother from the first page. There is a *proper upbringing* and *education* and Jeanette frees herself from them. To quote the novel's preface, the purpose of Jeanette's 'spiral' narrative is to break down that Manichaeism by weaving synoptic biography into fantastic storytelling.<sup>4</sup> Appearances dictate that a primary schism between system and the unsystematisable cuts across institution and individual, indoctrination and self-discovery, misery and happiness. It has thus become customary to discuss Jeanette's break from the family-Church apparatus in effusive discourses of 'language', 'sexuality' and 'desire'. The narrative is told, however, after the effect, from a world after this formative education, after the move that effectively 'resolves' the text (Jeanette leaves Accrington to read English at Oxford). Written by a young Oxford graduate working as a publisher in London, Winterson's 'fictionalised biography' writes out the grammar-school education that shadowed religious instruction and prepared the 'solution', the *proper education* of Oxford Eng.Lit. The influence intrudes on the narrative in 'real time' through Jeanette's proleptic condescension over the family's low-class food, cultural tastes and idiosyncrasy—even though the poignancy of the narrative is that this is the only world Jeanette knew at the time. The past tense relates the asphyxiation of an all-immediate present. The text goes to great lengths to establish this double-view

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<sup>4</sup> Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (London: Vintage, 1985), p. xiii.

because it forms the basis of its productive tension: *Oranges* bolsters the ‘universal’ interests espoused by an Oxford Eng.Lit. syllabus by locating *proper education* beyond the scope of the main narrative when, all the while, liberal humanism’s ‘anti-institutional’ values fold back to impregnate the text with its defining sensibility. Where do Jeanette’s literary allusions come from if they are not from the books she has at home, the Bible, Mallory or *Jane Eyre*? What is happening between North and South? How does the text position itself ‘outside’ education in order to organise it? What is the ideological import of attenuating the social, what exists, by insisting on the sovereignty of make-believe, the impossible? What infusions of style are projected into the consciousness of a *born* rather than socially selected and educated Oxonian?

The fundamental problem is that the language attendant on education is so resistant to thinking about class in terms of what it is—a *relation* between individuals within an economic mode of production rather than an *identity* fixed from birth—that it actively exacerbates structural inequality. In societies where the relation between capital and wage labour predominates, the proletariat sells its labour because it must to survive; the middle classes must also work, but to varying degrees they derive income from capital or rents; the capitalist class works by exploiting proletarian and middle-class labour; the rentier class lives solely off investments or rents. Because the relation between capital and labour produces all of our most basic needs, ‘the logic of capitalist process has’, E.P. Thompson wrote, ‘found expression within all the activities of a society, and exerted a determining pressure upon its development and form, hence entitling us to speak of capitalism, or of capitalist societies’.<sup>5</sup> What ‘public’ means is moot. Strange and often embittered conflicts mark the relations between political executives acting in the interests of capital accumulation and the direct masters of capital; between, we might say the stabilisers, the wheel and the cyclists. The State’s workforce is comprised of all classes. ‘Professional’ classes are credentialised by the State but, like the ‘managerial’ class, are split between public and private affiliations. Cultural workers, including intellectuals, are stretched across subsidised and market-based portfolios.

Education is pivotal as the mechanism promising ‘fairness of entry’ into these structurally unequal relations. The contradiction is a fair elite promising a fairness that must already exist. In his keynote speech to ‘The Future of Britishness’

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<sup>5</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory, & Other Essays* (London: Merlin, 1978), p. 254.

Conference organised by the Fabian Society in 2006 ahead of the 300-year anniversary of the Acts of Union, Gordon Brown bulldozed through historical fact to exalt ‘2,000 years’ of the ‘distinctive set of values which influence British institutions’. ‘Of course’, he asserted, ‘the appeal to fairness runs throughout British history, from early opposition to the first poll tax in 1381 to the second’. The present owes to ‘the Bill of Rights in 1689 where Britain became the first country to successfully assert the power of Parliament over the King’. The ‘battle of 20th century politics’, then, was ‘whether fairness would be formal equality before the law or something much more, a richer equality of opportunity’.<sup>6</sup> Actual equality, in other words, is inferior. Similarly, the 2003 white paper on Higher Education declared that ‘Britain’ is committed to ‘fair access’ because ‘education *is* the best and most reliable route out of poverty and disadvantage’.<sup>7</sup> The message between the lines was that poverty is a fact of life that is here to stay, and the role of government is to ensure that education allocates the right people to the right places. The strategy, Rosemary Hennessy writes, is to ‘encourage people to think of class in terms of the visible forms of class status they see—income, occupation, consumption patterns. In other words, people are encouraged to confuse class with lifestyle’.<sup>8</sup> This is how George Osborne invites us to think about welfare: ‘People who think it is a lifestyle to sit on out-of-work benefits... that lifestyle choice is going to come to an end. The money will not be there for that lifestyle choice’.<sup>9</sup> It is the ‘view’ of the *Daily Telegraph*: ‘The forthcoming cuts will underline the hard truth that Britain needs to rediscover the culture of migration that created our industrial cities in the first place. It is in many ways a cruel challenge, to which many Britons cannot or will not rise. But consider the fact that the immigrants cleaning our bathrooms or flipping our burgers have crossed continents to do so. Their dogged enterprise is a defining feature of the 21st century. Unless the Government can persuade native-born Britons to make the “lifestyle choice” of uprooting themselves in search of work, then the impact of the spending review will be savage indeed’.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon Brown, keynote speech at the ‘Future of Britishness’ Conference, the Fabian Society, London, 14 January 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education and Skills, *The Future of Higher Education* (Norwich: HMSO, 2003), p. 74—emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual identities in late capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Osborne’s words cited in Patrick Wintour, ‘George Osborne to cut £4bn more from benefits’, *Guardian*, 9 September 2010.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Telegraph View: Welfare: The “lifestyle choice” Britons must make’, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 September 2010.

Meritocratic gloss and commodity-fetishism are hardly new. The argument throughout this thesis is that late-twentieth-century Britain modulated political, social and cultural aspects of British life that have a protracted history. This is to say that this Introduction has a *longue durée* to explain before material that directly pertains to the time-period of the chosen texts. The intention of the next three sections is to relay that history through the educational afterworlds of three influential figures in British cultural life; the poet and critic Matthew Arnold, the literary scholar F.R. Leavis and the academic Richard Hoggart. Together, these symptomatic vignettes constitute a survey of national culture that takes the reader from the Victorian public school, through the grammar school and up to the brink of the 1980s, a juncture considered later. These intellectuals have been selected because we can still make out their mark on the categories of culture they helped to formulate. However, the meanings of culture produced and modified by Arnold, Leavis and Hoggart, never under ‘copyright’ in the first place, have always undergone adaptation by others. Largely unacknowledged authorities today, their understandings of culture are put to uses that would have them turning in their graves.<sup>11</sup> The purpose, then, is to present and account for the neglected (and in many ways travestied) educational origins of the long-constituted cultural attitudes—to the city, race, nation, gender, sexuality and language—handled by the main thesis.

Before that task, however, I want to convey why Francis Mulhern’s *Culture/Metaculture* (2000) is invaluable to what I am trying to do. Mulhern dissects the cultural politics linking Arnold, Leavis and Hoggart. In high cultural criticism, what is usefully termed *Kulturkritik*, there is a sharp distinction between Civilisation and Culture, refined minority and doped mass. The *Kulturkritiker* argues for the urgent intervention of Culture to save Civilisation from the impending abyss of system that awaits it. That authority, however, is sanctioned by the abiding image of a previous cultural break that shattered ‘life’ and doomed Civilisation. Truth, now fractured across temporal registers, is only partially

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<sup>11</sup> The first prime-ministerial debate of the 2010 General Election yielded this example from David Cameron, who now, of course, heads the ‘payment-by-results’ Coalition government: it is ‘important that [...] actually we’re opening young people’s minds to all the best things that have been written and all the best things that have been said to really excite people about education’. See ‘April 2010: Transcript’, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/16\\_04\\_10\\_firstdebate.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/16_04_10_firstdebate.pdf)

accessible by proper artists and critics; they piece together the shards. Because Culture can never be truly said to be 'present', any definition is evaded on the grounds that if it were to do so it would fall into the very condition of system it is duty-bound to resist. The paradox is that Civilisation, always already condemned to system, harries the last trusty pockets of faithful Culture entrusted to redeem it. But if intervention is self-thwarting from the outset, why the bewildering amount of energy expended in making such claims? Essentially, if *Kulturkritik* is understood as a rhetorical exercise then the political function of its evasive ornamentation is unmasked. Mulhern explains that Culture is best approached as a cannibalistic way of speaking—*Culture*, representatives of *Culture* say, is lost and is being lost now. It is a form of 'metaculture', a discursive phenomenon whereby culture *on* culture *is* culture. To regard this as self-reflexivity or suspicion of categorical statement that eludes ideology is to take an ideological form at face value: 'The ultimate stake, in all cases, is social *authority*' rather than the assumption of a *power* capable of breaking capitalist relations—they, instead, are wished away into contestable cultural difference.<sup>12</sup> *Kulturkritik* is, by its very nature, indebted to elite educational institutions. Its convenience in the educational afterworld is that something unaccountable is used to shape the world against the interests of the uneducated mass who, by definition, are incognizant of it. The patron saint of Culture in British society, Matthew Arnold, set the tone.

## CULTURE, ANARCHY AND THE EDUCATING STATE

Matthew Arnold delivered his last lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford on 7 June 1867.<sup>13</sup> His swansong called on his students to continue Oxford's defence of Culture. Beleaguered everywhere, curiosity was defamed as navel-gazing and Culture rudely conflated with its impostors. Thus the need for clarification: 'Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is *a study of perfection*. It moves by the force, not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for doing good' (pp. 44-45). The 'moment of culture' (p. 47) had arrived because its internal, spiritual condition was the only traction left against the external 'machinery' of modern Civilisation. The scourge was omnipresent and its manifestations legion; 'wealth'

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. xix.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)—all page references for this work feature in the main text.

(pp. 47, 50, 51, 52, 53, 58, 59, 65), ‘population’ (pp. 50, 52, 53, 54, 59), ‘coal’ (pp. 50, 51, 59), ‘religious organisations’ (pp. 56, 58, 59, 60), ‘railroads’ (pp. 50, 64, 65), ‘muscles’ (p. 64), ‘the games and athletic sports that occupy the passing generation of boys and young men’ (p. 61)—even ‘disputes, tea-meetings, opening of chapels, sermons’ (p. 58). The admirers of this morass were the ‘very rich Philistines’, whose gifts to the world amounted to the ‘unutterable external hideousness’ of London and the execrable *Daily Telegraph*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the world (pp. 52, 59). Arnold warned against a revolution, but he did not name it outright. Instead, he affirmed Culture as that which ‘seeks to do away with classes’. Culture ‘is not satisfied till we *all* come to a perfect man’. ‘This is a *social idea*’ that means ‘men of culture are the true apostles of equality’ (pp. 69-70). The lecture was published in July’s *Cornhill Magazine* as ‘Culture and Its Enemies’ before becoming the untitled chapter of *Culture and Anarchy* in January 1869. Its current title, ‘Sweetness and Light’, was a prettification of the second edition, published in 1875.

Matthew Arnold addressed an audience of six hundred at the Working Men’s College, Ipswich, on 8 January 1879.<sup>14</sup> The speech expressed his ‘private wish’ (p. 355) as well as the interests of ‘English civilisation’ (p. 361). He commended members of the College for the humble desire to pursue self-knowledge, then rapped the ‘poor and imperfect’ use of the library—men went there ‘merely to read the newspapers, to read novels’ for ‘amusement and relaxation’. They should ‘not be blamed for it’, Arnold magnanimously added (pp. 357-8). Unease had the very serious function of introducing the man of Culture as an oblique ally: ‘I want’, he asked, ‘to enlist your interest and help towards this object,—towards the establishment of public schools for the middle class’ (p. 369). Workmen were hardly prospective avatars of ‘English civilization’ because they were in possession of ‘cheap and popular’ knowledge (p. 358). Even so, it was still in their ‘direct interest’ (Arnold used the phrase three times) to support the middle-class education of others; to repudiate, in effect, the ideals of their own institution (pp. 370, 370, 373).

Arnold presented his case through the juxtaposition of a number of observations rather than an explicit line of argument. ‘Promising subjects come to the front of

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew Arnold, ‘Ecce, Convertimur ad Gentes’, in *Matthew Arnold on Education*, ed. Gillian Sutherland (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 68-82—all page references for this speech feature in the main text.



their own class' on the Continent, 'and they pass them, by a second and higher stage of education, into the class above them, to the great advantage of society. It is hardly too much to say'—here comes the hook—'that you and your class have in England no schools by which you can accomplish this rise if you are worthy of it' (p. 370). The all-important little word (too late, of course, for the adult audience) was the conditional 'if'. The promise was an epoch-breaking crusade to repeal all the 'immense inequalities of condition and property' (p. 362), but socialist ideals would have to concede the superiority of other collective tendencies first. Arnold repeatedly paraphrased the counter-revolutionary Edmund Burke (as he had done in *Culture and Anarchy*): the zenith of human achievement was the 'nation in its collective and corporate character' (pp. 345, 347, 351, 352, 372); 'To use the State', it was averred, 'is simply to use cooperation of a superior kind' (p. 372). The speech ended by offering the unbelievers amongst the workers the example of the enlightened Jews—they had looked beyond the confines of their ghettos and cried, '*We turn to the Gentiles!*' (p. 372). The lecture was published as 'Ecce, Convertimur ad Gentes' in *Mixed Essays* later that year. The word 'inequality' featured twelve times, whereas 'culture' appeared not once.

What was Arnold doing? First, history was transmuted into a stage for abstracted propensities. The 'organic' account of English history associated with Burke, Thomas Babington Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle was a readily available commonsense. It was said that the Gloriousness of 1688 and the steadfastness of the British State against Chartism in 1848 confirmed, against the backdrop of Europe's Age of Revolution (1879-1848), an exceptional English character. 'Providence' rewarded the evolutionary over the revolutionary, traditions over rights, the past over the future, nature over system. The power of this 'organic' view was in part the compelling plausibility of historical events, but elisions and falsehoods were integral to the misrepresentation; the overwhelming military force of William of Orange, the exportation of mass violence to Ireland, and the popular support for Chartism are the first among many. Less obviously, Arnold was drawing on emergent racialist discourses. His Victorian landscape of modern-day Hebraists, Hellenists, Barbarians and Philistines made a mockery of the dominant mid-nineteenth-century belief in progress. It was, however, progress by other means. Anachronism held out the possibility of retrieving Greek sweetness and light from (so the anti-Semitism went) the Jew-inspired wreckage. This was the 1860s on the cusp of high imperialism, where linguistic sophistication marked racial superiority. The Continental writers on Arnold's reading list had begun the

fascination with Aryan ‘lineages’ and linguistic ‘family trees’.<sup>15</sup> The aversion to sport was the hope that elite education would produce the correct ethos for governing the ‘native’ urban population at the heart of Empire. Something had to be higher than bodies for divide-and-rule to work, and Culture provided that.

Second, Arnold folded those abstracted histories back into the class system as graded dispositions—everyone and everything was judged ‘by its attitude to all this machinery’ (p. 60). The slipperiness of the term ‘philistine’ was crucial. It could be feasibly applied to: (i) the dominant middle classes, the Philistines; (ii) the motivating force of this Philistine class; (iii) the society in which the Philistine was hegemonic; (iv) all mental and material machinery; (iv) hence, most confusingly of all, the self-sufficient orthodoxies specific to the two *non*-Philistine classes. So every class was denounced as philistine but only Philistines as a class had no extra ideological baggage—they were neither the negligent aristocratic Liberal Barbarians responsible for the crisis (credo: ‘do as one likes’), nor the Populace (impulse: to grab and rend other people’s property). A primitive mob mentality, the mass could only learn by aping its betters. If ‘education is the road to culture’, the lowly were unteachable; Culture would ‘slide easily from their minds’ (pp. 209, 115). Ipswich workers were patronised for frequenting their library because they were going through the middle-class motions of their superiors—it got them off the streets; but they were dressed down because finding, understanding and acting on anything meaningful was not the class destiny prescribed to them by high cultural politics.

Third, Arnold put a human face to his grossly simplified tripartite of Barbarian, Philistine, Populace: ‘within each of these classes there are a certain number of *aliens*, if we may so call them,—persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit’ (pp. 108-9). Special people were nominally dispersed evenly throughout society, but *humane* and therefore *alien* were definitions subject to middle-class endorsement. In effect, a classed sensibility was lodged as proper education. Thinking the number of alien ‘natures’ ‘born’ into a society directly proportionate to a society’s hospitality to Culture (pp. 108-9), the foremost duty of a Barbarian-Philistine pact was to guarantee base-level conditions against the Populace—‘*Force*,’ Arnold was fond of saying, ‘*till right is ready*’.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 55-99.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’, in *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 26-52

State was obliged to support an educational apparatus capable of identifying and cultivating these special persons. The idea was that a multiplier effect would soon see everyone cultured and classless. But the appeal to classlessness was a middle-class solicitation to extend its reach: it was Culture *and* Anarchy, permanent control over the working class rather than the enlightened dispersal of inequality. Trapped in that relation, '*Force till right is ready*' implied that right would never be ready, that Culture would always play an inferior role.

Arnold might be best remembered, then, as one of the constructive faultfinders of capitalist societies. He took the persona of a lone visionary when, in fact, he was intervening in the inescapable debate about the stamp of British rule. The moment of 'Culture and Its Enemies' was the highest of watermarks, falling between the second mass demonstration in Hyde Park by the Reform League on 6 May 1867 and the hasty passing of the Second Reform Act on 15 July. The protest was so colossal the army withdrew all operations. Parliament, shaken by the logical inference, responded by extending 'democracy' to 1.5 million male householders. The day after the Fenian bombing of Clerkenwell Prison that December, Arnold wrote to his mother to reiterate his belief that only dispelling 'the real hollowness and insufficiency of the whole system of our public life' would stave off a fatal repeat of Hyde Park.<sup>17</sup> As a member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate since 1851, he was already at the heart of preparations. His job was to judge a teacher's capacity as a suitable role model for working-class children, which is to say whether deference to authority was implanted, fostered and commanded. Reporting as part of the Newcastle Committee on working-class education in 1863, Arnold wrote: 'The education of each class in society has, or ought to have, its ideal, determined by the wants of that class, and by its destination'.<sup>18</sup> Birth was determinism in perpetuity, extended and consolidated along the indications provided by capitalist class strata. The provision of universal education after the Second Reform Act entrenched that logic. New urban populations were managed through elementary education, whilst the middle classes, as Arnold wished, secured their educations. Six public

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(p. 33).

<sup>17</sup> *Selected Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Clinton Machann (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1993), pp. 205-6.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'A French Eton, or Middle-Class Education and the State', in *Matthew Arnold and the Education of a New Order*, eds. P. Smith and G. Summerfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 76-156 (p. 112).

schools had been inspected by the Clarendon Commission in the early 1860s; there were as many as 104 by 1902.<sup>19</sup>

From a conservative standpoint, Arnold gave the powers that be the hard lesson the Italian Antonio Gramsci would later give to the left: 'Every relationship of "hegemony" is an educational relationship'.<sup>20</sup> The public school advocated by Arnold was and still is an extremely powerful engine of consent in British society. He was, of course, neither working-class nor a member of the middling classes in want of a public-school education. His father, Dr Thomas Arnold, was widely credited for rejuvenating the English public school system, leading by example as headmaster of Rugby and as an uncompromising presence in national media. Educated in the unusually intense school-family environment of Rugby, the son rose through Greats at Balliol College, Oxford, to assume his own place in the pantheon of Victorian heavyweights. Generations of the elite have been cradled in the public school system at a distance from the enabling powers, State licence and family wealth. Dominant values are all the more deep-set for being enshrined in splendid isolation. Everything about the public school's market environment is hardwired to de-politicising an elite-in-waiting. 'Personalism' transcribes all social processes into experiential mental structures.<sup>21</sup> The most privileged tier of the education system does everything in its power to construct a world in which it is considered unsystematisable. 'Life' enters the educational afterworld as the ideologeme of the ex-public schoolboy.

In the early-to-mid-twentieth century, Arnold's most vociferous acolytes were testily locked within a society dominated by that public-school sensibility. Their personalism was riveted to another way of life and a different educational institution: petit-bourgeois existence and the pre-war grammar school. At another remove away from the world of money, a scholarship-winning flock opened up the prospect of an instituted subculture more bitterly opposed to Culture's enemies than its champagne-quaffing guiding light had ever been.

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<sup>19</sup> J.S. de Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe: The development of the Victorian public school* (London: Millington, 1977), p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2003), p. 350.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite schools in the field of power*, trans. Laretta C. Clough (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), pp. 96-101.

## MASS CIVILISATION, MINORITY CULTURE AND THE ENGLISH SCHOOL

The Minority Press, Cambridge, published F.R. Leavis's pamphlet *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* in 1930.<sup>22</sup> Ominously, the first observation was that Arnold's predicament was an enviable one. The first footnote repeated the poet-critic's sneer against the *Telegraph*, but the only comment, 'It is the *News of the World* that has the largest circulation today', was as matter-of-fact as it was morose in its resignation (p. 3). The interim had witnessed the unparalleled triumph of machinery, now solidified and crowned as 'the machine'. The omnipresence of its toxic influence forced a moral responsibility upon an as-yet unblemished critical minority; its singular task was to preserve the excellence of all prior achievement, tradition and value by sheltering its last manifestation, the finest English idiom, from corrosive forces. The future of the Anglo-Saxon race depended on its success (p. 5). Nowhere was downward acceleration more patent than the capitulation of standards in literary circles to new, mass-produced Americanist forms—lowbrow Arnold Bennett dictated national tastes (it was 'a misnomer to call *The Times Literary Supplement* a critical organ' (pp. 12-14, 19)), film was Esperantist (p. 9) and advertising was 'applied psychology' (p. 11). America's cataclysm had been speeded 'by the fusion of peoples', but eugenicists like Oswald Spengler or eugenicist-capitalists like Henry Ford were bastardised authorities (pp. 7, 28). The English had to uphold the highest possible standards of language because 'the demand for literature in "Basic English" will grow to vast dimensions as Asia learns how to use this means of access to the West' (p. 29). Absolute disaster was imminent, it was 'vain to resist the triumph of the machine', and yet there must be faith, however browbeaten, that we might still 'keep open our communications with the future' (pp. 31-32). The last line, a paraphrase of 'Culture and Its Enemies' / 'Sweetness and Light', completed the Arnoldian loop.

Leavisism is a testament to the fact that no matter how personality-driven or bizarre a subcultural formation appears, it remains a material construction. Tiers of the education system were built into the skylines of biography; Leavis, born at 64 Mill Road, Cambridge, attended the blissful-sounding Eden Street and Paradise Street schools, won scholarships to Perse Grammar and Emmanuel College, and taught at Downing—the entrance of the last directly faced his

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<sup>22</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930)—all page references for this pamphlet feature in the main text.

father's shopfront, 'LEAVIS: PIANOS'. There was a circular wholeness that enveloped and sustained a homely hierarchy in this provincial yet irreducibly central educational life. The young Leavis spent his summers immersed in nature, particularly the study of butterflies. In 1969, an ex-student recalled Leavis's words in one seminar about the East Anglian butterfly; 'They're killing them off with insecticide. You can see it see it everywhere: it's a truth, a symbolic truth'. It was emptied of specificity, but not poignancy: Leavis had been gassed on the Western Front where he had served, Milton in pocket, as an ambulance nurse from late-1915 until the end of the war. He never talked about his experience, nor recovered from the breathing, sleeping and speech difficulties he sustained.<sup>23</sup> Cambridge, or 'that Cambridge', 'essential Cambridge', as Leavis put it in his *Scrutiny* retrospective,<sup>24</sup> was thoroughly insular. Interruptions to its peaceable existence, most seismically war, were the horrors that formed the basis of a defence of 'organic' England and its lifeblood, Culture. The unavoidable difference between 'machinery' in 1867 and the 'machine' in 1930 was the machine-gun, the mechanisation of death.

Thus Leavis's intellectualism was dyed. There was synonymy between the bitter struggle for Life and Culture: the subtitle to *The Living Principle* (1975) was "'English" as a discipline of thought'.<sup>25</sup> There were seemingly uncontrollable and agentless technological forces of trench-warfare behind mass-produced cultural forms: 'it is enough to point to the machine', he writes; 'The machine has brought about change' (p. 5). There was the moral outcry of a non-interventionist witness and healer: 'Here we come to the point', he wrote of Shelley, 'at which literary criticism, as it must, enters overtly into questions of emotional hygiene and moral value—more generally (there seems no other adequate phrase) of spiritual health'.<sup>26</sup> It became more dogmatic with repetition: Lawrence's 'hygienic aim cannot be doubted [...]', Leavis wrote two decades later, 'it *is* a hygienic purpose, that is the unanswerable point I have to make'.<sup>27</sup> There was the belief that only one's inexpressible experience could give an account of world-historical forces: 'What is so desperately needed is the trained non-specialist [!] mind that, while

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<sup>23</sup> Ian MacKillop, *F.R. Leavis: A life in criticism* (London: Allen Lane, 1995), pp. 25-47 (p. 32).

<sup>24</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Scrutiny: A retrospective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> F.R. Leavis, *The Living Principle: 'English' as a discipline of thought* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> F.R. Leavis, 'Thought and Emotional Quality', *Scrutiny*, 13 (1945), 53-71 (60).

<sup>27</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), pp. 235-41 (p. 237)

qualified by its training to represent humane tradition as a living force, has at the same time enough understanding of the modern world and the complexities of its civilization to act as a kind of co-ordinating consciousness'.<sup>28</sup> Leavisism is too often dismissed as the paranoia of one individual, or a generalised sycophancy restricted to the readers of its organ, the quarterly *Scrutiny*; it spoke to the machine-gun age.

The irony of Leavisism was that its valorisation of language was premised on a constitutive inexpressibility that left it lost for words when it came to analysing historical change. If the first footnote of *Mass Civilisation* bolted Culture's worsening fortunes to the respective publics of the *Telegraph* and *The News of the World*, then Leavis had no answers as to what those changes were, why they had come about and what *that* meant. Rather, the purpose of the footnote was to punch home the conviction of a cosmic portent. In short, Leavisite subculture constructed an exhaustive symptomatology of decline without ever naming its cause. Once fixed on the link between the 'standardization of commodities and the standardizations of persons',<sup>29</sup> the logical progression was the pursuit and exposure of ever more trivial (and therefore all the more insidious) manifestations. Indeed, Leavis's career petered out into increasingly petty diatribes against suburbanism, museums and 'more jam'.<sup>30</sup> The dead-end was a formation waging a critique against industrialism but not capitalism, which is to say that it pilloried a one-dimensional frieze rather than the analysis of dynamic social forces in the round. Leavis noted on numerous occasions that the 'ends' of Marxism were estimable but the 'means' (with a nod to industrial Sovietism) were morally bankrupt. In practice, 'Marxism was a characteristic product of our "capitalist civilization"',<sup>31</sup> and thus rejected, along with all other 'capitalistic' alternatives, though not, it seems, the Liberal Party the would-be political recluse was committed to throughout his life.

This blind circling around the question of causality was not a form of inexpressibility peculiar to Leavisism; it was symptomatic of the wider British phenomenon that allocated *Scrutiny* its place. In 'Components of a National Culture' (1966), Perry Anderson located 'that Cambridge' as a 'meta-Cambridge',

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<sup>28</sup> F.R. Leavis, 'The Literary Discipline and Liberal Education', *Sewanee Review*, 55 (1947), 586-609 (599).

<sup>29</sup> F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment: The training of critical awareness* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> F.R. Leavis, 'The Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow', *Spectator*, 9 March 1962.

<sup>31</sup> Leavis, *Scrutiny*, p. 4.

the only significant home-grown narrative of national identity offered to mid-century Britain; ‘language’ was the ‘pseudo-centre’ that filled the ‘absent centre’ left open by a missing sociological account of British class relations (itself a corollary of the missing thoroughgoing bourgeois revolution). A linguistic determinism continually obscured its social determination.<sup>32</sup> Tellingly, Leavis admired the way in which Arnold piled clause upon clause to deepen his argument; but what Leavis read as the unfurling of genius was insulating circularity away from the determining point. This half-recognition of a pseudo-centre magnetised Leavis to Arnold as it would readers to Leavis. As Mulhern notes, the *Scrutiny* years (1932-1953) achieved ‘the large-scale entry of a new social layer into the national intelligentsia’—it was ‘the establishment of a new, professionally chartered discourse on literature’.<sup>33</sup> The journal’s distribution of 750 copies in the 1930s increased to 1500 by the early 1950s. Running many articles on education and teaching practice, providing examination papers, ‘Schoolboys’, Ian MacKillop records, ‘were therefore educated in the Downing way even before they went up to university’.<sup>34</sup> This dissemination of regular missives expressing the ‘essential life’ of a ‘concrete historical England’<sup>35</sup> was a net to catch the like-minded, which is to say that it was all part of a subcultural operation. A memorandum from 1958 defending the English School’s ‘status and reality as a *liaison* centre’ was a half-admission.<sup>36</sup> The *Scrutiny* worldview was examinable from sixth-form onwards, but the attitude to the ‘pseudo-centre’, reliant on *proper upbringing*, could not be taught. ‘The account, I think’, ventured *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*, ‘will be recognised as adequate by anyone who is likely to read this pamphlet’ (p. 5). Quite simply, a failure to recognise ‘an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned’ was to drop out of Leavisism’s orbit by design.<sup>37</sup> Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton and other working-class students across Britain found this out to their cost. For all the condescension, however, Leavisism was a *subculture*, an ‘outlaw’s enterprise’, as Leavis put it.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Perry Anderson, ‘Components of the National Culture’, *NLR*, 1/50 (1968), 3-57 (55).

<sup>33</sup> Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 318.

<sup>34</sup> Ian MacKillop, ‘Rubrics and Reading Lists’, in *F.R. Leavis: Essays and documents*, eds. Ian MacKillop and Richard Storer (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 53-70 (p. 55).

<sup>35</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Education and the University: A sketch for an ‘English School’* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943), pp. 11, 19.

<sup>36</sup> MacKillop, ‘Rubrics and Reading Lists’, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A study in Marxist literary theory* (London: New Left Books, 1975), p. 12; Leavis and Thompson, *Culture and Environment*, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Leavis, *Scrutiny*, p. 1.



Downing was principally known for training medics and lawyers, regardless of how ‘Downing English’ was trailblazed by some.

The unteachable spirit of Leavisism expressed the yearning of its lower-middle class base. The liberal philistinism of *The Daily Telegraph* was mourned because all liberal class roots were being pinched on two fronts: the spectre of Fordism on the one hand, and by the rise of the Labour Party on the other. *Scrutiny*’s antipathy towards emergent Welfare-ism was undisguised—‘the notion of society as an organism gives way to that of society as a joint-stock company’<sup>39</sup>—but the journal could not see it for what it was, the urgent defence of an England where its conception of an organic society (or at least its semblance) might have had a place. The alternative was socialism. Alan Sinfield writes, ‘fascism and welfare-capitalism were *alternative attempts* to deal with the bargaining position that the development of capitalism was bestowing upon the lower classes’.<sup>40</sup> Shifts in class power brought the near extinction of the Liberal Party that had consecrated Leavis’s childhood; with just six MPs in 1951 (five when one died), the party’s dismal fortunes were in direct proportion to Culture’s decline. As squeezed petit-bourgeois intellectuals, rasping criticism of the public school in the pages of *Scrutiny* could never endorse the extension of the grammar school system that had singled out the critical minority. Denys Thompson believed public schools should have been built on ‘the implications of say Matthew Arnold’s work, instead of being satisfied with, at worst, a nasty mess of Kipling, commerce and uplift’. Instead, they were ‘retailers’ of (note the allusion to trench-warfare) ‘the noxious gas of uplift’ that churned out ‘empty-headed fatlings’. Language was ‘levelled down’ in the postwar grammar by the inclusion of an elementary-school (read: working-class) intake that should never have been taught to read in the first place.<sup>41</sup> Indomitable, Q.D. Leavis could barely conceal her class resentment: ‘The car’, she bemoaned in a footnote, ‘has replaced the piano as the sign of social status’. Not only was her father-in-law Cambridge’s piano-merchant, her husband’s rich estranged cousin was a tyre seller.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Leavis, *Education and the University*, p. 49.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> Thompson, ‘Progressive Schools’, *Scrutiny*, 3 (1934), 208-15 (209); ‘Hail Butler!’, *Scrutiny*, 13 (1945), 72-73 (73).

<sup>42</sup> Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), p. 288.

Supposedly disinterested, Culture had to move within and adapt to shifting meanings of gender and sexuality to keep still. If mere mention of the *News of the World* was enough to denote collapse, then Oscar Wilde was the unspeakable shadow here. Alan Sinfield has written on how ideological work fermenting for two decades broke surface in the Wilde trials: 1895 was the point of rupture when ‘the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism, which Wilde was perceived, variously, as instantiating was transformed into a brilliantly precise image’.<sup>43</sup> Arnold’s Culture had been overtly homosocial, whereas post-Wilde acolytes had to repudiate the new connotations of effeminacy and homosexuality attendant on cultural work. The moral ‘muscularity’ of Leavisism was a pre-emptive reflex against raised eyebrows, but it was also class defiance against the Bloomsbury faction that wore a relative lack of sexual inhibition as a mark its social power. In a footnote to ‘The Institution of Henry James’ (1947), Q.D. Leavis berated Max Beerbohm’s ‘elegant triviality’. An Oxbridge afterworld was being contested: ‘the cult of it is historically explicable as a result of Oscar Wilde’s impact on Oxford [... and if] Oxford, King’s College Cambridge, and their Bloomsbury affiliations appear to be still culturally in the Wilde phase, the rest of England isn’t’.<sup>44</sup> *Scrutiny* claimed the heteronormative to attack leisure-class sensibilities. The Leavises suffered in this bitter cultural politics. In letters to T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound railed against the ‘Leavis louse’, ‘Leavis jew ooze’, his ‘anglo-yittisch and other diseased putrid secretions’ (Q.D. Leavis was rejected by her Orthodox family when she married).<sup>45</sup>

Culture had been whipped up by Arnold and hardened by Leavis into a formidable *Kulturpessimismus*. Its determinism had become the ‘kind of madness’ Raymond Williams warned against, where ‘a sense of the difficulties can depress us into a vague and indifferent state in which no necessary factors, not only hypothetically but practically, can be admitted to exist’.<sup>46</sup> But metacultural constants will be constants. Leavis’s pamphlet is instructive. The metaphor

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<sup>43</sup> Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the queer moment* (London: Cassell, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Q.D. Leavis, ‘The Institution of Henry James’, *Scrutiny*, 15 (1947), 68-74, reprinted in *A Selection from Scrutiny, Volume 2*, ed. F.R. Leavis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 107-14 (p. 107).

<sup>45</sup> Carole Seymour-Jones, *Painted Shadow: A life of Vivienne Eliot* (London: Robinson, 2001), p. 485.

<sup>46</sup> Williams, *Keywords*, p. 101.

structuring *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* played the gold standard off the touchstone of language: ‘The currency’ of Culture, Leavis warned, ‘has been debased and inflated’—‘The accepted valuations are a kind of paper currency based upon a very small proportion of gold’ (pp. 12, 14). The unstated reference was the Wall Street Crash of October 1929. London was relatively insulated throughout 1930, but Leavis foresaw Sterling’s withdrawal from the gold standard (the British banking system collapsed in 1933). It might be said that Leavis was offering language as an alternative standard of value to the edifice of capitalism. At close range, however, the appeal is not for a revolution through Culture but to a mirage, the restoration of an earlier phase of capitalism where the penny-counting shopkeeper knew gold when he held it and the speculative financier, a trafficker of paper-based fictions, had no place.

Despite itself, the achievement of Leavisism was that high cultural criticism secured a foothold within the university humanities and selective schooling by the early postwar years. Instituted in this way, the systematisation of the unsystematisable developed by Arnold and Leavis became the educational commonsense of scholarship-winners drawn into the compass of Culture from working-class backgrounds. There was, then, another way of life and a different educational institution to champion: working-class living and the postwar grammar school. An account that could relate new conditions to old traditions was certain to fly.

#### LITERACY, WORKING-CLASS CULTURE AND THE EDUCATION WELFARE STATE

Richard Hoggart’s portrait of the scholarship boy appeared in the penultimate chapter of *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of working-class life with special reference to publications and entertainments*, published by Chatto and Windus in 1957 and Penguin in 1958.<sup>47</sup> The depiction was qualified as exaggerated, abstracted, even wilfully generalised due to the broad sweep of lives, from the ‘normal’ to the ‘psychotic’, it related (p. 292). The common denominator was the scholarship boy’s underlying ‘sense of loss’, an emotional condition piqued by imaginative,

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of working-class life with special reference to publications and entertainments* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958)—all page references for this work feature in the main text.

intellectual self-awareness of alienhood. More specifically, it was an unremitting 'sense of no longer belonging to any group', or (in a key phrase) forever existing 'at the friction-point of two cultures' (pp. 291-2). As a group, the chapter's title announced, these were 'The Uprooted and the Anxious'. The boy marked out for his 'brains' was 'progressively cut off from the ordinary life of his group', excluded from his male peers and increasingly thrown in with the 'women of the house' (pp. 294-5). Divisions magnified themselves. At first the boy was initiated into a foreign world of learning; wearing dowdy hand-me-downs, he felt the stigma of a conspicuous working-class background within the otherwise middle-class environment of the grammar school. Soon enough, accents exchanged, 'He begins to see life, for as far as he can envisage it, as a series of hurdle-jumps, the hurdles of scholarships'. He begins to see 'life as a ladder' (pp. 296-7). His tragedy is the painful realisation that he has to live without the unthinking buoyancy of the middle-class public schoolboy; the world, Hoggart lamented, 'cares much for recognizable success, but does not distribute it along the lines on which [the scholarship boy] has been trained to win' (pp. 298-9). The resultant man, he who 'belongs to no class', went to lord his new airs over 'the group that fathered him', is inescapably equivocal: 'He would like to be a citizen of that well-polished, prosperous, cool, book-lined and magazine-discussing world of the successful intelligent middle-class which he glimpses through doorways or feels awkward among on short visits, aware of his grubby finger-nails. With another part of himself he develops an asperity towards that world: he turns up his nose at its self-satisfaction, its earnest social concern, its intelligent coffee-parties, its suave sons at Oxford, and its Mrs Miniver'ish or Mrs Ramsey'ish cultural pretensions'. Arnold's 'The Scholar-Gipsy' (1853) provided the summary; the scholarship boy was caught 'between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born' (pp. 300-2).

The half-biography was, of course, not as inclusive as it made out: 'speak for yourself' would be more than a justified retort to Hoggart's suggestion that all scholarship-winners are snobs. Equally, though, there were mechanisms through which *The Uses of Literacy* could lay claim to the experience of so many. In *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* (1977), Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron demonstrated how dispositions inscribed within everyday practices are capable of accruing linguistic and academic capital against the weight of notional odds. In early years, reward at school is distributed according to proficiency in language; praising children for this ability produces the aspiration to acquire the symbolic capital exemplified by the teacher (the message: 'You could

be me’).<sup>48</sup> Subjective aspirations are funnelled through objective educational structures to realise the original maldistribution of social capital. Pupils and students are subjected to selection processes: they are nominated for exams or they are not (*candidature*), pass or fail (*elimination*) and, if they survive, this repeats into narrower minority ranges of study (*specialisation*). It is the modus operandi of schools to eliminate under-performance and, conveniently, the social attributes associated with low academic attainment. Continued selection will enact a particular logic on each individual. The lower the initial social capital brought to the school gates, the more deference to authority a child will have to display if the relative exclusions of the field are to be overcome.

So, in a progressive and adaptive process of *over-selection*, ‘individuals of the same social class who survive in the system exhibit less and less the career characteristics which have eliminated other members of their category’.<sup>49</sup> Many high achievers from low-status backgrounds developed compensatory strategies that fully internalised the dominant spirit of their respective educational subfields. The idea, we might say, is to personify the selection criteria as a sensibility. This educational success is a poisoned chalice because, by definition, the interests of the afterworld mediated by education move with a spirit contrary to its ‘disinterested’ authentication. There are, then, confusingly, compounding probabilities of success over compounding probabilities of failure, which is to say that fortunes and misfortunes are interrelated yet self-perpetuating trajectories. It means that the tiny proportion of meteoric trajectories where innate ‘talents’ or ‘hard work’ appear to trump the social are, conclusively, the result of social processes. A minority of over-selected products are wholly abstracted geographically, socially and culturally from life as it was experienced on their first day at school. They make for some of the most powerful narratives in Britain today because ‘success stories’ are often deployed to mediate the dominant: ‘I know that life’, the formula goes, ‘but now I know it differently; I know that [insert any regressive measure] is a good thing, and the proof is my example’. Hoggart’s emphases need turning inside out.

Orphaned at eight, Hoggart grew up with his grandmother in Hunslet, a working-class district of back-to-back terraces in industrial Leeds. Like Leavis’s Cambridge,

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<sup>48</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82. For more on over-selection see pp. 73, 91, 103.

an educational trajectory was etched into the landscape of youth; he attended Jack Lane Primary School before winning scholarships at Cockburn Grammar and Leeds University. Acting *in loco parentis*, ‘aspects’ of his working-class culture and its patterns of education formed an all-encompassing familiarity—‘the group that fathered him’, and making ‘a father figure of form-master’ were typical expressions of this (p. 297). Hoggart’s urban ethnography was Leeds read through the lens of practical criticism; the Northern city, in other words, was spun around the interwar’s ‘pseudo-centre’ of language. Dotted literary epigraphs from Greats like Dostoyevsky and Turgenev signposted the superintending authority, *Kulturkritik*. ‘Life’ in the industrial North, Hoggart would later say, had ‘a kind of organic quality’,<sup>50</sup> by which he meant tameness, harmlessness and quaintness. Take, for example, the ‘prostitute called Irene, who liked to have a cup of tea. She was a good sort and would occasionally “give you a blow-through” in the furniture-van at the back, if she was not too tired’. Hoggart quickly adds that he ‘met her only once’ (pp. 97-98).

‘Aspects’ were not necessarily analyses. The superimposition of a Leavisian sensibility on a supposedly uninterrupted ‘working-class life’ utterly bypassed the contortions of British society that determined the time of publication. Hence the value of *The Uses of Literacy*: born two months after the end of the First World War and graduating two months before British involvement in the Second, Hoggart’s opus was a thoroughly *interwar* account of culture and education written, published and having its effect in *postwar* British society, the period when vastly increased numbers of scholarship-winners, its primary readership, came into their own. There was nothing about work, working-class organisation, or even adult education—Hoggart wrote *The Uses of Literacy* at the Department of Adult Education at Hull University. The new found themselves in the old, as Leeds Central Library took on shades of Ipswich; lone men in the reading room ‘sadly recalls those hidden inlets which the smaller detritus of a river eventually reaches, held there in a yeasty scum—old sticks, bits of torn paper, a few withered leaves, a matchbox’ (p. 69). ‘Matthew Arnold must be weeping somewhere’ (p. 169), Hoggart mulled, but therein lay the consolations of discursive continuity.

After the relief of rationing for the majority, any move to re-install pre-WW2 conditions by the ruling class would have invited revolution. Anticipating a

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<sup>50</sup> Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, ‘Working-Class Attitudes’, *NLR*, 1/1 (1960), 26-30 (26).

hollow victory, the Welfare State was the formula whereby the promise of a better world—a move needed, to the horror of the elite, for the war effort—could be kept in such way as to retain the established hierarchy of English class relations. The idea was that in a new pact between capital and labour, the former would create wealth while the latter would be protected by a safety net extending from ‘the cradle to the grave’. Everyone would have access to modest forms of the things previously the sole preserve of high-class life. In short, the masses were invited to view class as lifestyle. The pre-condition was that everyone conceded to the new paternalism.<sup>51</sup> The Butler Act was included in the spate of legislation passed in 1944 to safeguard the status quo. Trailing ‘Free Education For All’, the sexed, gendered and classed distinction was between ‘hands’ and ‘brains’, academicism and cookery/metalwork. The grammar school competed with the public school, though the latter won in advance by dictating the rules of combat; the grammar’s curriculum was Classics, literature and elocution, all executed with a wholesale importation of public-school pomp. Everyone was very open about this. ‘I see grammar school education’, one headmaster told an uncritical Frances Stevens in 1960, ‘very strongly as a matter of *communicating middle-class values to a “new” population*’.<sup>52</sup> The proportion of secondary school pupils in English and Welsh grammars peaked at 38 per cent as early as 1947, and the absolute number of pupils at 726,000 in 1964, the baby-boomer generation.<sup>53</sup> Many, Mulhern records, ‘affirmed that lower-middle class grammar products would now come into possession of *their* England’.<sup>54</sup> Whatever victories there were for postwar class fractions over those dispossessed by their election, the real coup belonged to their public-schooled, neo-Edwardian betters. Harold MacMillan’s Conservative government (1957-1963) was the acme of Etonian nepotism.

In a sense, Hoggart pre-empted MacMillan’s assertion that Britons had ‘never had it so good’ when he diagnosed the new ‘classlessness’ as the process and the condition whereby the working classes became middle-class through consumption. ‘We are becoming culturally classless’ is how he put it in *The Uses of Literacy* (p. 342). In conversation with Raymond Williams (a product of a Welsh interwar grammar school), Hoggart declared that ‘washing-machines, television and the rest’ meant we had to seriously ask where the working class had gone. As if it were

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<sup>51</sup> Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture*, pp. 20, 16, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Frances Stevens, *The Living Tradition: The social and educational assumptions of the grammar school* (London: Hutchinson, 1960), p. 216.

<sup>53</sup> B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 806.

<sup>54</sup> Francis Mulhern, ‘Culture and Authority’, *Critical Quarterly*, 87 (1994), 77-89 (84).

an endangered butterfly, he stressed that one ‘can still find exploitation in England’.<sup>55</sup> In truth, there were more middle-class jobs (Hoggart’s among them) due to the expansion of the State; but the proportion of the working class at university was unaltered, and technological innovations meant lower commodity-prices and more purchases. In short, the working classes were invited to consume the products of their own exploitation, and for the most part they did. Left-Leavisism accommodated what it saw as a trickle-down of affluence because, from its perspective, consumption was counterbalanced by the trickle-down of Culture through education and the subsidised arts: both depended on Welfare arrangements. Affluence and mass culture, regarded as American and Americana, were ‘de-Anglicising’ as well as ‘de-classing’, but they lent left-Leavisite Englishness its force, its new role in postwar Britain. In typical *Kulturkritik* logic, Hoggart’s position was that embourgeoisement was total yet impending, so the scholarship-winner was placed at the forefront of a pre-determined yet increasingly fraught experiential rather than social process. In effect, class was rendered a property of birth as plausible as the prelapsarian urban landscape in which it was interred.

*The Uses of Literacy* was, as Terry Eagleton judges, ‘at once a late document in this old lineage and an early essay in a new one’.<sup>56</sup> Essays like ‘Mrs Leavis and the Dangers of Narrowness’<sup>57</sup> made clear that Hoggart had leapfrogged petit-bourgeois prejudices to become the voice of ‘the people’ in a number of powerful cultural institutions. He was a member of the Pilkington Committee that green-lighted BBC2 in 1964 to curb ITV’s populism (1964), Assistant Director-General of UNESCO (1971-75) and Vice-Chairman of the Arts Council (1976-81). He will undoubtedly be remembered, though, for founding the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham (1964-2002). Things moved fast. During Stuart Hall’s time as director (1968-89), Birmingham comprehensively equalised high and low cultural forms as a corrective to the English ethnocentrism of the Arnold-Leavis-Hoggart platform. The about-change was observed by Hall’s periodic reviews of the new discipline. In 1980, he wrote approvingly on how Cultural Studies had moved ‘from the *what* to the *how* of cultural systems’<sup>58</sup>—that

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<sup>55</sup> Williams and Hoggart, ‘Working Class Attitudes’, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Hoggart, *Speaking to Each Other, Vol. II: About Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), pp. 129-30.

<sup>58</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some problematics and problems’, in *Culture, Media Language: Working papers in cultural studies 1972–79*, eds. Stuart Hall *et al.* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 15-47 (p. 30).



is, from expounding the authority of high Culture to typing the coordinates through which such enunciation was possible. In 1989, with Martin Jacques, he declared that culture is ‘now as “material” as the world’.<sup>59</sup> The equivalence was ostensible—only ‘material’ suffered the indignity of scare quotes. The classic metacultural move of claiming social authority over a field co-extensive with life itself persisted; but, at the same time, Arnold, Leavis and even Hoggart had become personae non gratae. One of the consequences of the shift from the *what* to the *how* of culture is that there has since been no intellectual statement about the role of education in national life to match the *influence* of Arnold, Leavis or Hoggart. On that account, I am turning to the socio-political consensus of late-twentieth-century Britain in which cultural work operated.

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Tony Blair delivered his speech to the pre-election Labour Party Conference on 1 October 1996. ‘Ask me three main priorities for government’, he implored, ‘and I tell you: education, education, education’. A nation’s future was at stake in terms of personal growth (or rather masculinity)—‘give me the boy at 7’, he said, ‘and I’ll give you the man at 70’—and a sense of social justice—‘I want a state education system in Britain so good, so attractive, that the parents choose to put behind us the educational apartheid of the past, the private and state’. ‘Nothing’, he asserted, ‘would do more to break down the class divides that have no place in a modern country in the 21st century’.<sup>60</sup> Blair had boarded at the all-boys Chorister School, Durham, before boarding at the prestigious Fettes College, Edinburgh, the school Ian Fleming chose for James Bond and Captain Britain’s creators thought suitable for their superhero’s moral fortitude.<sup>61</sup> In his resignation speech, Blair accounted for himself as a State-licensed vigilante. He told a postwar story: ‘a young man in the social revolution of the 1960s and 1970s’, he reached ‘political maturity as the Cold War was ending’, and saw his mission ‘sweeping away all the detritus of the past’. He was (and still is) convinced that the decisions he made on behalf of ‘the

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<sup>59</sup> Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, *New Times: The changing face of politics in the 1990s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), p. 238; see Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture*, pp. 114–32.

<sup>60</sup> Frances Rafferty, ‘Blair places schools in foreground of his vision’, *Times Educational Supplement*, 4 October 1996.

<sup>61</sup> See Ian Fleming, *You Only Live Twice* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 252.

greatest nation on earth' should be judged by his own private morality.<sup>62</sup> So much for everyone else.

Blair's memoir *A Journey: My political life* (2010) is casting a shadow over politics because the main parties are desperate to re-capture the election-winning formula that secured three unprecedented Labour victories.<sup>63</sup> As the 'life' of its title suggests, Blair's book continues his trenchantly personalist perspective: 'with an analysis of human beings as my compass; the politics is secondary' (p. 79). Reading Law at Oxford, Blair came to the view that the problem with the Labour old guard was that they cared for people but did not 'feel' like them—left paternalism did 'not "get" aspiration' as Tories did. The self-evident proof was the sentiment of Blair's Conservative father: 'My dad's greatest wish was that I be educated privately, and not just at any old private school; he chose Fettes because he thought and had been told that it was the best in Scotland'. There was no arguing with this: growing up in a Glasgow tenement and becoming a lecturer in Law, Leo Blair had 'escaped class' (pp. 42-43). Class, for Blair, is birth rather than a relation within a mode of production, something to be escaped rather than eradicated. Securing the 2012 Olympic Games for London was selection to boarding school all over again: 'Oddly enough, at that moment I remembered the time when aged twelve, I found out that I had won an exhibition to Fettes, running around our garden in Durham in sheer delight and of course relief, the draining anxiety replaced by joy' (p. 482). Boxing at Fettes is a veiled metaphor for controversial political struggle: the schoolboy did not want to fight but respected himself for doing what he had to do with all his might—he was not a 'wuss' (p. 110).

New Labour's education policy was ultimately inspired by the example set by the public school. In *A Journey*, selective schooling is not superior because of academic or financial selection—like public schools, grammar schools and academies have independence, ethos, identity, flexibility, and leadership and pursue excellence. 'In other words, they believe failure is not inevitable, it is avoidable; and it is their fault if they don't avoid it, not the fault of the "system", the "background of the children" or the "inadequacy of the parents' (p. 597). Some pointed out that Labour had made an election pledge to keep university education free, but the Ivy League demonstrated that 'Those who paid top dollar got the best. Simple as that',

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<sup>62</sup> 'Full text of Tony Blair's resignation speech', *Times*, 10 May 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Tony Blair, *A Journey: My political life* (London: Hutchinson, 2010)—all the page references for this work feature in the main text.

and after the tuition fees were introduced in Britain, ‘It was plainly a fairer system’ (p. 486). Blair was, of course, talking about himself. *A Journey* promised to pay ‘more attention to merit’—indeed, ‘class’ does not have an index entry. Even so: ‘I take an essentially middle-class view of public services, and you can’t understand anything I tried to do to reform them without understanding that’ (p. 272). In effect, the ex-leader of the Labour Party was repeating Arnold’s request that the working classes support the middle-class education of others.

It soon became apparent what an end to the educational apartheid between ‘public and private’ meant for New Labour. David Blunkett had told the 1995 Labour Party Conference: ‘Read my lips. No selection, either by examination or by interview under a Labour government’. As early as January 1996, however, it was announced that Harriet Harman’s son Harry would attend the selective State attended by Blair’s two sons. Diane Abbott—who, as Britain’s first black female MP, has made a career as a living symbol of the fight against inequality—criticised Harman for making ‘the Labour Party look as if we do one thing and say another’. But after sending her own son to a £10,000-a-year school, Abbott pleaded a form of insanity: ‘It is inconsistent, to put it mildly’, she confessed, ‘for someone who believes in a fairer and more egalitarian society to send their child to a fee-paying school’—she described her position as ‘Intellectually incoherent’ and ‘indefensible’.<sup>64</sup> *Fait accompli*: the episode advertised a state of affairs where the private exercise of financial power did not have to explain itself within the conventional terms of participatory politics. Abbott’s son joined the 7 per cent of children in receipt of a private education. New Labour was so successful in shifting the debate away from the existence of selection to its extension that Blunkett brushed off his ‘Read my lips’ speech as such an ‘obvious’ parody of George H.W. Bush that no-one should have taken it seriously.<sup>65</sup> An end to the ‘public and private’ divide would be at the former’s expense.

Blair—not, of course, a victim of the ‘bog-standard comprehensive’ (a put-down attributable to his boorish press secretary, Alastair Campbell)—set about extending the market choice sanctified by his own elite private education. The aim of policy was to woo North London professionals ‘back’ to a State sector (the Blairs being the model) by providing a superior State product. In one sense it was

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<sup>64</sup> Matt Born, ‘Abbott says that school decision is indefensible’, *Daily Telegraph*, 1 November 2003.

<sup>65</sup> Martin Bentham, ‘Our war against grammars is over, says Blunkett; “Read my lips” selection pledge was “a joke”’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 12 March 2000.

self-defeating because, by definition, the State cannot trump the social exclusivity provided by the private sector. Research by the Institute of Fiscal Studies has found that despite a fee increase of 83 per cent in real terms between 1992 and 2008, it takes a rise of five per cent more State schools achieving five A\* to C grades at GCSE for public-school enrolment to fall by 0.3 per cent.<sup>66</sup> As a gesture within a class project, though, the ostensible attempt to surpass the private sector at its own game has been a highly successful means of reinforcing and extending a market credo throughout the State sector. Far from anomalous, the natural habitat of the new lingua franca is the so-called 'Independent School'. Alan Smithers, Professor of Education at Buckingham, relentlessly criticises the 'State monopoly' in school and university provision as if private schools did not exist, as if he did not work at the UK's first private university.<sup>67</sup>

The appeal to parental choice espoused the market philosophy that has been installed at the heart of British government practice since the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. 'Neoliberalism', David Harvey explains, 'is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade'. The first priority of the neoliberal State is vigorous intervention to reconfigure present conditions to the demands of capital accumulation—this involves the cultivation of 'investment climates' and the privatisation of public assets. The second priority of the State is to withdraw from the market out of respect for its claim to auto-regulate prices in line with the self-determined wants of citizens—manipulation in the market against this august end is slammed as the 'interference' of a special-interest group over the consumer's natural rights.<sup>68</sup> There is a significant contradiction between the crusading interventionism of State power demanded by the first duty and the splendid isolation of entrepreneurial culture demanded by the second. Force, we might say, until right is ready.

The balance sheet of thirty years of neoliberalism dashes any argument that it is motivated by or evinces pure meliorism. As the evidence collated by Harvey

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<sup>66</sup> Chris Ryan and Luke Sibieta, *Private Schooling in the UK and Australia* (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Alan Smithers and Pamela Robinson, *Worlds Apart: Social variation among schools* (London: Sutton, 2010), p. i.

<sup>68</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 2.

demonstrates, whenever the contradiction between market ideals and naked self-interest is exposed during economic crises, the former are 'either abandoned or become so twisted as to be unrecognizable'.<sup>69</sup> In practice, free-market philosophy cannot explain why the pre-condition of private investment in public services is the privatisation of profit and the nationalisation of risk. Put another way, there is no explanation for why some consumers are more equal than others to the point where a select few hold the sacrosanct consumer-polity of neoliberal theory at perpetual ransom. Societies where neoliberal reform has been influential are now marked by massive upward redistributions of wealth, low-to-stagnant rates of growth and desultory social planning due to the privatisation of services, not to mention deep and pervasive unhappiness.<sup>70</sup> In what the authors of one collection of critical essays call 'Feelbad Britain', the richest 10 per cent are now over 100 times better off than the poorest 10 per cent.<sup>71</sup>

Neoliberalism is not a revolution that liberates citizens from class but the restoration of a capitalist class power that had its worst excesses curtailed by the postwar compact. British social relations had been characterised by promises of individual rather than collective ascent into 'democracy' long before the Second World War; however, by 1944 wholesale enfranchisement became the imperative of an elite desperate to avoid revolution. The Welfare State was rationalised as the triumph of human mutuality. What would now be called the traditional Labour Party found its calling. Keynesianism sought, however, to manage the unmanageable. Sterling was hit by balance-of-payment crises in 1947, 1949, 1951, 1955, 1957, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1972, 1975 and 1976. In the last, the Republican-led US intervened through the IMF to curb the spending of a Labour government committed to public expenditure. Britain has been, in effect, monetarist ever since. The political representatives of labour were purposefully set against labour, but the New Right narrative is that the turbulence of the 1970s was internal to left mentalities, a *folie à deux* between spineless Labour Party leadership and bolshie working-class greed. That narrative has yet to come unstuck.

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<sup>69</sup> Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> See Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why equal societies nearly always do better* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> *Feelbad Britain: How to make it better*, eds. Pat Devine, Andrew Permain and David Purdey (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2009); Amelia Gentleman and Hélène Mulholland, 'Unequal Britain', *Guardian*, 27 January 2010.

New Labour spun a ‘centre-left’ inflection of that neoliberal story, a capitalism without capitalism whereby the dirty work of the Thatcher Revolution—anti-union legislation (1980-93), the Miners’ Strike (1984-85), ‘de-regulation’ of the City (1986)—became the springboard for a new Britain purged of nastiness. The weakness of the Conservative Party was its palpable disdain for the polity. Sir Keith Joseph, Thatcher’s man at Education between 1981 and 1986, condemned the State education system for existing: ‘We have a bloody state system I wish we hadn’t got’, he told Stephen Bell in 1989; ‘I wish we’d taken a different route in 1870. We got the ruddy state involved. I don’t want it’.<sup>72</sup> A crucial fraction of the electorate wanted redemption. Blair vows that politics was secondary to his analysis of human beings, but the New Labour ‘Project’ (as insiders called it) relied on the focus group analysis of pollster Philip Gould to fine-tune a cutthroat pragmatism. Focus group analysis boiled down the concerns of middle-class, particularly female voters in all-decisive marginal constituencies to the discord felt between drives for economic growth (which these voters wanted) and a sense of community (which they wanted to resuscitate). New Labour’s aim was ‘to conflate both concepts into one unifying idea’, and the answer, re-branding Blair as the nation’s savoir,<sup>73</sup> has been the mould for British politics ever since. Hence the ‘T’ of the glossy, magazine-like 1997 Labour Party Manifesto: ‘I want a society in which ambition and compassion are seen as partners not opposites—where we value public service as well as material wealth’ (education was the ‘number one priority’).<sup>74</sup> Gould, political scientist Colin Leys summarises, brought ‘a single-minded commitment to make Labour appealing to the legitimate aspirations of intelligent victims of secondary modern schooling (of which he was one), no matter what it cost in pandering to their racist and socially authoritarian prejudices’.<sup>75</sup>

The injunction to ‘choose’ away educational inequality, then, appealed to social inequality. In 2009, Alan Milburn, speaking as Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, advocated a voucher-based education system that would ‘give

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<sup>72</sup> Stephen J. Ball, *The Education Debate* (Bristol: Polity, 2008), p. 64.

<sup>73</sup> Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution: How the modernisers saved the Labour Party* (London: Abacus, 1999), p. 343, cit. Colin Leys, *Market-Driven Politics: Neoliberal democracy and the public interest* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 77.

<sup>74</sup> The Labour Party, *New Labour: Because Britain deserves better* (London: Labour Party, 1997), reprinted in *Labour Party General Election Manifestos 1900-1997*, ed. Iain Dale (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 343-82 (p. 347).

<sup>75</sup> Leys, *Market-Driven Politics*, p. 240.

parents the keys to a better school'.<sup>76</sup> The working-class had been priced out of the catchment areas of 'good' schools since the Conservative's privatisation of the housing stock in the early 1980s. The 1997 Manifesto pledged that 'all parents should be offered real choice through good quality schools',<sup>77</sup> but if children cannot choose their parents, neither can they choose their parent-consumers. Opening up 'choice' opened up a field of educational inequality to greater disparities, often reconfiguring the inequalities inherited from Welfare Britain. About a third of UK grammars are in Northern Ireland, there are none in Scotland and Wales, whilst English grammars are mostly located in the Home Counties (over a quarter are in Kent alone). New Labour's opposition to the Eleven Plus was not the same as opposition to grammar education; allowing 'local parents' to choose their admissions policies guaranteed, in effect, the selective State education of 4 per cent of the population in areas of exceptionally high house prices. 'Church schools' were to 'retain their distinctive religious ethos'.<sup>78</sup> Rebranded 'faith schools', this segregation, unthinkable in any other branch of civic life, exists to manipulate admissions.

With 'Zero tolerance of underperformance' promised in 1997,<sup>79</sup> most schools have not been so lucky. The statement 'poverty is no excuse for failure' has, in its various paraphrases, accompanied the annual publication of school league table results for England and Wales since 1998. Toughening against critics, Blunkett dismissed so-called 'cynics' who read 'socio-economic' factors into the results; 'It is poverty of aspiration and not poverty of income', the clarification ran, 'which prevents a child from taking full advantage of their talent'.<sup>80</sup> Talent, not a product of education, was taken for granted. A hardening of attitudes was directly proportionate to New Labour's failings. In January 2009, Secretary for Children, Schools and Families Ed Balls threatened head teachers with the supposed panacea of academy status if they continued to indulge in 'external' rationalisations for their own lack of inspiring 'leadership'—'an excuses culture', he warned, 'is still there in some communities and that's unacceptable'.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Alan Milburn, 'Give parents the keys to a better school', *Guardian*, 20 May 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Labour, *New Labour*, p. 350.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>79</sup> p. 350.

<sup>80</sup> John Carvell, 'Poverty is no excuse for failure, says Blunkett', *Guardian*, 2 March 2000.

<sup>81</sup> Graeme Paton, 'School League Tables 2009', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 January 2009.

The effects of turning ‘universities from ivory towers into business partners’ (Peter Mandelson, 1998) are too numerous and too familiar to list here,<sup>82</sup> so I will restrict myself to brief observations regarding historical context, class power and new configurations of disinterest. Universities are now hailed as the engines of the ‘Knowledge Economy’, a phantasm that has its roots in so-called ‘post-industrial’ debates that, since the 1950s, have extrapolated the end of ‘bricks-and-mortar’ economies from the cutting-edge appearance of highly sophisticated centres of capitalist uneven development. By the late-90s, the prospect of an ‘e-world’ inflated then burst the ‘dot-com’ bubble (the FTSE and the NASDAQ still languish far below their respective highs of 30 December 1999 and 10 March 2000.) With nobody of strategic importance questioning who really benefits from the measures implemented in the name of the ‘Knowledge Economy’, implacable faith in its ‘globaldegook’ continues. The transformation of the British university campus into a World-Class Centre of Excellence has gone hand in glove with a consolidation of middle-class power within Higher Education (HE). All else being equal (including grades), pupils from the top 20 per cent of homes in England on a scale of social advantage are 7 times more likely to go to the most select universities than the poorest 40 per cent, a significant widening during the ‘Knowledge Economy’ years.<sup>83</sup> The introduction and escalation of top-up fees has been a triumph for the middle classes able and willing to buy themselves out of competition in HE as they do in secondary schooling. In the overproduction of dispositions for available positions, the price for general middle-class advantage is the sacrifice of some to the constant precarity of the remainder. The graduate population is too desperately corporatist and indebted to resist; by not campaigning against the principle of tuition fees, the National Union of Students has, in effect, conceded everything.

## THE THESIS

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<sup>82</sup> Peter Mandelson, speech to the CBI, London, 2 November 1998, cit. Jonathan Rutherford, ‘Cultural Studies in the Corporate University’, *Cultural Studies*, 19 (2005), 297-317. For more on the British situation see Alex Callinicos, *Universities in a Neoliberal World* (London: Bookmarks, 2006). Gaye Tuchman offers a North American perspective in *Wannabe U: Inside the corporate university* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>83</sup> Jessica Shepherd, ‘Rich families widen “gulf” in access to top universities’, *Guardian*, 19 May 2010.



The last two decades of the British twentieth century followed a decisive break with the postwar compact yet preceded the frictionless hegemony of the latter Blair years. In that time, a neoliberal class project transformed Britain against backwashes of embedded liberalism and the consequences of market failure. Neither purely neoliberal in feel nor fully denuded of a Welfare-ist apparatus, distinctions blurred. By the early 90s, a centre-left narrative was appropriating and exploiting postwar hopes and disappointments. An electorate wary of privatisation acquiesced to the neoliberal reform of public services because it was still deeply attached to the postwar promise of a better world administered by the State. The polity became desperate for a rejuvenation of collective endeavour but allergic to the means; tax, unionisation and the curbing of middle-class market freedoms. Meanwhile, the mercuriality of the Thatcher-Blair Revolution resisted any easy transposition of political conflict into a straight fight between ‘patrician’ high Culture and ‘individualist’ popular cultural forms. As metacultural forms, *Kulturkritik* and intellectual apologies for various modes of consumption existed to wrest social authority *away* from the political sphere. The effects of these cultural texts in that political world, therefore, were highly contradictory. High Culture was aligned with Welfare-ism in the public imagination because of the monetarist climate; but *Kulturkritik* was ultimately opposed to Consensus Britain for blotting out the memory of prelapsarian pasts. Likewise, the consumption of ‘popular entertainments’ preceded Welfare Britain, but it had become associated with postwar affluence and, in turn, it was conducive to neoliberal expressions of self-determination. The late-twentieth century became increasingly oblivious to the shadow cast by figures like Arnold, Leavis and Hoggart. However complex or vulgar, though, texts were reproducing the irresolution of the period. In the educational afterworlds of neoliberal Britain, political, cultural and sexual developments drew on, enjoined and in many ways escalated the dizzying crisscross of antagonisms and cross-identifications that had long marked British society since the rise of capitalist class relations.

The following chapters are concerned with the supposedly redundant problem of class within those new yet familiar configurations. This thesis develops a number of *perspectives* that look out over the educational afterworlds of neoliberal Britain from various positions of privilege within it. The reasoning behind this is that the relations expounded are dialectical but reading is linear, so texts have been selected and the chapters constructed in a way that, I hope, offers the reader a number of ‘narrative threads’. I am anxious not to impose a ‘way of reading’ that would limit

in advance the productive connections the reader may make, so I will briefly outline four major features.

First, the *structure* of a response is provided by educational inequality. In terms of primary subject matter, the thesis moves down through the social advantage entrenched in the tiers of the British education system: Chapter 1 begins with super-elite schooling; Chapter 2 examines the relationship between the public and grammar school; Chapter 3 considers the Redbrick University; until, in Chapter 4, we reach a depiction of working-class illiteracy. It is a mark of the power of selection in education, however, that it directly determines the cultural production of the first chapter as it does the last—all principal authors are, one way or another, products of selective education.

Second, institutional histories are the *guiding points of entry* into the different social, cultural and political spheres of neoliberal Britain. Each chapter traces a determination that leads back to a pre-neoliberal past. The thesis encompasses, therefore, the histories of ‘cultural’ institutions—the ‘dreamy’ public school, the lettered grammar school, the BBC, the Arts Council, subsidised, fringe and commercialised theatre—and their various facilitations—nineteenth-century administrative reform, imperial service, Welfare-ism, the Conservative Party, New Labour, HE and the housing market. Geographically speaking, the chapters brush against the London-centrism of the subject matter by taking the educational afterworld back to Empire, provincial life and ‘feeder’ educational institutions. Curiously and unintentionally, this means that Magdalen College, Oxford, features at regular intervals; Hull University features heavily towards the end of the thesis.

Third, a *transfer point* within the educational afterworld hones discussion. Mainstream gay male subculture has been chosen because it is a marginal constituency of British society whose fortunes are, in many ways, struck through with the same defining contradictions as neoliberal Britain in general (I say more about this shortly). I want to stress that this focus is not to the neglect of women or heterosexuality; in fact, more often than not, female heterosexuality is decisive.

Fourth, the chapters roughly follow the *chronology* of neoliberal Britain, or at least the years of its implementation and consolidation. In terms of setting, the chapters cover, respectively, 1983, 1983-1986, 1996-97 and 1993/1999-2001. (I am not so much concerned with the period after New Labour’s ‘quiet’ landslide of 2001

because, it would seem to me, the Millennial *Gimme Gimme Gimme* captures that time.) The value of *The Swimming-Pool Library* for the first chapter is that its synoptic reading of the British twentieth century is an opportunity to explore the long development and intersection of the State apparatus and gay male subculture. The opening Hollinghurst chapter, then, develops themes and introduces commercialised sexuality as a preoccupation for the remainder of the thesis. The conclusion will offer a theoretical development of the educational afterworld, reflect on the present thesis and consider its possible futures.

## The Creative Uses of History

Alan Hollinghurst's debut novel *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988) still resists easy summary. The author told *Guardian* writer Nicholas de Jongh that its defining concepts took shape during the writing of his Oxford M.Litt dissertation; submitted eight years previously, *The Creative Uses of Homosexuality* examined the works of E.M. Forster, L.P. Hartley and Ronald Firbank.<sup>1</sup> In hindsight, the dissertation teems with the obdurate complexities Hollinghurst was in the business of re-articulating against the presiding utilitarianism of the 1980s. The novel begins by confronting the reader with a near yet pre-Aids past. Will Beckwith, the first-person narrator, is a gay rake cruising London in the summer of 1983. He resuscitates an octogenarian lord in a Kensington Park toilet using the first-aid techniques he learned at Winchester College. The peer, Lord Charles Nantwich (also a Wykehamist, an alumnus of Winchester), asks his saviour to edit and publish his diaries on his behalf. Reading reminiscences of same-sex devotion at Winchester and adoration for black men on imperial service in East Africa, Will begins to reflect on his own Dionysian public-school life and starts viewing his participation in gay male subculture in a different light. A deliberately withheld last box of papers, however, reveals that Will's grandfather, Lord Denis Beckwith, was instrumental in Nantwich's imprisonment for homosexuality in 1954. History irrupts as the unveiling of formative contradictions: on the one hand, Charles is, like Will, a Wykehamist connoisseur of black men; on the other, 'Lord B's' financial investments drive Will's consumptions of mainstream gay subculture. From this perspective, the novel is testing the relative power of bourgeois family interests and public school subculture in late-twentieth-century Britain. No ready answers are forthcoming: Hollinghurst, like the Forster of his study, 'delights in playing with and dissolving moral imponderables, blowing up a haze of suggestions about what his characters should do, how they should most profitably interpret their lives'.<sup>2</sup> But by drawing mainstream gay subculture back

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, 'The Deep End', *Guardian*, 27 February 1988; Alan Hollinghurst, *The Creative Uses of Homosexuality in the Fiction of E.M. Forster, L.P. Hartley and Ronald Firbank* (unpublished M.Litt. thesis, University of Oxford, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Hollinghurst, *Creative Uses of Homosexuality*, p. 17.

into the society of his thesis, that of homophile, public-schooled Oxbridge literary types, Hollinghurst, educated at Canford and Magdalen College, Oxford, was intervening in an educational afterworld.

Hollinghurst's approach may appear strange for a homosexual writer during, in the words of de Jongh, 'witch-hunting Clause 28 times'. The novel intervened on the understanding that subculture has been 'forced into stylised, ritualised environments' ever since the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, conditions that had proven incapable of sustaining a knowledge and appreciation of the fight against 'cruel and repressive behaviour' that made sexual freedoms possible. It was about the place of minorities in postwar British society: 'In 1954, the year I was born, there was the beginning of a gay pogrom', Hollinghurst told de Jongh, 'and also the first fairly organised hostility and violence against coloured immigrants'. Yet the period in which this tension between excess and struggle was most pronounced had passed. The author wanted to indicate 'that on the one hand it would be fantastically thrilling—that hedonistic period between 1967 and 1983 when people could do what they wanted—and on the other there would be a human cost. Grave effects would impinge'. If the aim, though, was 'to show a gay world, though opening out, self-contained with its own laws and tradition, but also part of the rest of life', everything ultimately depended on the ideological assumptions invested in 'life'. A weighty warning suggested a vision of life by negation. 'It's very easy to feel paranoid and I try to avoid it', Hollinghurst said; 'But there is a general sense of a creeping totalitarianism. It's as if homosexuality were some kind of political creed. It's an absurd idea'. The point is that Hollinghurst could avoid 'totalitarianism' because of his middle-class freedoms. It was unclear whether he meant 'cruel or repressive behaviour' (the Far Right and/or the State), 'political creeds' (left reactions to that persecution from within subculture) or the systematisation of gay culture itself. This is significant because, as the strongest words of the interview, the distinctions between culture, politics and sexuality became as blurred as they were rigidly apolitical. In contrast, Hollinghurst's approach, to 'Cross frontiers of races and classes' through writing, presented itself as neutral and correct in equal measure.

This chapter is about *The Swimming-Pool Library's* entanglement in ongoing debates about authority, culture and sexuality in British life. The material is approached in two stages. The first half of the chapter is a history of the novel's 'Table of Contents', which is to say the *longue durée* of the administrative elite, public-school education and homosexual subculture. I have tried to do this in such

a way as to bring out the detail of the novel; the public school system, for example, is viewed through the idiosyncrasy of Winchester. The link between the universal and particular, though, is eroded as the novel's twentieth century progresses, until gay subculture is depicted as a featureless underworld. I belabor the point because it explains why Peter Gowan's account of nineteenth-century administrative reform is so useful for what I am trying to do. In the words of Tariq Ali, Gowan's 'starting point, as always, was that, since policy-making in state executives and multilateral organisations is largely closed to public scrutiny, to understand how state power is being wielded, and to what ends, requires delving into the detail of backstage negotiations and "mapping back" onto the *cui bono* of policy outcomes'.<sup>3</sup> As I see it, Gowan unmasked the self-interest in high office exposed, in its own literary fashion, by *The Swimming-Pool Library*. But as Gowan was the first to admit, 'Analytical work' such as his 'has narrow parameters—it's confined to particular times and particular spaces'.<sup>4</sup> The work of David T. Evans is productive and limited for the opposite reasons: its typification of commercialised subculture in the 1990s as symbolic of marketised society overstates, it would seem to me, the blanket portrayal of gay settings and the annulment of political agency Hollinghurst anticipates. At the same time, however, the acumen of Evans and Hollinghurst derives from a resolve to read sexual life through the lens of commodification. The second half of the chapter builds on these partial accounts to examine passages from *The Swimming Pool Library* that stage that accumulated history. This means conveying and analysing, in turn, Will's dissipation, the intrusion of history in the guise of the diary extracts and, finally, its effect.

## NORTHCOTE-TREVELYAN REFORM

Peter Gowan's 'The Origins of the Administrative Elite' (1987) was spurred by an impatience with the historiographic literature on nineteenth-century reform: the inattention to class was in direct disproportion to how elites at the time discussed the minutiae of policy in explicit class terms.<sup>5</sup> Fabian writers contested the Toryist presumption that the administrative apparatus was the State's response to the charitable goodwill of the Victorian middle classes. In contrast, Fabianism believed that the good society was the result of social engineering by an intellectual elite. So

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<sup>3</sup> Tariq Ali, 'Death of a Comrade', *NLR*, 2/59 (2009), 39-48 (46).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gowan, 'The Ways of the World', *NLR*, 2/59 (2009), 51-70 (63).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Gowan, 'The Origins of the British Administrative Elite', *NLR*, 1/162 (1987), 4-34 (4-7)—all further page references for this article feature in the main text.

Toryists, believing that the State follows society, decried any distension beyond a core nucleus of State functions as interference in the lives of citizens, those best placed to know their interests. Meanwhile, Fabians demanded that enlightened government intervene to save the public from itself. Gowan pinpointed the agreement underlying the disagreement. Bourgeois libertarians and bourgeois reformers shared the view that society threw up a series of unstructured problems that elites could always fix with new solutions. Under the Tory-Fabian consensus, the overall structure of society was guaranteed by the question ‘how to govern the public?’ because it endlessly deferred the possibility of the public governing itself. Class inequalities were denied, and democracy was contained by the platitudes of ‘modernisation’. The target of an alternative left analysis, then, was a split narrative of British rule as an uncomplicated, bloodless trajectory that enjoyed tacit cross-class consent (4-7).

Gowan’s starting-point was the Northcote-Trevelyan Report, a twenty-page document published in 1853. Six tenets for a permanent administrative caste were proposed: (i) an internal division between intellectual and day-to-day operations; (ii) appointment by merit rather than patronage; (iii) recruitment for life; (iv) the use of examinations; (v) the furtherance of a liberal Oxbridge curriculum, allowing direct recruitment from the old universities without intermediary training; (vi) cross-departmental appointments to bind the civil service into a cohesive force. The obvious winners were public-schooled Oxbridge products, lending a compelling plausibility to Hans Mueller’s 1983 thesis that Northcote-Trevelyan reform was the work of an ‘inter-institutional clique’.<sup>6</sup> All the major actors were public-schooled Oxbridge. Of the conspiratorial Treasury and Education departments, the latter proved the most amenable to nepotism; Matthew Arnold’s appointment there in 1851 was the success of a Balliol network (by the early 1850s, anyone who was anyone at Education had been taught by Benjamin Jowett). Sir George Kekewich remembered the educational afterworld as a direct extension of a liberal Oxbridge education: the Education Department was ‘exactly the same sort of society that is to be found in any college Common Room. They were scholars, poets, philosophers and musicians, etc. and they were reading to discuss—and to discuss well—any subject under the sun except education’ (12). Religious and conservative, Oxford was being marginalised by an agnostic metropolitan set that took its cue from Benthamism, the utilitarian creed

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<sup>6</sup> Hans Eberhard Mueller, *Bureaucracy, Education and Monopoly: Civil service reforms in Prussia and England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

propagated at University College London. Benthamites had been dominant in Parliament since the 1832 Reform Act. Mueller's thesis argued that the public schools, Oxbridge and the civil service gradually reconfigured themselves to the opportunities made available through this self-reproducing fraternity. The problem was that the argument tended towards an educational determinism; it could not explain, for instance, why the middle classes did not want the small number of jobs available, or why the Report was shelved after comprehensive ridicule in 1854.

An answer as to why something emergent in 1853-54 triumphed in 1870 lay in the nature of the Coleridgean conservatism that inspired reformers. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, like William Wordsworth, John Henry Newman and Matthew Arnold, was a leading nineteenth-century poet-conservative; for these men, the nub of the affinity between poetry and conservatism was that 'inner', natural and real emotional ties were superior to 'outer', artificial and abstract impositions. Coleridge argued that all problems were 'resolvable into the overbalance of the *commercial spirit in consequence of the absence or weakness of the counter-weights*', by which he meant the relative weakness of the powers invested in land and religion over industrial and financial capital.<sup>7</sup>

Like Arnold, Coleridge was not an enemy of commerce, industry, the world of money: he was no more anti-capitalist than Burke had been before him. But he was bitterly opposed to the spirit of capitalism being allowed to become the dominant ethic in national life: there must, he argued, be an equilibrium between the forces of permanence—embodied above all in the landed interest—and the forces of movement and dynamism, which included commerce. (25.)

Class, a function dictated by birth, meant that it was right that the majority should be refused the vote. Social problems were symptoms that individuals were violating their obligations to the organic whole. The Coleridgean prospectus, then, called for internal reform within the aristocracy. The plan was that consensual relations would lock into place throughout society once the upper class was orientated back towards its natural purpose. Antipathy towards 'democracy' had targeted the ambitions of what Coleridge called the 'shopkeeper' class, so when the Northcote-Trevelyan manifesto was presented to the same class, now dominant in Parliament, the Philistine reaction was unsurprising. The middle classes had

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons* (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), pp. 188-9.



nothing to lose by routing a bill that, by challenging Parliamentary patronage, accused it of corruption. Sir James Stephen criticised the Report as the creation of ‘statesmen in disguise’ (31).

The volte-face was secured during the 1860s when a cross-party elite realised that *‘winning the rising middle classes away from any class coalition with the radical democrats among the workers’* was the only way to preclude revolution (19). Parliament abdicated the power of patronage to take State functions out of the reach of new arrivals. It was understood that there had to be some appearance of democracy within the class system as it stood to legitimise this Barbarian-Philistine pact, and Coleridgean conservatism provided the necessary meritocratic gloss: birth meant that the gentry class was the best for the job. Examinations adapted to Oxbridge syllabi opened up the civil service to a field of talent on terms that effectively closed down candidature to all but gentry sensibilities. The grip of the gentry class on Oxbridge was unchallenged and its social gaze was fixed upwards, defending landed interests whilst dependent on paid employment. Northcote-Trevelyan reform was instituted in 1870, then, because it offered a positive alternative to Benthamism once its class base could no longer act unilaterally (laissez-faire capitalism promised destabilisation that would, in the circumstances, have been ‘a leap in the dark’ too far). The symbolic personage of this new order, the gentlemanly civil servant, governed, it was said, through personal gravitas rather than institutional directive. Mueller’s education thesis was adapted: the ineluctable question of the time, *‘what type of central mechanism should be constructed in Britain’* (14), served a class project that, eventually, displaced the locus of power within the State in favour of elite educational institutions, the gentry class, and (ultimately) the status quo. We rejoin Gowan later.

## THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Education sealed the new political pact. The ten-fold expansion of the public school system after the Second Reform Act was also its transformation: the public schools could be discussed as a ‘system’ for the first time and, as such, intense ideological effort was expended characterising this highest of echelons as

unsystematisable.<sup>8</sup> Thus the late-Victorian and Edwardian public school sustained a full-blown cult of itself. Public school narratives sealed private education off from reality to construct blissful adolescences; one such narrative, *The Jolliest Term on Record*, was published in wartime (1915).<sup>9</sup> The terms of the public school's social formation were introjected into the appearances of a mysticised residuum. This is H.B. Gray, an ex-employee of Winchester, writing from his post in British Columbia in 1913:

The English Public School is a deposit resulting from the *mutual attrition* of human ingredients, *brought together* by the fortuitous concourse of atoms, which *admit certain social affinities and reject others*, and which, through the action of certain solvents such as time and atmosphere, are precipitated in a *form of crystallisation* known as a 'public school'. The action of the said solvents gives off a certain 'spirit', which finds its analogue in adult English 'society'.<sup>10</sup>

The public school system was, though, a very real jockeying for power. Arriviste families, cowed by economic depression and baulking at working-class agency, incorporated themselves en masse. In reaction, an aristocratic contingent, penetrable by only the most powerful representatives of capital, overrode any claim to social parity by retreating into the oldest public schools. George MacDonald Fraser, writing as late as 1977, knew that the 'spirit' Gray spoke of was trumped by '*mystique*', the savoir faire that opened doors 'where it really matters'. A telepathy-like power of recognition bound those who possessed it: 'When a boy from one of the Great Public Schools becomes P.M.', Fraser explained, 'no one takes a blind bit of notice', but a boy from an nondescript public school will show himself up by looking 'satisfied about this achievement'.<sup>11</sup> Self-effacement was the

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<sup>8</sup> J.S. de Honey, 'The Sinews of Society: The public schools as a "system"', in *The Rise of the Modern Educational System: Structural change and social reproduction*, eds. Detlef K. Müller, Fritz Ringer and Brian Simon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 151-62.

<sup>9</sup> Angela Brazil, *The Jolliest Term on Record* (London: Blackie & Son, 1915); see Jeffrey Richards, *Happiest Days: The public schools in English fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). In his acknowledgements, Richards writes that he has 'no interest to declare' because he 'was educated at a small boy's grammar school' where he 'was profoundly happy'. Selection goes without saying in British education.

<sup>10</sup> H.B. Gray, *The Public Schools and the Empire* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1913), p. 35—emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> George MacDonald Fraser, 'Introduction' to *The World of the Public School*, ed. George MacDonald Fraser (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), pp. 1-12 (pp. 2-4).

mark of a man confident in power; he never condescended to draw attention to himself or the conditions over which he lorded.

New political, social and cultural arrangements meant new systems of boy-government. In the traditional fag system, a younger boy acted as a servant to an older master in return for protection. Writing in 1984, John Chandos ignored the institutional sanction to affirm a Toryism of boy-government; fag and master were 'interdependent members of a traditional system which had evolved, unplanned, out of antiquity'.<sup>12</sup> The romance of fagging was that the proper education of an elite-in-waiting depended on suffering—only those who had experienced oppression could administer sympathetic rule. Fags and masters, though, were undermined by the introduction of a rival system that pandered to the new middle-class customer base. The prefect monitoring that characterised the Edwardian public school was a godsend for institutions when quick reputations as value-for-money investments demanded high levels of discipline at low expense. Pioneered at Marlborough, senior boys organised the 'constant and wholesome recreation of boys' in what headmaster G.E.L. Cotton openly called 'tribes'. This divide-and-rule strategy redirected 'primitive' energies into 'healthy' rather than individualistic competition, the spirit of monopoly rather than laissez-faire capitalism.<sup>13</sup> The promise was that private education would tame sons into effortlessly employable gentlemen. Established racialisms advertised the transformation; as Gray put it, there was 'no conception of Saxon freedom in a public school' once the move from 'Saxon home to Norman feudalism' had been forgotten.<sup>14</sup>

Totalising systems of public visibility had the perverse effect of shifting attention to the unknown sins and abuses committed behind closed doors. Educationalists were divided. Most hoped that boys would be so obsessed with cricket that they would not have the time, inclination or energy to sin. A minority, including Gray, criticised the cult of Athleticism as a regimen that 'imbibed the false creed that a Higher Power delighteth in men's legs'.<sup>15</sup> At Winchester during the 1930s, defaecation was organised so that all boys completed their toilet in full view of all,

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<sup>12</sup> John Chandos, *Boys Together: English public schools, 1800-1864* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> de Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>15</sup> Gray, *Public Schools and the Empire*, p. 193.

one after another—even the music rooms had spyholes.<sup>16</sup> Fears were always vague because they could never be fully expressed. In one of his favourite sermons, ‘The Danger of Young Self-Absorption’, Winchester headmaster Rev. George Ridding criticised the Athlete as a dirty Newfoundland dog who ‘rushes into a house to the dismay of its attendants, shakes itself over everybody and everything, wagging its tail in profound certainty that it is welcome, and ends up clumping round radiantly in the middle of the hearth rug as in full possession of its undoubted rights’.<sup>17</sup> Another sermon warned of ‘summer troubles’, the tendency ‘to drift down stream’ in wasteful ‘free time’, though what that trouble might be was never stated.<sup>18</sup>

Founded by William Wykeham in 1282, Winchester used its status as the oldest public school to fuse a more heterogeneous class demographic than rivals Eton, Harrow, St. Paul’s and Westminster. In a statistical study of Wykehamists (1967), Rupert Wilkinson found that the school had the lowest proportion of pupils who had at least one grandfather in possession of a hereditary title, but also the highest proportion of boys from business families.<sup>19</sup> Winchester was a clash of aristocracy and bourgeois power because its function within elite education was to shroud new money in purchasable timelessness; an aristocracy increasingly in need of vocations (which is to say salaries) acquiesced. Wilkinson found that ‘the hinge between the ethos of the gentleman and the mind of the entrepreneur’ was professional vocation, notably law and the civil service.<sup>20</sup> Day-to-day cohesion was enforced by the ‘emotional conformism’ for which Winchester was notorious.<sup>21</sup> New arrivals suffered prefect-administered *examinā* in the College slang, ‘Notions’. The fag system was dominant at Winchester for a longer period than most elite schools; a non-prefect at Winchester was known as an ‘inferior’, though according to the diary of a head prefect, only ‘slave’, the Westminster term, did

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<sup>16</sup> Anthony Storr, ‘The Individual and the Group’, in *The World of the Public School*, ed. Fraser, pp. 97-110, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> George Ridding, *The Revel and the Battle, & Other Sermons* (London: MacMillan, 1897), cit. Peter Gwyn, ‘The Tunding Row: George Ridding and the belief in “boy-government”’, in *Winchester College: Sixth-centenary essays*, ed. Roger Custance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 431-77 (p. 466).

<sup>18</sup> Cit. Gwyn, ‘The Tunding Row’, p. 466.

<sup>19</sup> Rupert Wilkinson, *Winchester and the Public School Elite: A statistical analysis* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>21</sup> p. 27.

justice to the subjugation he saw.<sup>22</sup>

## THE SUDAN POLITICAL SERVICE

The Sudan Political Service (SPS) governed the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of Sudan (1899-1939) as a British possession from Khartoum. Inspectors known as district commissioners (DCs) were assigned to provinces held by Egyptian military commanders. The selection process was formidably Northcote-Trevelyan in spirit. When the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin wrote to the Governor-General of the Sudan to ask why only five Trinity men were serving there, the insinuation of discrimination confirmed, for the outraged board of selectors, the excellence of Oxbridge candidates (only one Trinity man was chosen in the next forty years).<sup>23</sup> Wykehamist Sir Gawain Bell discussed selection in his memoir *Shadows on the Sand* (1983), one a clutch of East African ‘lives’ published in the 1980s; independence and resilience were key, but ‘a known tendency to “poodle-faking” would almost certainly have ruled a candidate out’.<sup>24</sup> A poodle-faker ‘cultivates female society, esp. for the purpose of professional advancement; a ladies’ man. Also (in extended use): a young, newly commissioned officer; an effeminate man’ (*OED*). Bell specified no other undesirable quality. The services’ slang was effective because it encompassed all deviations from proper male conduct. In order for a ‘poodle-faker’ to fake, of course, women had to be over-bred, over-preened dogs first. Misogyny meant that any association with female company denoted an inner feminine inauthenticity contrary to the masculinist ethic that pervaded the SPS. Needless to say, Oxford tutelage ran down into the homosocial environments of the leading boarding schools. The British presence in East Africa had a Wykehamic air. Despite being only half the size of its rivals, Winchester outclassed Eton in SPS recruitment between 1919 and 1939 by 18 appointments to 11; Harrow managed only five.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Chandos, *Boys Together*, pp. 89-90. Culture at Rugby, Anarchy at Winchester: in one the incidents that led to the schoolboy’s removal from Winchester, Matthew Arnold was pelted with bread rolls; in another he was pulled out from under a scrum of bullies ‘like a medieval witch’. Park Honan, *Matthew Arnold: A life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Collins, ‘The Sudan Political Service: A portrait of the “imperialists”’, *African Affairs*, 284 (1971), 293-303 (296).

<sup>24</sup> Gawain Bell, *Shadows on the Sand* (London: Hurst, 1983), p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> M.A. Mangan, ‘The Education of an Elite Imperial Administration: The Sudan Political Service and the British Public School System’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15 (1982), 671-99 (681).

For many, the SPS was a Northcote-Trevelyan *corps d'elite* that extended the deference of British social relations to the outermost reaches of Empire. Historian Robert Collins propagated the mythos in the 1970s:

Born and reared in the atmosphere of the country gentry, if not actually a member of that class, they were imbued from birth with a sense of the duties, responsibilities, and privileges of the gentry. The devotion to duty, the lover of the out-of-doors, the paternal feelings of responsibility toward the lower classes within the village community, and even the enthusiasm for village cricket shaped those attitudes of mind and created that confidence to rule which were later merely sustained and confirmed by education at public school and university.<sup>26</sup>

Collins placed 'imperialist' in quotation marks because he believed elite education preserved and certified the unfading beneficence of a gentry habitus; imperial outpost and tribal village were the logical corollaries of country-house and parish. Public school historian M.A. Mangan was rightly critical of those 'seductive myths about squirearchical imperial Englishmen'—his statistical work on SPS personnel revealed more social diversity than Collins's fantasy openly admitted.<sup>27</sup> But I say 'openly' because Collins' position did (as it had to) process the fact that, strictly speaking, the gentry class it exalted never existed. 'Some may have enjoyed the profits of a family fortune which had earlier been invested in industrial enterprise', Collins wrote, 'but they did so from the healthy isolation of an English country house'.<sup>28</sup> Transliterating class into the tokens of class status created the discursive possibility of alienhood. In the best of both worlds, the claim to rule was based on the enlightened ascetism of an aristocracy shorn of privileges that might be construed as harsh financial power.

Nostalgia for the East African DC was a reaction to the twentieth-century fate of Northcote-Trevelyan principles. The precipitous heyday was 1922: abroad, Empire contracted for the first time since 1783 yet reached its largest scale; at home, the Labour Party formed the Opposition after the 1922 General Election (briefly leading a coalition government two years later). The civil service was coolheaded about the prospect of working-class candidature because, as Gowan

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<sup>26</sup> Collins, 'The Sudan Political Service', 300.

<sup>27</sup> Mangan, 'The Education of an Elite Imperial Administration', 691.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, 'The Sudan Political Service', 301.

saw, the Northcote-Trevelyan apparatus was now rigid. By 1929, however, the Colonial Office was forced to confront the disintegration of even gentry-class appearances: an internal memorandum acknowledged that many gentry families could no longer afford Oxbridge educations. Examinations were dropped in 1940 as a direct result; liberal education no longer indicated the right sort (32). As for the rest, the facts speak for themselves. There were 700m foreign British subjects in 1945, 5 million by 1965; Sudanese independence came into effect on 1 January 1956.<sup>29</sup>

## PUBLIC SERVICE

Minds were concentrated by the Welfare State, which honed the reverence for imperial accomplishments in postwar institutions. Raymond Williams was one of many forced to distinguish an alternative vision of society from the relative good achieved by the new paternalism. His gracious yet firm criticism appeared in *Culture and Society* (1958): ‘the charter of many thousands of devoted lives’, he judged, ‘it is necessary to respect [the ideal of public service] even where we cannot agree with it’. Dissent was motivated by the knowledge that ‘in practice it serves, at every level, to maintain and confirm the status quo’. Two opposing interpretations of bourgeois life, individualism and service, jointly opposed working-class ideals of solidarity. Public service was a response to capitalist competition, its ‘reforming bourgeois modification’. It was limited to a mollifying role because it subscribed to the first axiom of bourgeois life: nobody had the right to violate the freedom of another. The public servant was beleaguered by a perpetual ‘crisis of conscience’ because he worked tirelessly to improve the lot of people within structural inequalities that produced rather than hindered his efforts. Ultimately, despite ‘genuine dismay’, the line between service and self-promotion blurred. ‘There is even a very nice grading’, Williams observed of 50s Britain, ‘quite formalized in the public service, in which the particular point reached in climbing the bourgeois-democratic ladder is magically transformed into a particular feudal grade’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William Roger Louis, ‘The Dissolution of the British Empire’, in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 4*, eds. William Roger Louis and Judith M. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 329-56 (p. 330).

<sup>30</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), pp. 345-50.

The postwar undertaking that everyone should have a place in society should they acquiesce to the new pact was tested by each social problem the State was forced to bring into Consensus.<sup>31</sup> Homosexuality became unavoidable. McCarthyite Washington pressured London to uproot its 'homosexual underground' after the defection of homosexual Guy Burgess to the Soviet Union in 1951; Home Secretary Sir Maxwell Fyfe launched the 'new drive against male vice' that led to the high-profile convictions of actor John Gielgud in 1953 and Lord Montagu in 1954.<sup>32</sup> The latter move overstepped the mark. A royal commission investigated, in effect, how legislation could prevent a repeat embarrassment. The Wolfenden Report (1957) recommended that homosexuality should not be illegal so long as sexual acts were conducted between males of at least twenty-one years of age in private.<sup>33</sup> In other words, there should be no more blackmail and no more public visibility. Opposition came from *The Daily Mail*: 'Great nations have fallen and empires decayed because corruption became socially acceptable'. A broad consensus, however, welcomed the Report because it consecrated the bourgeois axiom of non-inference in private, middle-class affairs. The Church of England Moral Welfare Committee supported a 'thorough, courageous and liberal document'. The Catholic Advisory Committee agreed: 'Attempts by the state to enlarge its authority and invade the individual conscience [...] always fail and frequently do positive harm'. Thus a Vatican spokesperson: 'the community should not, in general, pry into a citizen's private deeds—even if they are misdeeds'.<sup>34</sup> The so-called legalisation of homosexuality actually increased the number of homosexual offences from one to three: *soliciting by a male, procurement* and *gross indecency* between males neatly distanced State personnel from impropriety while increasing the number of arrests.

A flummoxed Establishment had turned to the irreproachable educationalist John Wolfenden, then Vice-Chancellor of Reading; as a product of a Northern grammar school (Queen Elizabeth, Wakefield), he was 'of the people' yet, as an Oxford don (Magdalen) and former headmaster of two prestigious public schools

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<sup>31</sup> I discuss the postwar 'social problem' in Chapter 4.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Jeffery-Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons: The struggle for gay law reform from 1950 to the present* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 8-27.

<sup>33</sup> The Wolfenden Committee, *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (London: HMSO, 1957).

<sup>34</sup> Reported in 'Great Britain: Wolfenden Report', *Time*, 16 September 1957.



(Uppingham and Shrewsbury), a creature of the system.<sup>35</sup> The subsequent legislation bore the hallmark of that educational background—like a public school, what went on went on on the understanding that it would never break surface into the official fora of institutional life. In hindsight, legislation was the correspondence between State-appointed father and twenty-year-old undergraduate son writ large. As his biographer Sebastian Faulks writes, Jeremy Wolfenden, ‘precociously and openly homosexual’ at Eton, ‘had never made a secret of his sexual life; he was a famous figure in the small world of Oxford, and an active one in the larger sphere of London; his preferences were known about by hundreds, perhaps thousands of people’. Sir John, abhorring homosexuality, had two demands after his appointment: ‘1) That we stay out of each other’s reach for the time being. 2) That you wear rather less make-up’.<sup>36</sup> Jeremy’s death in 1965 meant that his father’s recommendations became law without scandal.

Meanwhile, the Fulton Report (1968) called for a dismantlement of the hundred-year-old Northcote-Trevelyan apparatus. The Labour hierarchy had ensconced itself within the machinery of State to the extent that it was de rigueur to discuss the Establishment as a unified bloc rather than (when the term was coined and popularised) an apparatus led by the Eden, MacMillan and Home Conservative administrations. Once in office, the modernisation programme of Harold Wilson’s government (to quote Gowan) ‘denounced the mandarinat for failing to be what it was never intended to be—a technocratic elite’ (25). The Fulton manifesto aspired to ‘provide the constant competitive challenge needed for the achievement of maximum efficiency’.<sup>37</sup> Oxbridge fell from grace. Lip service was paid to the contribution of the old universities that had provided Britain with ‘intelligent all-rounders’ (who understood historical change). But unlike History and Classics, ‘The date and circumstances of the ‘universities founded in this century’ ensured ‘that their courses have been mainly designed to prepare their undergraduates for work in a modern industrial society’. To add insult to injury, any candidate holding an ‘irrelevant’ degree would be required to complete a year’s postgraduate training at the new Civil Service College.<sup>38</sup> Resistance was

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<sup>35</sup> See John Wolfenden, *Turning Points: The memoirs of John Wolfenden* (London: Bodley Head, 1976).

<sup>36</sup> Sebastian Faulks, *The Fatal Englishman: Three short lives* (London: Random House, 1996), p. 241.

<sup>37</sup> The Fulton Committee, *The Civil Service, Vol. 1: Report of the committee, 1966-68* (London: HMSO, 1968), p. 63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

instinctive, and the appointment of the Treasury's Sir William Armstrong to lead the supposedly all-new breakaway Civil Service Department was a concession. One insider described the disillusion felt by staff with their new image of 'leadен impersonality and the appearance of a greater concern with rules than with people'.<sup>39</sup> After Sir Armstrong's breakdown during the Winter Crisis (1973-74), neoliberals lodged within Conservative ranks sought to exorcise what they saw as the malingering stranglehold of a desiccated order.

The public system was highly sensitive to developments. In journalist Anthony Sampson's *Anatomy of Britain Today* (1965), 'One public school above all others does produce an intellectual cream: Winchester'.<sup>40</sup> His stance was anti-Establishmentarian: 'The influence of a relatively tiny group of people from a few public schools, and particularly from Eton and Winchester, remains one of the most astonishing features of contemporary Britain'.<sup>41</sup> *The Changing Anatomy of Britain* (1981) identified the crucial moment as the decision of the Headmasters' Association to appoint a full-time PR-firm in 1969; on its advice, the Independent Schools Information Service (the suitably Oxonian ISIS) was founded. The Independent School was a consumer-friendly, finance-oriented institution that measured its values against those of the Welfare State, and became increasingly more open about it. Fagging was all but eradicated, the use of surnames became less common, and by the early 1980s one in five public school products took work in sciences and engineering.<sup>42</sup> A new indoor swimming-pool at Winchester symbolised the turnaround. This is a letter—replete with Wykehamic quirks—from the December 1980 edition of *The Trusty Servant*, the Winchester bulletin:

The look of the place has changed quite a bit in the last quarter-century: we have a whole new playing-field, New Hall, the P.E. Centre with its three separate gymnasia and an indoor swimming pool, greatly enlarged Science Buildings, and an extension to Music School (what would the Wrench of Wrench Card say, who wrote to one of the Go. Bo. in 1903 'the vulgar expenditure of thousands of pounds lavished upon a huge Music School and a Stinks Palace seems to me to reveal an awfully cloven hoof').<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John Garrett, *The Management of Government* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 259.

<sup>40</sup> Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain Today* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), p. 201.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 680.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Sampson, *The Changing Anatomy of Britain* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1982), p. 123.

<sup>43</sup> Letter to *The Trusty Servant*, December 1980.

At Winchester's sixth-centennial celebrations in 1982, Lord Wilberforce, a law lord famed for his 'cautious moves within established principle',<sup>44</sup> made a joke of a Northcote-Trevelyan judiciary's plight within the Wykehamical afterworld: passing any judgement had to negotiate the monetarism of a Wykehamist Home Secretary (William Whitelaw), Wykehamist Chancellor (Geoffrey Howe) and the Wykehamist chairmen of the banks dictating government lending.<sup>45</sup> The public school no longer symbolised public service.

## LOST VOCATIONS

In his article 'The Lost Vocation' (1980) for a special edition of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, 'Imperial Hangovers', writer Anthony Hartley returned to a 'conception of vocation' in 20s Britain and found late-twentieth-century life wanting. The authority was Lord Hugh Cecil, the Tory grandee who argued that national cohesion relied on an English impulse to project goodwill abroad. 'Contrary to the habitual mythology (or demonology) of empire', Hartley maintained, 'the loss most deeply felt after its dismantlement was that of the ability to do good, to express in action a national ideal of beneficence'. The 'governing class' and the 'upper middle classes' were to blame for rejecting a patricianism that, although naïve, had been the 'life-lie' of the British State, a delusion that changed the world for the better. Hartley predicted that, the 'protective nimbus' of Empire gone, Britain would continue to decline under a mean government without any positive response to the challenges of a post-1945 world. The nation took on something of an alien identity: 'Neither accepting nor rejecting its past, Britain remains in limbo, stranded between two worlds'.<sup>46</sup> Writing in 1981, a year remembered for its race riots, Q.D. Leavis dismissed those conditions: '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 racial minorities, with a suburbanized countryside, factory farming, sexual emancipation without responsibility, rising crime and violence, and the Trade Union mentality to give rise to a literature comparable

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<sup>44</sup> David Williams, 'Lord Wilberforce', *Guardian*, 19 February 2003

<sup>45</sup> Sampson, *Changing Anatomy*, p. 125.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Hartley, 'The Lost Vocation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15 (1980), 67-79 (68, 77).

with its novel tradition of a so different past'.<sup>47</sup> At least the impossibility of Culture was alive and well in a post-*Scrutiny* world.

The doldrums anticipated by Harvey underestimated the pace, severity and nature of the change ahead. The Nationality Act passed in 1981 redefined Britain as a closed racial community; *Jus soli*, the precedent of English law whereby one born on land subject to the Crown is subject to its law and protection, no longer applied—neither, in effect, did the term 'British subject'. Empire was formally closed when the Act came into effect on 1 January 1983.<sup>48</sup> Norman Tebbit articulated the Powellite racism motivating government policy: 'Many traditional Labour voters realized that they shared our values—that man is not just a social but also a territorial animal; it must be part of our agenda to satisfy those basic instincts of tribalism and territoriality'.<sup>49</sup> Empire appeared to invert itself as the State fostered a politics of English nativism. Historian David Cannadine bemoaned the rise of the little Englanders in *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (1990). He identified the about-turn as the 'new-style Toryism' of Edward Heath's party that aped Wilson's 'unaristocratic technocracy'. This Toryism was a 'compound of an abrasively professional attitude to politics and close connections with industry'. With the 'genteel kind' all but 'eliminated by 1983', Cannadine lamented that 'there was (and is) almost no room for the representatives of the old guard, now thought unacceptably wet'.<sup>50</sup>

1983 saw the very first inklings of the Aids crisis in Britain.<sup>51</sup> Joseph Bristow looked back at the 1980s and 'the overwhelming work of mourning that was being undertaken in the wake of the emancipated golden age that had been so briefly won'. Unfettered sex was a lost vocation. Reading 'Gay Abandon', a *Guardian* piece by Rupert Haselden—'a gay man reporting on the apparent death-wish implanted in all gay men because of their lack of family commitments'—Bristow saw that the image of recklessly debauched self-destruction 'attaches to the

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<sup>47</sup> Q.D. Leavis, 'The Englishness of the English Novel', in *Collected Essays, Vol. 1: The Englishness of the English novel*, ed. G. Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 303-27 (p. 325).

<sup>48</sup> See David Dixon, 'Thatcher's People: The British Nationality Act 1981', *Journal of Law & Society*, 10 (1983), 161-80.

<sup>49</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 149.

<sup>50</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 675-6.

<sup>51</sup> See Virginia Berridge, *AIDS in the UK: The making of policy, 1981-1994* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

stereotype of the leisure-class queer'.<sup>52</sup> Importantly, though, mainstream gay subculture *had* become symptomatic of what happens when a State divorces itself from the polity and cedes its welfare to the market. 1967 had been the recognition and repudiation of homosexuality, so the logical refuge for private, contracted relations between individuals beyond State moralism had free licence. There was no space outside the market in civil society for homosexuality. When collective expression was repeatedly blocked, the freedoms of the market were relatively undiscriminating, but growing into the mould of its host, gay male subculture became increasingly blind to the caveats. 'As gay men claimed their leisure and lifestyle market', David T. Evans writes, 'the market claimed them, colonised and exploited gay sexuality'.<sup>53</sup> In these conditions, homosexual identities were reduced to pleasure, the connection point between sexual object choice and the market that opened up a gay lifestyle. Gay spaces, goods and services bore the predictability, control and political atrophy of the Culture Industry. In these conditions, gay citizenship developed an attitude towards home, work and play that managed the social conditions of its manufacture as the personal dynamism of an all-consuming 'post-issue' subject. This, subculture as hermetically sealed carnival, was premonitory of the marketised society being created at the expense of the traditional channel of expression, participatory politics: 'The potency of the modern homosexual's "virilisation" is as much economic as it is sexual, allowed to exercise his rights as consumer but denied "equal" rights elsewhere, and on the whole he doesn't seem to mind'.<sup>54</sup>

## INADEQUATE REMINDERS

*The Swimming-Pool Library* begins by confronting the reader with a pornographic consciousness: an 'I' recounts a drunken journey home on the Underground absorbed in 'The black', a 'severely handsome' London Transport worker about to begin a night shift (p. 1). The 'I' is soon established as Will Beckwith, an unapologetically privileged homosexual white male. Recounting a stroll through Kensington Park, criticisms are trumpeted as virtues. Will's oldest and dearest

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<sup>52</sup> Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic writing after 1885* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), pp. 169-71; Rupert Haselden, 'Gay Abandon', *Guardian*, 7 September 1991.

<sup>53</sup> David T. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The material construction of sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 100.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

friend, Dr James Brooke, had written in his diary that the libertine had grown even more ‘thoughtless’, ‘brutal’ and ‘sentimental’ of late. So, in turn, Will boasts of how ‘he was certainly sentimental with Arthur, deeply sentimental and lightly brutal, at one moment caressingly attentive, the next glutting him with sex, mindlessly—thoughtlessly’ (p. 5).

Will’s rollicking egoism imparts the rough outline of a bourgeois, philistine and puritanical class background, despite his wholly *uncritical* attitude. The educational afterworld is cross-referenced with a school-family habitus: the trees and lakes of the Park are ‘inadequate reminders of those formative landscapes, the Yorkshire dales, the streams and watermeads of Winchester, whose influence was lost in the sexed immediacy of London life’. An inner world is still locked within its upbringing—Marden, a grandfather’s country-house in Yorkshire, and Winchester, elite public-school education. At the same time, however, there is an insistence that blissful childhood and metropolitan afterworld are disconnected. Marden might fruitfully be read as a ‘marred garden’, the original sin of schismatic English social relations. Along the ‘great beech ride which ran unswervingly for miles over hilly county and gave out at a ha-ha and a high empty field’, a village that used to be part of the estate can be discerned over the depopulated expanse (Improvements, in other words, severed country-house from rural community). Will only realised later ‘how recent and synthetic this nobility was—the house itself bought up cheap after the war’. New money had been superseded by newer, but, for Will, the artifice of a thirty-year-old viscountcy still trumps the Park’s ‘stilted countryside’. The afterworld, we can say, denies an upbringing it invokes as superior. Will (History, Corpus Christi) tells the reader that his Oxford tutor, fearing that he would fall into dissipated ways, had secured him a job working on the Cubbitt *Dictionary of Architecture*, but on receipt of his grandfather’s estate (Lord Beckwith is avoiding death duties) he quit his post to pursue a life of uninterrupted dissolution (pp. 1-5). Movements, landscapes and inheritances draw the bourgeois sexuality of the narrative voice into the very distinction between the public and the private in English life that is unthinkingly consumed.

Two weighty moments in this opening self-portrait transform the roving desire ostensibly propelling the narrative. The first is the quote ubiquitously cited as the novel’s major allusion to Aids:

My life was a strange way that summer, the last summer of its kind there was ever to be. I was riding high on sex and self-esteem—it was my time, my *belle*

*époque*—but all the while with a faint flicker of calamity, like flames around a photograph, something seen out of the corner of the eye.

For Deleuzian critics Brown and Sant, this passage denotes the ‘mutability of the gay world’ implanting a sense of ‘immanent downfall’ in the ‘postpandemic’ reader.<sup>55</sup> If catastrophe is ‘immanent’ to gay life, though, it belongs to the hardwiring of Will, a partial representative of it. I am interested in the effect of a narrative position that is at odds with the sobering pressure of the dedication—‘For Nicholas Clark 1959-1984’—yet introduces an allusion to Aids as a portent. An implicit sense of subcultural disaster is heightened then, almost immediately, displaced onto something really quite specific, a ‘tiny proportion’:

I wasn’t in work—oh no, not a tale of hardship, or a victim of recession, not even, I hope, a part of a statistic. I had put myself out of work deliberately, or at least knowingly. I was beckoned on by having too much money, I belonged to that tiny proportion of the populace that indeed owns almost everything. I’d surrendered to the prospect of doing nothing, though it kept me busy enough. (p. 3.)

Before we consider how the text fleshes out that relation between subculture and minority bourgeois power, however, pause to consider the decisive *Kulturkritik* coup that has taken place. By the end of the paragraph, a blithe ‘I’ is in possession of an undefined yet inferable hindsight that, because it is not categorically known, impresses on the reader not so much a *cause* for (what has, up until this point, been relatively uncomplicated) self-indulgence but, rather, the need to account for *causality* somewhere between minority bourgeois property and gay subculture. The absent centre of Aids is shifted to this relation between that ‘tiny proportion’ and gay life. In effect, the reader has been hurtled through the component phases of history as Culture dictates it—Philistine gratification, cataclysm and retrospection. This is complicated because it is straight from the Philistine’s mouth, even though (and the joke is serious) his writing is as polished as Hollinghurst’s. A cultural break and an absent centre may have been constructed but the location of Culture remains uncertain. The jolt of this paragraph is indelible, and *The Swimming-Pool Library* continues through its unnerving

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<sup>55</sup> James N. Brown and Patricia M. Sant, ‘Race, Class, and the Homoerotics of *The Swimming-Pool Library*’, in *Postcolonial and Queer Theories: Intersections and essays*, ed. John C. Hawley (Westport: Greenwood, 2001), pp. 113-27.

contradictions. That narrative dynamic defies easy description because there is no clear centre of authority guiding the reader: the time of action is, at once, the perpetual present of a near past stalked by an impending break.

Britain is out of joint in 1983, but this symptomatic rift between social authority and gay subculture creates the very conditions of possibility for a healing narrative of English national culture. The second note of caution closes Will's self-presentation as a dual persona:

Though I didn't believe in such things, I was a perfect Gemini, a child of the ambiguous early summer, tugged between two versions of myself, one of them the hedonist and the other—a little in the background these days—an almost scholarly figure with a faintly puritanical set to the mouth. And there were deeper dichotomies, differing stories—one the 'account of myself, the sex-sharp little circuits of discos and pubs and cottages, the sheer crammed, single-minded repetition of my empty months; the other the 'romance of myself', which transformed all these mundanities with a protective glow, as if from my earliest days my destiny had indeed been charmed, so that I was both of the world and beyond its power, like the pantomime character Wordsworth describes, with 'Invisible' written on his chest. (pp. 4-5.)

Will might be a lapsed alien, but he is still caught between two worlds. Social disjunction is personified as cultural conflict, with competing personas suggesting an opposition between moral scholar and pleasure-junkie, intellectual high Culture and commodified low culture. Each façade has its own story, though the reality is murkier—Will's long preparation for the House of Lords emboldens his detached consumption of gay subculture. When it arrives, the literary reference (from another William) would appear to indict embourgeois institutions of social authority that act 'of the world but beyond its power'. In the seventh book of *The Prelude*, 'Residence in London', Wordsworth's Cambridge don finds himself in a maze of sideshows; the capital is pure Fancy, the poor relation of Imagination, and is all the more phantasmagoric for having no meaningful centre. The poet sees 'Jack the Giant-Killer':

The garb he wears is black as death, the word  
'Invisible' flames forth upon his chest.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Volume 5* (London: Edward Moxon, 1857), pp. 113-366 (p. 239).



The truth, the sham exceptionalism of embourgeoised institutions of power, comes to a stop in literature without ever being named. In this literary suspension, Will is offered as the product of contradictions that promise to develop through the course of the narrative—the last summer—ahead. *The Swimming-Pool Library* is and is about a literary attempt to piece together the ‘deeper dichotomies, different stories’ of an apocalyptic English landscape.

Unpacking Will’s name illustrates just how tightly the protagonist is loaded with sexualised class ambiguities. Brown and Sant make much of the Nietzschean and Freudian associations of ‘will’ as innate sexual drive, citing sexualised literary precedents, notably Shakespeare’s homoerotic sonnets (where ‘Will’ puns on genitalia) and Gothic writer William Beckford.<sup>57</sup> If William is a Wykehamist, though, and the novel is interested in the Wykehamic afterworld, then the medieval provenance of ‘William’ Wykeham is relevant here. Etymologically, ‘William’ fuses the vitalism of ‘*wil*’ and the moral vanguardism of ‘*helm*’, which is itself a sexual pun (conveyed by ‘helmet’). At the same time, ‘Willy’ is ambivalent, an Edwardian affection that drew on the medieval deflation of cocksure Plantagenet rule (what the anachronisms of high cultural politics came to understand as the antecedent of Philistine ‘Norman’ organisation). What is more, Lord Beckwith’s will looms over the action as inheritance and influence. These meanings are all co-present as a question: what *will* become of a situation where the ambivalences constituting ‘William’ are ‘beckoned on by too much money’, the possessive *wilth*. If, as I read it, Wykehamic tensions of ‘William’ are obscured by bourgeois property inscribed in the family name, gay subculture threatens erasure. Where Will is too informal for Charles, William is too formal for the working-class Bill and Phil; ‘some vestige of a joke seemed to reside’ in his exchanges with Bill, a patron of the Corrie gym, ‘the same name, yet by the difference of a letter, each called something altogether different’ (p. 10). The joke is the protagonist’s function as a pivot between two strands of gay male subculture, one public-school-educated and denotative of seventeenth-century kings (Charles, James and William), and the other of a State-educated mass (hierarchy is flattened out in the standardised monosyllables Will, Bill and Phil).

Will asserts that ‘naked mingling’ at the gym dispels the ‘social distinction’ of ‘the world of jackets and ties’ (pp. 15-16), but the *Kulturkritik* perspective now in train

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<sup>57</sup> Brown and Sant, ‘Race, Class and Homoerotics’, pp. 124-5.

frames that naivety as symptomatic of a cultural re-arrangement of hierarchies that satisfies the demands of commercialised subculture. The dilapidated 1930s exterior of the Corinthian Club ('the Corry') testifies to interwar hopes that homosocial interracial bonds will continue beyond Empire's twilight years (the British Commonwealth of Nations was established in 1926, the 'British' dropped by 1949); the doorway is 'surmounted by two finely developed figures—one pensively Negroid, the other inspiredly Caucasian—who hold between them a banner with the device "Men of All Nations"' (p. 9). Yet Will's racist language, incorrigibly hierarchic, exalts the white male as an intellectual inspiration (Charles's imperial narrative will teach the heir the reverse, that white should take inspiration from black). Inside, the Commonwealth is now a market. The décor is Hollywood epic rather than Roman Empire. There is a 'continuous relay of music—insipid pop on weekdays, classical on Sundays', which is to say that token high art is another branch of the Culture Industry (pp. 11-12). Theodor Adorno argued that in so-called 'free time' the mind is impoverished by the pursuit of diversions structured by the logic of capitalist production. For the Frankfurt critic, the cultivation of the body through leisure is when 'the fetish character of the commodity lays claim to actual people; they themselves become fetishes'.<sup>58</sup> Thus the Corry: Bill represents a fraternal, old-school male ethos, though he wants Will do some 'work' in the gym because the young man has 'the makings of something real choice'. Bill's 'weight-training suggested a labour that strove towards some private image of himself, a solitary perfection' rather than the transcendence of Culture (p. 24). It is fitting, then, that a commodity fills the air with creeping disaster; 'Trouble for Men', a perfume marketed to gay men, 'had permeated the gay world in a matter of weeks' (p. 27).

The Brutus Cinema is, like the Corry's swimming-pool, cast in 'subterranean' near darkness and, like the weights-room, 'stagnant' (pp. 10-11). Will goes in 'for what sex-club owners call an experience' (p. 48). The cinema's shop is crammed with pornography, dildos ('mighty black jobs'), every fetish item (chains, masks) and rent boys. A TV screen showing a nature documentary is, as Bristow points out, another Aids metaphor: 'we saw the freakishly extensible tongue of the ant-eater come flicking towards us, cleaning the feeling termites off the wall'. This is juxtaposed with the image of condom-less 'American college boys sticking their

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<sup>58</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Free Time', in *The Culture Industry: Selected essays on mass culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 187-97 (p. 191).

cocks up each other's assholes' (pp. 48-49).<sup>59</sup> The cinema is so dark, Will can only guess whether the boy who gave him a blow job was Phil, the seventeen-year-old bodybuilder from the Corry:

I was tempted to follow him at once, to make sure, but I realised it would be easy enough to tell from seeing him later; and besides, a very well-hung kid, who'd already been showing an interest in our activities, moved in to occupy the boy's former seat, and brought me off epically during the next film, an unthinkably tawdry picture which all took place in a kitchen. (p. 54.)

This is, perhaps, *Kulturkritik* at its peculiarly insouciant best.

Will had met Arthur, a seventeen-year-old black boy from Stratford East, at the Shaft, a Soho basement club with a twice-weekly gay night; but, ensconced in the flat Lord Beckwith bought him, a private space tests out the possibilities of a miniature Empire in Wolfenden Britain. With the heating on full blast, Arthur turns the bachelor pad into a private tropics. There are flashes of comedy in the mismatch. Drunk, Arthur shows up the artifice of Will's speech: 'Arse-hale', 'Get off my arse-hale', 'No, no, no—listen, no—"cunt-stabularch"' (p. 14). But the sex was 'purgative', the release of hours of 'inertia and evasion', and, as 'two strangers caught in fateful mistake together', the relationship becomes a 'murky business' between master and 'slave'. Will 'fucked him cruelly' (pp. 29-30). This 'fateful mistake' is re-enacted as English farce when Will finds Arthur at home with Rupert, his six-year-old nephew. 'Roops', decked out as a bourgeois prince, is the novel's cheeriest representation of aristocratising Beckwith power, all 'knickerbockers and embroidered jerkin, with a Millais-esque lather of curls, as if about to go bowling a hoop in Kensington Gardens' (p. 59). Will has to juggle his inquisitive nephew, a stowaway Arthur and Rupert's father, Gavin. Arthur disappears but race does not. Phil, the new squeeze, is always described as pale: 'His whiteness was broken only by the red blotch of an insect bite in the tender, creased skin at his waistband'. There was no 'instinctive ease' during sex with Phil; they 'were acting' (pp. 106-7).

After Will's 'involuntary recall' saved Nantwich's life' (p. 7), the first third of the novel prepares the prospect of a return to an instinctive Wykehamic self through the influence of Charles. A ruling class 'type' is held 'immaculately and

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<sup>59</sup> Bristow, *Effeminate England*, pp. 73-4.

Edwardianly intact' (p. 42) at the lord's club, Wick's, where the young man is, in effect, interrogated for signs of poodle-fakery. Charles's misogynistic position is clear: 'There are chaps who don't care for them [...]. Can't stand the sight of them, their titties and their big sit-upons, even the smell of them' (p. 37). The peer insists that Will should get a job, and offers to secure him work. When Will visits Charles at home near St. Paul's, his townhouse displays the 'eccentric rectitude of a colonial staying on, unflaggingly keeping up appearances' in streets from the 'invalidish world of Edwardian ghost stories' (p. 70). Will is asked to write Charles's life in the presence of the cavorting male figures captured in a Roman Pavement, the floor of an ancient swimming-pool in Charles's basement (p. 81). There is, then, a certain rightness of history to Will's task. Before he commits to reading the diaries, however, there is a tussle. Will remembers the words of a Forsterian schoolmaster, Mr Bast, when he was caught with the 'house tart', Mountjoy: 'You lack vocation, William, that is what troubles me', he said (p. 86). When Will sits down to read two boxes, 'Oxford, 1920' and '1924: Khartoum', reading is postponed (for another twenty pages) because Lord B's secretary rings to put the grandson through to the patriarch; Will 'felt that slight anxious remoteness that thousands must have experienced during my father's life in government and the law' (pp. 95-97). The diaries, then, enter a situation charged with undisclosed sexual, vocational and stylistic tensions.

#### A STRONGER, ETHICAL POWER

In *The Swimming-Pool Library*, the greater the mediation the greater the sense of authentic experience there is. Will 'settled down to read about Charles's doings long ago' in East Africa, 1923, and from there he is transported to the district commissioner's 'dream of Winchester'. In the College bathrooms, 'Everything was contrary to the domineering exalted ethos of the school'—the bidets startled the young Charles 'by their democratic nature'. The 'sweet, civilised certainties of home were trampled by the stronger, medieval laws of school' when he plunged into the dirty water left by the prefect-figure, Strong. 'Get in, baby' is an interpolation. 'I think I was only able to do it', Charles relays, 'because I felt suddenly unaware of myself in the senior boy's presence. Certainly it never struck me that I could be seen in a sexual light myself. Facing Strong's 'red, thick prick, which was thickly overgrown with black hair, as were his legs, all matted & streaked down with the bathwater', authority is the burgeoning male body. 'I think, though I cannot be sure, that Strong took this as a kind of sign, and perhaps

he was aware of the spell he had cast'. Stepping out of the bath, Charles 'knew that one day [he] should leave the water for other men younger than myself' (pp. 109-10). The significance of the bathroom as a setting is that it enjoys the internal distance within the public school that the public school enjoys within society as an exceptional microcosm of its best ideals. The bathrooms are, we might say, the best of the best. Importantly, with no direct institutional edict, the primary educational role is deferred to Strong. Education reproduces dispositions by implanting the aspiration to acquire the symbolic capital of the teacher through the social structure the teacher symbolises. The institutional is experienced as a personal call to take up a special place over everyone else. Here, the fag-master cycle is invested with the social authority of actions proper to educational institutions. This Wykehamic good society springs from bottom-up experience rather than 'exalted' top-down institutional edict.

At Winchester, fag-master relations embody Barbarian-Philistine pacts. Strong's 'father was a banker, not a country person, but he had lived mostly with his mother near Fordingbridge', Hampshire (p. 111). The implicit target is Will. All we know about Will's unnamed father is that he is a Wykehamist, a chairman of 'a group of companies', and a member of the Garrick Club (pp. 40, 34). Will's unnamed mother is using his Lancia after he was caught drink driving for her 'forays into Fordingbridge' and trips to Harrods (p. 47). With no allusions to slavery, Charles is Strong's 'valet', and even receives a little money (p. 109). If Strong is the best self of Winchester, he is complemented by redhead Stanbridge, the ringleader of the 'menacing conspiracy' that bullies Charles (p. 110). Suffering is still a prerequisite for good rule, but here the fag-master relation is solely protective. Stanbridge raped Charles after returning from the pub one night. Strong 'said how perfectly furious he had been when he had heard what Stanbridge had done to me. He would have done something about it, only Stanbridge's brother being killed [in France] had made it impossible. I said I didn't mind, really; but he said he would never have done a thing like that' (p. 112.). So when Strong dies, war heroism suspends the exemplary but contradictory values of his two roles in boy-government: Strong-the-master evinces a private gallant love, while Strong-the-prefect upholds public fraternity. The endgame of this formative episode displaces the trauma of public-school education to the conspiratorial abuse of power within but not *of* the institution.

Before he began his Winchester account, Charles made the preliminary distinction between 'adoration and devotion' for the Nuba and the 'forgettable

saturnalia' of lust; the former was 'accompanied by excitement' but 'it is not in essence a sexual thing' (pp. 108-9). The transition from Strong to Webster is the demonstration. After the relationship with Strong, a young white Englishman, 'things were beginning to turn around. The worship I felt for bigger boys, the heroic ones already taking on beauty as their leaving drew near, & glamour of the Army glowed about them, was as *strong*, or almost so. But by the time I was 16 my eyes swung about & saw the younger boys' (emphasis added, pp. 112-3.) There is the gradualist inevitability of an 'English' evolution here; Strong's name returns as an adjective to denote the maturity of something that already existed. The distinction between desired male body as spiritual symbol and sexual fetish is affirmed again before the romance with mixed-race Webster, a Tobagan-English boy; the 'idolatry' groomed at Winchester 'was to do with not having—it was idealised, above lust'. The continuity is also an advance: the spiritual is now explicitly of *and* higher than the body.

Webster's father was a 'wealthy rum-distiller from Tobago, & his mother was English, & had aspired to give him the best education she could' (pp. 113-4). Again, the mother's 'English' influence pays off. Webster is 'poetic', in part, because he 'was not a College man', which is to say that he is a Commoner. Hollinghurst houses him in 'Phil's', the one of the nine Commoner boarding houses that denotes the middle-class Philistine clientele (the motifs of Culture binding this master and fag implicitly criticise Will and 'Phil'). Webster *is* Culture: he had 'a sophisticated, literary mind', was 'buried in some history book' and struck the eye 'like a Gauguin' (pp. 113-4). The scene of romance is also important. More so than the bathrooms, benevolent desire is located at the crossing-point of nature and educational institution. One guide to Winchester from 1900 claimed that Gunner's Hole was 'second to none as a bathing place in England. Here, under the shade of the limes, are the best features of a swimming bath and a river rolled into one'.<sup>60</sup> So, the figure of the man of Culture looking out towards dreaming spires is brought to raced fag-master relations: 'on the frequent disinterested occasions I contrived to touch him', Charles writes, 'I found his skin as smooth as a dream' (p. 114). Moving through white to mixed-race to black, from inside to half-outside to outside, the opening diary section posits Africa as the natural corollary of Winchester's best self. As Charles puts it, his devotion for Webster 'was like my admiration for Strong, but now transformed by a stronger, even ethical power'—the 'wildest apostasy', there is a decisive break from negative

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<sup>60</sup> Robert Townsend Warner, *Winchester* (London: George Bell, 1900), p. 154.

influences. Wondering if anyone else heard the call at Winchester, Charles is 'continuing to act' on that revelation amongst the Nuba (p. 114).

In an Oxford diary from October 1920, a group of Oriel Wykehamists stumble across a faux medieval ruin, a set-piece compression of national history replete with 'Arthurian chairs', 'hideous Victorian things', the look of 'some mad college hall'. The non-Wykehamist tag-along, Chancey Bough, represents a range of Philistinisms—'bursting with vulgar health', having 'rigger-player's hands', he is Athleticism; with 'terrific', 'big', 'large', 'straining' 'private parts' on show (because he cannot afford clothes that fit), this 'bourgeois Priapus' is body rather than spirit; with an 'incurious gaze', he is insensitive to Culture. He is another bank manager's son. I am interested in what follows because it would seem to me the nearest there is in *The Swimming-Pool Library* to a direct recognition that educational inequality exists and causes suffering. Before being fucked mechanically by Bough, Charles is subjected to a breathless account of 'How hard his father had worked, & what his mother had done to give him a good education, & how Eddie looked down on him because he had been to a school he'd never heard of, & how—& this was the unearned climax to his peroration, which went on for a good 5 minutes while I said nothing whatsoever—I was the only person who showed him any true consideration, & and thought about his inner life'. Bough is mistaken: the squire 'had never for a moment imagined he had an inner life & frankly, the glimpse he had just afforded [...] of it was none too appealing'. Bough is worried about his 'real' nature, that the others know it, but Charles assures him that he 'must have bugged Tim Carswell at least 500 times'. Bough is 'fairly shattered at this', replying, 'rather melodramatically', 'I have missed out on my youth'. Back with the Oriel Wykehamists, Charles is teased for 'Poodlefaking with Chancey Bough'. The defining factor that makes Bough different from Strong, the other bank manager's son, and Webster, whose mother also did her utmost for her son's education, is that his nondescript school had no system for cultivating the mystique of same-sex bonds. The melodramatic middlebrow, Bough, effeminised as the 'poodle', is contrary to the elite homosocial environments of imperial and public service represented by the Oriel Wykehamists. 'Oriel College', Robert Collins wrote, 'the ghost of Cecil Rhodes notwithstanding, always maintained a great interest in the Sudan Service, and it was hardly coincidence that Oriel contributed the greatest number of

candidates'.<sup>61</sup> *The Swimming-Pool Library* does broach educational inequality, then, but chooses differentiations internal to a public-schooled Oxbridge set to do so where, given the novel's scope, sympathy for the relatively unprivileged can only be limited. Containment is tolerance: Bough 'never relaxes, & seems constantly aware of his inferior station, though everyone else would gladly forget it', which is to say that he is inferior, after all (pp. 123-8).

Withholding an account of DC life for later, the diaries continue by establishing the decadent educational afterworld of these Oriel Wykehamists at the high noon of Empire. The influences are American cosmopolitanism (cocktails and jeans), European modernism (half-Dane Otto Henderson's commercial paintings are 'larger than life-size') and Continental 'bare-bum sun-worship' (attributed to Henderson and Cocteau). For Adorno, sun-bathing was the acme of 'hobby ideology'.<sup>62</sup> On leave from the SPS, the comparison between Africa and Bohemian subculture is unfavourable: 'It felt subconscious & absurd lying up on the leads as if we were laundry, & there was something so prurient about the nudity when I compared it to days on tour when all our party wd stop at a river, & the men strip off their shirts & drawers to wash them & spread them on the boulders to dry'. The men of Kordofan are disrespected when Otto tells Sandy that they 'must go to the Tropics [...] and run around like darkies'. The name 'Sandy' might have suggested an affinity for imperial service, but he 'shows no curiosity' in langorous bohemia. Café Royal subculture, Oscar Wilde's old haunt, has 'an unreal, subaqueous atmosphere' in the interwar period, where the temptation is 'slumming it' with lower-class men in various exchanges of money (Henderson pays his nudes). Sitting in a dark corner, Firbank is the dying spirit of the place amid subculture's dominant 'fun' ethic (pp. 149-54).

Meanwhile, the Empire on which the sun of education never sets continued. Charles is kitted out in Port Said as if for 'term', he 'had the absurd vision' of himself as 'a doting schoolmaster leading off his special charges on some special treat', and Charles remembers words of a Winchester schoolmaster about tough love whilst giving the lash. The Coleridgean-Arnoldian lens is unfailing—male-male relations are 'poetical', the Nubian voice 'gurgles on as in England a stream might at the bottom of an orchard, easy, colloquial & yet ineffably ancient and

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<sup>61</sup> Collins, 'The Sudan Political Service', 296; Collins's claim is placed in perspective by A.H.M. Kirk-Greene in 'The Sudan Political Service', *Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15 (1982), 21-48 (38).

<sup>62</sup> Adorno, 'Free Time', p. 191.



impersonal', life is 'inward yet candid', his boy-servant Taha has the 'most lyrical hands', and Charles's house is 'a kind of frame for living in or discipline for thought' (pp. 205-7). The de-politicisation, too, is absolute—the approach to Alexandria gave 'the impression of changeless pharaonic labour' (p. 181), a Continent untouched by the ravages of modernity. Indeed, the only social dilemma in the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium appears to have been 'a contention between two men over a pig' (p. 207). There is, however, an interpersonal act that speaks on behalf of the British presence in Africa. Charles's manservant Hasan is frozen in 'panic' when a snake bites Taha. As if deadly snakes were native to Winchester rather than the Sudan, the DC, entering the scene, moved with 'brusque disinterest' and (ignoring Hassan's 'lachrymose injections') 'managed to master [his] sympathy & anxiety & present an impassive doctorly face'. After saving Taha's life, Charles 'saw he *was* my responsibility made flesh'. This, the indivisible perfection of Northcote-Trevelyan rule, vindicates the distinction that ends the Winchester-Africa diaries: 'Everything in this job is personal: it is government on the ground [...]. It is not sitting at a desk: it is standing in scant shade [...]. It is not bookish and bureaucratic: it takes place in open spaces almost without end' (pp. 208-10).

Wartime Britain is the rude awakening: '*September 1943: My birthday...* It's so dull being as old as the century, it make's one's progress seem so leaden & inevitable (p. 244). Life is now grindingly pedestrian. The 1943 diary wanders through a purgatorial British landscape bereft of imperial or domestic institutions capable of channelling a service ethic manifested by intimate homosocial bonds. There is no messiness with respect to Empire itself. By not making it explicit that Charles has retired in his early forties, the Condominium is left unblemished before agitation and preparations for Sudanese independence would have threatened the verisimilitude of the diaries.

The unlikely conditions of an alternative patricianate in postwar Britain reveal themselves slowly in the last diary extract—slowly because this undated typewritten script recounts six months of 1954 through a fragmented, reverse chronology. The more this educational afterworld loops back to education and an earlier education-led afterworld the more potent the nostalgia and more pointed the disclosure of narrative facts. The script begins with an Arnold-esque meditation on confinement and dreams: 'The prisoner dreams of freedom: to dream is to be free' (p. 250). An encounter in a Gents that was experienced at the time as a dream is re-lived again in the present tense of a dream: Charles is making

'love' with the agent provocateur 'in the drying room at Winchester, or in a white-tiled institutional bathroom, or the white house at Talodi'—the man's penis is 'some work of art which, seen for the first time, outwits thought and sense and strikes in an instant at the heart' (p. 251). Prison forces a re-orientation of Wykehamic values towards a native working class. The educational afterworld takes on the distinctions of education and the upshot is dissident solidarity rather than blind hero-worship:

But a difference soon emerged, for while the schoolboys were bound to struggle for supremacy, and in doing so to align themselves with authority, thus becoming educated and socially orthodox at once, we in prison were joined by our unorthodoxy: we were all social outcasts. (p. 253).

Sensibilities, though, are still at stake. Prison life is read through Culture. The peer is stupefied by 'strict and ascetic routines', 'abstract, cretinous routines' that filled an 'infinite time with the cruel simulacrum of work' (pp. 252, 249). Meanwhile, working-class Bill, 'poor, passionate, uncontrollable', encountered the prison library with good intent: he 'doggy-paddled through books in a mood of miserable aspiration, but they were not his element' (pp. 254-5). It is the 'uneducated' and 'unorthodox' who have a 'respect for class' (p. 253). Taha's murder by a racist gang anticipates the formal cessation of British rule in the Sudan. The symbolic basis of contemporary life in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, the 'world without Taha' (pp. 257-8), is a populist and State killing of an imperial past.

The punch is delivered by two short paragraphs, one a vow by Nantwich to 'hate' his homophobic 'captors' and 'humiliators' in the prison afterworld, the other a denunciation of their chief, Denis Beckwith. 'Oddly typical of the British way of getting rid of troublemakers', the brilliant phrase goes, 'by moving them up—implying as it does too some reward for the appalling things he has done' (p. 260). Nantwich fears Beckwith will be 'more powerful' in the Lords than bigots Winterton and Ammon because of 'his cultured, bureaucratic smoothness'. Charles has 'an image of him before me now in the courtroom at my sentencing, to which he had come out of pure vindictiveness, and of his handsome suaveté in the gallery, his flush and thrill of pride as I went down...' (p. 260). Deviating from the historical referents, Hollinghurst's Beckwith is aristocratised to capture the full range of middle-class self-advancement from lawyer to Establishment figure, peer of the realm to the super-rich. The grease of upward mobility is bigotry, and the tidy arrangement between public service and the honours system is a regressive political function. New arrivals to the Lords at the time, Winterton was an

Etonian Conservative while Ammon was an elementary-educated union man elevated to the peerage by Labour. Beckwith's *savoir faire* is inserted into and transcends this homophobic Labour-Conservative bloc. As the defendant 'goes down', not only is the sadistic exercise of State power a sexualised thrill; recounted by Charles, its masochistic receipt is, too.

The question remains, though, as to how the mandarin figure may be cultured *and* bureaucratic, so I want to end this section with an answer because I think it is key to the cultural politics *The Swimming-Pool Library* invokes. The mode of government exemplified by the SPS was 'not bureaucratic' and not 'sitting behind a desk'. In *Keywords*, Williams cited Thomas Carlyle's disfavour for the 'Continental nuisance called "bureaucracy"'—certain aspects of the British State were perceived as un-English.<sup>63</sup> From the French *bureau*, the *mise en scène* of domineering power was the office. Beckwith's 'handsome suaveté' speaks of acquired French pretensions—he dines at 'La Crépescule des Dieux' (p. 118)—which is why he is cultured as opposed to simply an embodiment of Culture. The process is a dispossession: Beckwith removed Charles 'violently removed from [his] rightful lettered habitat', Polesden, the Nantwich seat in Shropshire, before purchasing his own country-house. Unlike Marden, *Polesden* was the unity of opposites: 'I had not read Pope since I was a child myself, but I had a sudden keen yearning for his order and lucidity, which was connected in my mind with a vision of eighteenth-century England, and rides cut through woodland, and Polesden and all my literate country origins'. Reading 'a schools edition of Pope' in prison, Polesden holds out the promise of bringing opposites together once more. The aim of 'The Rape of the Lock' was to 'laugh two families out of a feud, as the flashings and gleams of a civilised world, where animosities are melted down and cast again as glittering artefacts' (p. 256). The last typewritten script is Charles's attempt to stir literary feelings within another product of country-house living.

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<sup>63</sup> Williams, *Keywords*, pp. 40-41. After rubbishing the Liberal Barbarian in *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold told his Ipswich audience that "The British Government is an aristocratic government' adequate to the challenge of revolutionless revolution: 'Such a government', he insisted, 'is entirely free from the faults of what is commonly called a bureaucracy' ('Ecce Convertimur ad Gentes', p. 355).

## THE WARNING BELL WAS ALREADY RINGING

Any hope that Will would have an epiphany reading the first Winchester entry is roundly dismissed. He is next seen in ‘a mood of atrocious egotism’ at Covent Garden Opera, wearing ‘a pair of pyjamas—a super-light African cotton outfit, the queenery of which was chastened by a hint of martial arts’. James, noting the look of *Arabian Nights* fancy dress, tells him that his erection is on show. But as conspicuous as Will is, Lord Beckwith presides. The peer comments on the opera, Benjamin Britten’s all-male *Billy Budd* (1951), as a paid-up Director. The work is belittled for not being worth the expense of a new production; the ‘loot’, Lord B says (referring to the arts money sunk into Covent Garden), will be ‘better spent on something else’.<sup>64</sup> Criticism of the music is then attributed to the librettist, Forster, whom Lord B and his wife Laura have met; ‘people’, the viscount says, ‘understandably didn’t altogether care for the Pears-Britten thing’ (Peter Pears, the tenor in the original production, was Britten’s life-long partner). The peer misses ‘hearing a good soprano’, feeling, Will discerns, cheated by Britten for not ‘providing the display of palpitating femininity that so many homosexuals crave’. This is all couched as an ‘intensely British problem: the opera that was, but wasn’t gay, the two young friends on good behaviour, the mandarin patriarch giving nothing of his feelings away’. ‘The warning bell was already ringing’ as Will and James resume their seats, ‘mesmerised’ by the sight of a very frail Peter Pears in the audience: ‘I don’t give him long’, Lord B ‘curtly’ remarks (pp. 117-22). The episode twists and turns within the contradictions of Wolfenden-era precepts. The Director would have been aware of Pears’s presence and the sense of occasion befitting the last-chance revival. So, the State should subsidise art so long as the reality of homosexual production (muses, relationships, collaborations) remains private because, that way, cosmopolitan bourgeois man appropriates the cultural kudos of ‘palpitating femininity’. Whilst ‘reminiscing about Forster’ (who had no public lovers), Lord B heterosexualises the encounter (by namedropping his wife as well). A Toryist tendency to justify State action through populism is attributed to Lord B, the novel’s high society poodle-faker.

The juxtaposition between Covent Garden and a visit to the Limehouse Boys Club, a sports association subsidised by Nantwich, leads back to Will’s formative education. In these pages, the position held by Brown and Sant is re-aligned. Quoting Guy Hocquenghem, they maintain that ‘there is a lot to be said for the

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<sup>64</sup> I discuss Covent Garden and the Arts budget in Chapter 4.

so-called “homosexual” system of pickups and mechanical scattering—a system which is so obsessed by sexuality that it often stands accused of lacking soul or feeling’. In this anti-essentialism, ‘mechanical scattering corresponds to the mode of existence of desire itself.’<sup>65</sup> In *The Swimming-Pool Library*, Will’s sexual invincibility is comprehensively demystified when a spotty sixteen-year-old pick-up demands money. Then, entering the ‘Nantwich feudal system’ perturbed and ravenous for quick sex, Will is struck by how his encounter with an ‘abusive stranger’ is shown up by the ‘soldierly tenderness’ fostered in the young boxers. Bill, a trainer there, desires the heterosexual boys without the prospect of sexual gratification. This, with the working-class boys invoking images from Genet, is desire heightened into the static of particular social atmospheres. Facilitated by philanthropic money, desire produced by homosocial environments buffers youth from the social disintegration wrought by a wilfully neglectful State (pp. 130-9).

The dream of school that opens the seventh chapter is something of a synthesis between the values of Lord Beckwith at Covent Garden and Lord Nantwich at Limehouse. Will dreams about an unnamed ‘prep school’ rather than Winchester, which shifts attention to an earlier, formative bourgeois school-family habitus. Will is appointed as the prefect in charge of the swimming-pool during his last term, though ‘for some errant Wykehamical reason’, prefects were known as Librarians. The ‘errancy’ refers to the use of slang rather than Notions, but also the ‘errancy’ of an Etonian provenance. To quote one Etonian, ‘A *library* had nothing to do with books, but signified a self-electing group of boys in each House, who were sporting heroes and ran the place and never opened a book if they could help it’.<sup>66</sup> We might begin to see, then, a conflation of top-down prefectural selection and bottom-up boy relations in a factory producing bourgeois candidates for top public schools. Managerialism inspired prefect choice: Librarians ‘were chosen on grounds of aptitude for particular tasks’. With a skills-set of sorts certified, Will’s parents ‘were evidently relieved that I had not been entirely lost’. The son was ‘urged absurdly’ to drop Rider Haggard’s empire-building quest-narratives in favour of Philistine Trollope (p. 140).

It soon transpires that ‘the Swimming-Pool Library’ refers to the changing rooms of a pool that resembles, but is not equal to, Gunner’s Hole; it is a quarter of a mile

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<sup>65</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 139, 131-2.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Sinclair, ‘By Their Speech Ye Shall Know Them’, in *The World of the Public School*, ed. Fraser, pp. 175-83 (p. 176).

from the school buildings and open-air but completely artificial. The good done by the Limehouse Club is the sublimation of violence in sporting environments charged with desire, whereas the Swimming-Pool Library squares sport with violent and thoroughly objectified sex: ‘soap, lathered in the cold, starlit water, eased the violence of cocks up young bums’ in ‘gross little rhythms of sex’. This—continuing the play on the Etonian meaning of ‘library’—is where, Will says, they ‘learned [their] stuff’ (p. 140). In the flurry of body parts (there are no names and no descriptions of individual boys), Will does not learn about interpersonal bonds. The Edenic Swimming-Pool Library, then, represents the Anarchy of Statelessness rather than just, as it is customarily read, irretrievably uncomplicated sexual freedom. Winchester’s new indoor pool is the scene of Will’s sporting triumphs; Gunner’s Hole, it is said, had been abandoned to duckweed. Here Hollinghurst invokes developments in the 80s to comment on the turn in elite education from the public ideals of State to those of rampant free-for-all markets in the early 70s (thirteen-years-old at the time, Will’s last term at prep school would have been in 1971).

Under the pressure of the diary extracts, elements of gay subculture are teased apart in the middle section of *The Swimming-Pool Library*; some are emphasised, others attenuated. Orientalised market relations at the Corry reach their height:

O the difference of man and man. Sometimes in the showers, which only epitomised and confirmed a general feeling held elsewhere, I was amazed and enlightened by the variety of the male organ. In the rank and file of men showering the cocks and balls took on the air almost of an independent species, exhibited in instructive contrasts. Here was the long listless penis, there the curt, athletic knob or innocent rosebud of someone scarcely out of school. Carlos’s Amerindian giant swung alongside the compact form of a Chinese youth whose tiny brown willy was almost concealed in his wet pubic hair, like an exotic mushroom in a dish of seaweed. [...] I couldn’t wait any longer, and at the merest word to Carlos took him dripping and giggling to the lav, where we brought each other off swiftly and greedily. (pp. 164-5.)

Non-Europeans are consumed as dishes. (It is a running motif: ‘Ecuadorian Carlos with his foot-long Negroni sausage’ (p. 142) and ‘dal-coloured Indonesian boy’ (p. 164), are other examples.) Here, value is relative, the whim of a supply-and-demand outlook that reduces Corry members to their members. Credited with super-sensuousness, the pun is dormant in Marx’s account of the fetishism of commodities: ‘endowed with a life of their own’, commodities say ‘our use-value

may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our own intercourse as commodities proves it. We relate to each other merely as exchange-values'.<sup>67</sup> In this marketised gaze, exchanged looks take on the pleasure of sexual acts; instant gratification is a compulsion, so masturbation with Carlos is a cadence, not even a coda.

Pornography begins to differentiate a subcultural clique indebted to pre-Wolfenden conditions from Will, a child of Wolfenden freedoms—and not as might first be expected. After some 'efficient' sex cruising on the tube (p. 94), Will spots his trick, a policeman, in a set of 'Edwardian' pictures shot by photographer Ronald Staines who, as his name suggests, mars Firbankian legacies (he is, according to Charles, a 'Bit of a cunt' (p. 44)). Left alone with the photographer, Phil is cajoled into having his picture taken, and Will, who left him half-hoping Staines would seize the bait, feels guilty afterwards. That self-reproach—'I turned him into pornography'—is effaced through the pornographic cliché it decries. Arriving back home, Phil is desperate for the toilet; Will, 'restoring [Phil's] porno image', rolls up his T-shirt, pushes him to the floor and makes him piss himself—he then 'fucked him in it like a madman'. Looping back, this is the 'unthinkably tawdry picture which all took place in the kitchen'. It is a turning point because, doing the washing afterwards, Will finds Arthur's address on a 'spunk-stiffened hanky' (p. 163). In the second visit to see Staines, Will finds himself on the rickety set of an 'Edwardian' porno featuring staff from Wick's, including Taha's son, Abdul. Charles, now a sleaze merchant, has a glint in his eye as he tells Will that his venture—this will be 'Series III'—turns a tidy profit. Finding the shoot 'embarrassing and anaphrodisiac', Will tiptoes out. The next chapter opens with the determination that the post-Liberation subject 'didn't need the secrecy of Charles and his pals'. In a 'different game', Will 'looked forward to clear July days, of no secrets, of nothing but exercise and sun'. He is set apart: 'I had seen myself, with weird detachment in the society of corruption' (pp. 184-8). This is *The Swimming-Pool Library* opening up the illusion of a distinction between the furtive commodification of a pre-Wolfenden past and the marketised relations of Wolfenden 'free time'.

Two incidents encourage a sense of solidarity, the 'lawless tribunal' (p. 173) in Stratford East—Will, looking for Arthur, is beaten up by a gang of National Front

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<sup>67</sup> Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1: A critique of political economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 165, 176-7.

youths—and the arrest for soliciting—James is entrapped by a policeman, Colin, Will's 'efficient' tube pick-up. In the first, Culture is still a protest against the forces of Anarchy. Charles's first-edition copy of Firbank's *The Flower Beneath the Foot* (1922) is being read by Will before he lends it to James, the Firbank devotee, but the transmission of Culture is terminated when the paperback is stamped into the dirt by a fascist boot (p. 174). The tower blocks, named 'Casterbridge', 'Sandbourne' and 'Melchester', Hardyian in inspiration, indict the postwar settlement as a false Arnoldian dawn (p. 169). The charge has to be implicit, though, to allow the possibility of inventing new ways of communicating with the future (telephone-less, Arthur's full name is Arthur Edison Hope).

If working-class violence is a lesson against the uncritical consumption of a 'skinhead' look, of populism, police subterfuge warns against fetishising men in uniform, State persecution. As a *Guardian*-reading, Oxford-educated, vegetarian professional, James, 'a conscientiously good citizen' (p. 215), is consummate Social Democrat material—he is even a non-protesting member of CND.<sup>68</sup> The incident makes James realise that he is 'that archetypal middle-class intellectual out of touch with everything, just like someone in a Forster novel' (p. 220). The episode is the novel's means of representing thwarted ideals of public service in postwar Britain. James's work is as unfulfilling and impersonal as his sex life; his lonely reads are *Update*, a medical magazine, and pornographic imports *Black Velvet*, *Black Male*, *Whopper*, *Super Dick*, *Nineteen-Inch Pipeline* and (in one of the novel's best political puns) *Black Rod*. There is no prospect of cross-class intimacy for James, who only wishes for 'someone poor, young and dim to hold [him] tight...' (p. 218). If the comparison is with the SPS, this depiction of a 'bleak and transitory' existence 'thrown out for the service of others', then like is not compared with like. Middle-class, the doctor's encounters with violence, death and negligence are characteristic of a service bogged down with a predominantly white population. The novel elides an account of the recent developments within a British administrative elite that undermined the traditional dignities of bourgeois-cum-gentry civil servants and exacerbated social disintegration. If this is true, there must be a sense in which *The Swimming-Pool Library* uses an unspecified NHS to convey new anonymities of State machinery in late-twentieth-century Britain.

Just before the last diary extract, Charles delivers what, in retrospect, is his statement of purpose. Reiterating his wish that Will takes a job (p. 239), he

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<sup>68</sup> I discuss the SDP in Chapter 3.



explains the rationale of his diary entries against a ‘fantastically boring’ (fictitious) memoir, *A Life in Service* by Sir Leslie Harrap. ‘On the gay thing’, he says, ‘they were completely untroubled—even to the extent of having a slight preference for it’, because they wanted ‘men who would give themselves’ over to ‘immense idealism and dedication’. Wykehamic organisation allowed for the possibility of detached interpersonal bonds: ‘There was a tendency to treat Africa as if it were some great big public school—especially in Khartoum. But when you were out in the provinces, and on tour for weeks on end, you really felt you were somewhere *else*’ (p. 242). Charles then indicts the racism and homophobia of populist and State nationalism: ‘There are times’, he tells Will, ‘when I can’t think of my country without a kind of despairing shame’ (p. 244). There are notes of caution, though. The ‘gay thing’ is an anachronism that attempts to bridge, if not eliminate, the differences between the SPS and contemporary sexual subculture. Charles’s misogyny surfaces again in his belief ‘that men don’t really want women around much’, preferring ‘a male world, with gangs and best friends’, a position that lends some legitimation to National Front youths. Further, Will has the sense that the peer is a ‘fixer and favouritiser’ (p. 245) when the peer defends his role as a pornographer in terms of a job recruiter for those wanting to pursue pleasure (we know that Charles eventually joined in the ‘Edwardian’ porn shoot).

So when the last box of papers ‘just fucks up everything’ (p. 278), a disorienting chain of incidents anticipates rapprochements and insuperable breaks. The text enacts the confusion of history. In the kitchen at Wick’s, which has the ‘sense of order of an Edwardian country house’, Abdul fucks Will over a chopping board with ‘leisured vehemence’ before telling him to ‘fuck off’ (pp. 261-2). Reading *Goldie*, a randy ‘gay thriller’ about an American police officer, a universe of *Kulturkritik* assumptions is acknowledged as inestimably superior (p. 270). When Gabriel, an Argentinian pick-up, emerges from his en suite wanting to fuck Will with a ‘gigantic pink dildo’ and whip him for ‘what you did to my country in the war’, Will flees the ‘sex and politics metaphor’ (pp. 274-5). After Will walks in on Bill and Phil together, the discovery of their working-class relationship explodes the fantasy that a viscount-in-waiting and a philistine (conspicuously, the only pun on ‘Phil’ Will has missed) could ever represent a viable pact. Turning to James, Will builds on his insight that he was ‘encouraged yet kept at a hygienic distance’ (p. 265) by his grandfather to condemn him as a ‘bureaucratic sadist’ who executed a ‘gay pogrom’ (p. 278). The text makes the connection that the homophobic interests ostensibly confronted by the Wolfenden Report actually boxed subculture into a self-indulgent consumerism for their own advantage.

Will's death is intimated when he receives a phone call from a fellow Wykehamist informing him of a 'memorial service for a not-much-like don' (p. 280). He has finally arrived, however, at a sense of vocation; he genuinely wants to 'save Arthur' (p. 284), and, watching film footage of Firbank from just before his death, the last pages appear to wind down the narrative to an elegiac close that would suspend that sentiment. Will tells Charles that he cannot write the peer's life, only 'a book about why [he] couldn't write the book' (p. 281)—Culture, we can say, on the impossibility of itself. On the last page, however, it becomes clear that Charles has been instrumental in the removal of the pictures that would have incriminated Colin. Will returns to the Corry, and the narrative ends just as he is about to chase another pretty young thing in blue trunks. When he had told James that history had 'soured everything' (p. 278), Will was referring to his own situation; by the end, however, 'everything' precluded the possibility of acting on distorted imperial legacies.

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In an overall assessment, *The Swimming-Pool Library* hollowed out an absent centre by displacing a subcultural need to comprehend the Aids crisis onto a cultural conflict spanning the long development of the British administrative elite, post-imperial feeling and the commodification of gay life. In this sense, the novel executed 'an oblique crisis-report', the phrase Hollinghurst used to describe Adam Mars Jones and Edmund White's *The Darker Proof* (1987), a collection of short stories that directly refers to Aids only twice.<sup>69</sup> For all the de-politicisation of the Sudan, the diaries did have the benefit of precluding any counterfactual claims about the war-torn, famine-ridden East Africa of the 1980s. The ideals of Northcote-Trevelyan service are, we can say, superimposed onto a sexual order. The romance is indulged to maximise the problematisation of the present. Nantwich provided the summary: dreams 'dissolved one nostalgia in another, and showed how all closures, all endings, give warning of closures, yet greater, to come' (p. 250). *The Swimming-Pool Library* is effective, then, as a work inserted into inter-institutional cliques that have always been against themselves. Subverting the happy public school narrative, the productive idiosyncrasies of Winchester foreground rather than efface the binding conflicts of bourgeois individualism and

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<sup>69</sup> Adam Mars Jones and Edmund White, *The Darker Proof: Stories from a crisis* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987); Alan Hollinghurst, 'The Shape of Restitution', *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 July 1987.

bourgeois reformism within elite education. I think the novel conveys the pragmatism of elites trying to strike counter-intuitive alliances during crises. The hope of an internal revolution within the aristocratic caste is dangled then thwarted. Indeed, the slow revelation of Nantwich's corruption brings the very attempt to reform the highest orders of society into question. Fabian and Toryist reflexes are held in check: the text is a postmortem of State failure and offers no prospectus for change. Having said this, separating out classed British histories into Philistine homophobic and cultured homophile impulses has its effects. The monopolisation of enlightened public service by homosexual bonds depends on sexual alien identities with subtle class ecologies that must always be measured against the administrative centre. In turn, British rule is a history of violence against oppressed sexual and racial minorities rather than classed majorities, of which oppressed sexual and racial minorities are part. This is to say that the novel closes off participatory politics, the space where the mass has a voice: this is a novel about the Elect not the elected. The novel has to be about grandfathers rather than fathers to project developments associated with a neoliberal, new-style Toryism onto the postwar Establishment. These are the creative uses of history. The novel is a productive, almost symphonic presentation of the themes and motifs carried by the long British twentieth century into the 80s and 90s analysed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 where, as we will see, the primary texts impose less flexible readings than Hollinghurst's remarkable debut.

## The Beauty of English Equilibrium

Alan Hollinghurst spoke of the shift in his attitude towards the Thatcher years with Tim Adams of the *Observer* in 2004: ‘At the time it seemed like a great violation of English equilibrium’, he said, ‘But now it seems more and more like Englishness itself.’<sup>1</sup> To recognise that and strike its correct literary expression in his new work, *The Line of Beauty*, took time. He told Emily Bearn of *The Daily Telegraph* that the ‘ghastly’ 80s were difficult to broach: ‘I remember the feeling of deep discomfort at living through it. I feel an undiminished sense of unhappiness and indignation about that period and it took me a long time to find a way of writing about it.’<sup>2</sup> But the sentiment sat uneasily with the conviction that his ‘way of writing’ brought a sense of personal re-balance. He told Stephen Moss of *The Guardian* that the 80s ‘determined so many things about the way we live now’, yet felt he could now move on from it and his tetralogy of works exploring gay identity.<sup>3</sup> If a feeling of ‘undiminished’ despondency was shaped by the past yet rendered tolerable by its representation, then structural conflicts had been given an aesthetic resolution. Moreover, Hollinghurst’s reluctance to discuss his work in explicitly political terms denied the reader any point of specificity to readily contest his position. Questions of history—what, for example, made the 1980s so ‘ghastly’? What ‘things’ in the present are determined by the 1980s?—slid into those of style. ‘English equilibrium’ and ‘Englishness’ crystallised an undefined centre while author and work took on an impressive expansiveness in spellbound reviews.

In this chapter I want to explore Hollinghurst’s insights whilst also challenging the pristine quality of his preoccupation with Englishness. Nominally, *The Line of Beauty* is the story of a young, grammar-schooled aesthete: Nick Guest, twenty and pursuing doctoral study on Henry James when the novel begins, is staying with the

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Adams, ‘A Classic of our times’, *Observer*, 14 April 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty* (London: Picador, 2004)—all page references for this novel feature in the main text; Emily Bearn, ‘Most of all, I like bad behaviour’, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 October 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Moss, ‘I Don’t Make Moral Judgments’, *Guardian*, 21 October 2004.

parents of his straight Oxford friend Toby in London. An ‘innocent’—Hollinghurst’s description<sup>4</sup>—has entered a drawing-room world of bourgeois-cum-aristocrat pretension and high Conservative politics. Unlike *The Swimming-Pool Library*, which starts and finishes when *The Line of Beauty* begins, 1983, the narrative is not the work of the protagonist; instead, it belongs to the third-person lauded by critics as Jamesian. My ultimate argument will be that the concealment of educational determination is structural to the relationship constructed between the representative of Culture in the novel’s diegetic world and the superintending narration, a corollary of Hollinghurst’s authorial persona.

My intention in the last chapter was to present the underside of the history that concerned the text, and that approach stands here with a few adaptations. Those changes stem from the fact that *The Line of Beauty* is an allusive beast, a consequence of Hollinghurst’s interest in a logic of English national identity predicated on the juxtaposition of cultural patterns and forms. The novel is loaded with an array of references to different times and places, setting the reader the daunting task of detection, comparison and interpretation. The text’s suggestiveness is so central to my argument that it informs the majority of the opening historicisation. For that reason, the relevance of some material may not be obvious to those familiar with the novel. I cannot justify that material in advance for the simple reason that that it would require the very textual analysis in need of contextualisation. I am *not* launching an exhaustive catalogue of these clues, but I *am* conveying a number of perspectives on economic, political and cultural processes that are, in their own fashion, preoccupied with the notion of equilibrium in ways that touch on education. So the synoptic and at times jarring survey of English history presented here—enveloping William Hogarth, the Nairn-Anderson theses, the figure of the Anglo-Jewish gentleman, the Conservative Party, Thatcherism, Postmodern culture and finance capital—reflects the novel’s meditative horizons as it does our interest in the educational afterworld.

The opening two sections are concerned with the two points of class equilibrium that most interest *The Line of Beauty*: first, the interpenetration of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy (represented by the high Conservatives); and second, the intersection of the working and middle classes (represented by petit-bourgeois

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<sup>4</sup> Readings booksellers, ‘Interview: Alan Hollinghurst’, 29 October 2007, available at <http://www.readings.com.au/interview/alan-hollinghurst>

Nick and Thatcher). The last three sections of textual analysis follow the structure of the three-part novel, taking the reader through the novel's select 'curve' of mid-80s Britain: first, long educational and family histories as they stand when Nick begins his stay with the Feddens (1983); second, the excesses of finance, postmodernism and commodified gay subculture during the 'Big Bang' deregulation of the City (1986); and third, the exposure of Thatcherite assumptions and lower-middle-class fantasies (1988). In the last section, I follow on from where the novel ends by visiting perhaps unlikely theoretical material to add rigour to the criticism of an unnameable Englishness that, as a literary form of self-censorship, must always allude to a history it can never fully convey nor outrightly condemn.

### BOURGEOIS-ARISTOCRATIC EQUILIBRIUM

The 'line of beauty' appears in William Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) as the perfect balance of six principles, 'FITNESS, VARIETY, UNIFORMITY, SIMPLICITY, INTRICACY, and QUALITY'.<sup>5</sup> Each constituent principle is poised so that none impinges on the essential nature of another. The subtitle of the *Analysis* declared Hogarth's disinterest—he wanted to fix 'the fluctuating IDEAS of TASTE' in mercantilist metropolitan culture by outlining incontrovertible principles, but as the detail of his theorisation reveals, it was a social exercise. Since David Dabydeen's revisionist work, Hogarth has been understood as an artist keen to place blacks in satires of white mercantilist culture: *Marriage à la Mode* (1743-45) seethes with the chicanery, infidelity and disease of the bourgeois-aristocratic caste—tobacco and the troubling black figure draw the viewer into a web of mid-eighteenth-century Empire, capital and decadence.<sup>6</sup> The contradiction, art depicting the complicity of art and dominant culture, was reproduced in Hogarth's monograph on beauty. The treatise begins to confuse when it becomes clear that there is not just one line of beauty; the vast majority, if not all, are distortions of an ideal. Hogarth uses the same term to describe perfection *and* deviations from it. Divergent lines of beauty were coded as either bourgeois-aristocrat—'bulging too much in their curvature' they became 'gross and clumsy'—or lower-class—'as they straighten' they become 'mean and poor'.<sup>7</sup> By

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<sup>5</sup> William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Ronald Paulson (London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in eighteenth century English art* (Kingston Upon Thames: Dangeroo, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Hogarth, *Analysis of Beauty*, p. 48.

default, perfection evinced a sensibility locatable somewhere within the middle classes. The geometrically precise line of beauty, 'the line of grace', was offered as indisputable perfection: two-thirds of an edge of a circle and one-third of the opposite edge of an adjacent touching circle of equal size. Even so, a plate illustrates the line of grace as a 'fine wire, properly twisted round the elegant and varied figure of cone'.<sup>8</sup> Hogarth prefigured the apostles of Culture by constructing beauty as a line of discourse that erred as close to undeniable categorical statement as it dared. Beauty always had to be placed teasingly out of reach, only inferable by pointing to the smug who claimed to possess it and declaring them bogus.

Hogarth's time was a particular moment in the long development of English national culture, a history sketched by the *New Left Review* in the 1960s in what became known as the 'Nairn-Anderson theses'. The conflicts that formed the bourgeois-aristocratic fraction were decisive. Perry Anderson's opening article, 'Origins of the Present Crisis' (1964), set the parameters.<sup>9</sup> The schoolbook romance that the English Civil War saw a dwindling aristocracy overthrown by an upstart bourgeoisie was debunked. Rather, the 1640s was a conflict 'which was fought primarily *within* and not *between* classes' that was always going to contest feudal limits to capital accumulation without breaking the fundamentals of the social formation (29). The City remained a 'subaltern group within the ruling system, an "interest" and not a class' thereafter, because the ambition of each of its members was to convert wealth into the trappings of aristocratic life. Possible conflict was thus contained by upward assimilation, a '*permanent and partial interpenetration* of the "moneyed" and "landed" interests, which simultaneously maintained the political and social subordination of merchant capital, and gave the City the aristocratic coloration it has retained to this day' (30). The comedy of the bourgeois-aristocrat fraction ever since lay across the hyphen; individuals and families attempted to pass as the latter and shirk the former. During the Age of Revolution, war with Napoleonic France and the 1832 Reform Act clinched the pact between rattled bourgeoisie and compromised aristocracy against the masses. The consummation was the co-education of boys in a transformed public school system. Homogenising the next generation of landed and business elites into a ruling class gave 'its characteristic *style* to that society, consecrating and fossilizing to this day its interior space, its ideological horizons, its intimate sensibility' (34).

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *NLR*, 1/23 (1964), 26-53—all page references for this article feature in the main text.

In perpetual deferral of revolution, the ‘burgeoning middle-class sold its birth-right for the accent of a gentleman’ (52). Unique among major European powers to have neither a thoroughgoing bourgeois revolution nor full-scale upheaval during two world wars, the present crisis of British life was due to its dilapidated means of production, a technically deficient workforce and an anachronistic model of leadership.

Impressed by Gramsci, Anderson offered a diagnosis of British social relations in the hope that it would initiate work capable of challenging that supine order: ‘If a hegemonic class can be defined as one which imposes its own ends and vision on society as a whole’, he explained, ‘a corporate class is conversely one which pursues its own ends within a social totality whose overall determination lies outside it. A hegemonic class seeks to transform society in its own image, inventing afresh its economic system, its political institutions, its cultural values, its “mode of insertion” into the world. A corporate class seeks to defend and improve its own position within a social order accepted as given’ (41). From the vantage point of the 1960s, then, hegemony in Britain was typified by four main phenomena. First, its *social relations* were notoriously hierarchical, mystagogic and obscurantist. Second, its *ideology* was a perverse hybrid of traditionalism and empiricism—the present, once bolted to the past, was rolled out as the only possible basis for future action. Third, its aristocratic-bourgeois *leadership* was wrapped in the iconography of the past (traditionalism) and philistinism towards any effort to imagine possible alternative futures. Fourth, *rejects*, such as utilitarianism, were never serious contenders. The upshot was a premature working class without a rival ideology or set of institutions: ‘the working-class has developed over a hundred and fifty years an adamant social consciousness, but never a commensurate political will’. Its avatar was the Labour Party, the only working class representation in Europe to define itself as an ‘existent interest’ within a closed system rather than a vehicle to social democracy (39-41). The General Strike of 1926 and the abdications of Labour governments in 1931 and 1951 were the historical proofs. Thus a mid-twentieth-century Britain caught swinging between Conservative and Labour governments without any prospect of change in structural form: ‘In reality, two unequal forces are in perpetual shock against each other pushing the point of collision between them now in one direction and now in another, but over a period of time establishing a *relatively stable equilibrium* at a point favourable to one and unfavourable to the other. This partially stabilized equilibrium, neither total victory nor drawn combat, but *permanent net superiority* of the hegemonic class is the reality of social peace and political democracy in England today’ (50).



The high Victorian financier remains a symptomatic Nairn-Anderson figure. The nineteenth century saw the conspicuous emergence of—to quote F.M.L. Thompson—a ‘social group or sub-class which was non-aristocratic in its attitude to work and profit-making, non-bourgeois in its attitude to land, country houses, and country sports’.<sup>10</sup> Many made sense of these gross concentrations of wealth by locating causality away from capitalism (the social system that produced and distributed all wealth) to conspiracies by morally reprehensible individuals. The abstractions were there for anti-Semitism to exploit: Jews owned 23 of the 31 millionaire banking fortunes made in Britain between 1814 and 1939.<sup>11</sup> The legal status of the Jew added fiery racial and religious conflicts to defining nineteenth-century arguments. 1832 allowed Jews as well as Philistines into Parliament. The Jewish Disabilities Bill championed by Lionel de Rothschild MP rescinded medieval proscriptions against Jewish property rights, high office and attendance at Oxbridge—a precedent for ‘equality’ law. Eight defeats over twenty-five years by the House of Lords, however, measured the aristocracy’s reluctance to follow the breaking of its class monopoly with the loss of its racial prerogative. Journalist Thomas Hay Sweet Escott captured the prevailing view when he surveyed London high society in 1885: ‘the movement from aristocracy to plutocracy’, he wrote, was ‘to a large extent Hebraic in its composition’, because powerful Jews personified the ‘increased power attaching to the principle of money, as distinguished from the principle of birth’.<sup>12</sup>

Cultural politics relied on the figure of the Jew to make sense of the nouveau riche, though Gentile philistines and sophisticates followed oppositional strategies. Lawyer Anthony Trollope was (and still is) quintessential Philistine reading. In his *The Way We Live Now* (1875), the foreign-born Jew Augustus Melmotte machinates his way into English high society, and is punished for it. Trollope’s referent was the Rothschild family; 10 of the 23 Jewish millionaire fortunes were owned by Rothschilds.<sup>13</sup> The qualification, then, to add to W.H. Auden’s

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<sup>10</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, ‘Life After Death: How successful nineteenth-century businessmen disposed of their fortunes’, *Economic History Review*, 63 (1990), 40-61 (41).

<sup>11</sup> William D. Rubenstein, *Men of Property: The very wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Foreign Resident’ [Thomas Hay Sweet Escott], *Society in London* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1885), p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Delaney, ‘Land, Money, and the Jews in the Later Trollope’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 32 (1992), 765-87 (775).

sentiment, Trollope ‘understands the role of money’,<sup>14</sup> is that anti-Semitism wrote off the racketeering of a class as the connivance of a raced individual. Today, ‘inclusion’ the buzzword, apologists for finance read the Rothschild legacy as an against-the-odds narrative for capitalism itself. In his two-volume biography of the family’s rise from the Frankfurt Ghetto to the House of Lords, Niall Ferguson wonders at their ‘centres for corporate entertaining’ that collapsed any distinction between cultural and financial capital.<sup>15</sup>

Disciples of Culture, of course, begged to differ—stockpiling art on account of its fabulous expense was outrageous vulgarity. One Jew who led an intellectual strategy of assimilation was Leipzig-born Sir Nikolaus Pevsner. Criticising Rothschild opulence, he transliterated social action into ‘disinterested’ disciplinary discourse. The cry against artistic miscegenation can be heard in the Buckinghamshire edition of Pevsner’s *Buildings of England* series: ‘when it comes to self-assertiveness and to an intrepid *mixing of sources*, there is nothing in England to beat Ferdinand de Rothschild’s Waddesdon of c. 1875-80 and Baron Lionel’s, or rather Baron Alfred’s, Hatton, completed in 1884’. The critic related sensory discomfort. For Pevsner, the disorder of the fake sixteenth-century Waddesdon château was ‘partly because motifs jostle each other too much to isolate them mentally’.<sup>16</sup> An inanimate ensemble was imbued with an agency that expressed the social upheaval wrought by their owners. Behind all this was the intimation of an indivisible national consciousness and a pure architectural style expressive of it. William Vaughan nailed the contribution Pevsner made to a national-cultural stylistic category: ‘Englishness’ had ‘at its kernel some timeless element that can be teased out in an unmediated manner by comparison between art works of vastly different periods and circumstances’. Unsurprising, then, that Pevsner’s *The Englishness of English Art* should be the earliest instance of the word ‘Englishness’ in the title of any work held by the British Library.<sup>17</sup> Henry James

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Of all the novelists in any country, Trollope best understands the role of money. Compared with him, even Balzac is too romantic’—W.H. Auden, ‘A Poet of the Actual’, in *Forewords and Afterwords* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), pp. 202-67 (p. 266).

<sup>15</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild, Vol. II: The world’s banker, 1848-1999* (New York: Viking, 2000), p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buckinghamshire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), pp. 38, 267—emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> William Vaughan, ‘Behind Pevsner: Englishness as an art historical category’, in *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the national past, 1880-1940*, eds. David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 347-68 (pp. 347, 358); Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

was another outsider using the Anglo-Jewish country-house to fashion 'Englishness' against other outsiders: 'The gilded bondage of that gorgeous place', he wrote of Waddesdon, 'will last me a long time', adding that 'Murder and rapine would be preferable'.<sup>18</sup>

The natural political habitat of the Jewish high financier was a Conservative Party whose composition was sufficiently fissiparous to support the political, cultural and racial balance of his social persona. But different threads of party history were opportunities as well as liabilities for the City Jew. The ecological provenance of the word 'conservatism' developed in the seventeenth century to refer to the polity as an organic body in need of stewardship. 'The idea', Bob Schwarz clarifies, 'commonly heard in our own times, that the "fabric" of society needs to be preserved, draws directly from this mode of thinking, regarding as inherently destructive any action which upsets the putatively organic nature of social life'.<sup>19</sup> A natural *social* as opposed to natural *biological* community clipped race-based anti-Semitism but opened up the charge of philistinism—after all, 'Hebraism' was Arnold's shorthand for mechanical thought. But when radical conservatives enthralled by free-market principles eclipsed One-Nation Toryism in the 1970s, the party line rejected any organic truth. Natural law was located within the balance of interests sealed by market exchange instead, the 'supply and demand' of English political economy. Rather than accommodating and influencing opposition into a vision of their society, this abrasive politics called for their immediate destruction. Nationhood was now a biological community, the 'will of the people', and, in its name, radical conservatives promised to unleash market forces against the Welfare State and roll back its supposed preferential treatment of racial and sexual minorities.

How did the Anglo-Jewish bourgeois-aristocrat handle the airs of One-Nation gentlemanliness, the demands of financialisation and troublesome racial politics? A certain immunity lay in his function as a transfer point for the conflicts that held together a coalition of competitive interests as an electoral force. Individual cases reflected that contingency. Nathan Mayer Rothschild MP, dubbed the most powerful man in Britain by Lloyd George, was a member of a commission on Jewish immigration, but he dissented against the report's findings and the

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<sup>18</sup> *Henry James Letters, Vol. III*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 98.

<sup>19</sup> Bob Schwartz, 'Conservatism', in *New Keywords: A revised vocabulary of culture and society*, eds. Tony Bennett *et al.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 54-5.

resulting legislation, the Balfour government's 1905 Aliens Act. Walter Rothschild formally received the 1917 Balfour Declaration committing Britain to the establishment of a Jewish state.<sup>20</sup> The neoliberal turn offered more bittersweet opportunities. 'It is tempting', the political commentator Stephen Brooks ambiguously noted in 1989, 'to extrapolate from the presence of Jewish ideologues in the Thatcher camp that they represent a trend somehow inherent in Jewish thought and life'.<sup>21</sup> True, in 1986 three top Cabinet posts were held by unabashedly neoliberal Jews—Keith Joseph at Education, Leon Brittan at the Home Office and Nigel Lawson at the Treasury. The 'temptation', though, was surely restricted. The National Front, needing no encouragement, was too busy capitalising on the racial prejudice exacerbated by racist government policies.

The notorious faultline of Conservative politics that subsumed all these questions pitched—borrowing from the public school slang for pansy or homosexual—'wet' One-Nation Tory against 'dry' neoliberal. The lasting comment on the split was attributed to chief party whip Michael Josling by Alan Clark: Michael Heseltine was a man 'who buys his own furniture'.<sup>22</sup> The slight was that as a self-made businessman, the party's flagship meritocrat lacked the credibility that only a furnished life could bestow. The boundaries between old and new money, however, were sufficiently blurred to render loyalty to the Prime Minister the only sound discriminating factor (which itself demanded an extraordinary degree of second-guessing and compromise). The untidiness of the wet-dry distinction was evident in the two leadership contests that ousted Thatcher: the stalking horse in the first, Sir Anthony Meyer, was a 'wet' whose German-born Jewish grandfather had worked for the Rothschilds before acquiring his own baronetcy; Heseltine, a 'dry', wielded the knife against the petit-bourgeois leader in the second.

## PETIT-BOURGEOIS EQUILIBRIUM

A reading of Adam Smith, Hogarth's contemporary, illustrates how definitions of beauty will always be definitions of human beings in a social world. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) dismissed the Hobbesian conception of society as the sum of mutually intrusive individuals, citing the tranquillity of parish life as proof.

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<sup>20</sup> See Daniel Gutwein, *The Divided Elite: Economics, politics and Anglo-Jewry, 1882-1917* (New York: Brill, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Brook, *The Club: The Jews in modern Britain* (London: Constable, 1989), pp. 345-6.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Clark, *Diaries* (London: Phoenix, 1994), p. 162.

Instead of rivalries, ‘sympathies’ delineated the ‘proportion or disproportion’ of people’s actions when measured against the actions of others.<sup>23</sup> This was all constitutionally magnetised to the status quo. For Smith, personal sympathies attuned themselves to the pre-existing balance of things. Dissent was aberrant passion. This movement from volatility to sobriety conditioned Smith’s later economics. *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) prophesied that the ‘natural price’ of commodities—that is, the cost of their production—would be reached when supply and demand balanced across the whole economy. There was, it would seem, a benign end-point of indefinite investment without profit ‘to which the prices of all commodities are continually gravitating [...]. But whatever may be the obstacles which hinder them from settling in this center of repose and continuance, they are constantly tending towards it’.<sup>24</sup> Impurities of the system—taxation, regulation, monopolies—had to be eliminated to allow commodities the opportunity to resemble their ‘real’ natures. Smith did not use the words ‘capitalism’ or ‘equilibrium’, but he was nevertheless lauded by Thatcherites drunk on what became known as ‘general equilibrium theory’, the proof, it was said, that capitalist markets only operate to the good of all when left to their own devices.

At this point, I want to indicate a certain aesthetic homology that links Smith’s convergence of socio-economic harmony with Hogarth’s cone-wrapped line of grace. There are, of course, notable differences, but both abstracted from the upheaval of mercantilist Britain an imagined homeostatic society lying dormant within the commodities of their day that was suppressed by excess. Their individual units refrained from impinging on the essential natures of others by reciprocal consideration and readjustment. With human agency brushed out of sight, fetishes credited inert commodities with autotelic drives towards the truth of their material forms. (This is why Hogarth is proud of six artistic principles that ‘co-operate in the production of beauty, mutually correcting and restraining each other occasionally’,<sup>25</sup> as if they formed a self-regulating society within the interior life of the beautiful object.) The paradox is that the only way to prove that an equilibrium of forces rather than an immobile thing exists is to witness movement, which is to say disequilibrium. If the proof of equilibrium is its opposite, then the travesty of ‘general equilibrium theory’ is clear: the greater the

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<sup>23</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. A.L. Macfie and D.D. Raphael (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Vol. 1*, eds. R.H. Campbell, William B. Todd and Andrew S. Skinner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, p. 23.

destabilising effects of capitalism, the more we are invited to view crisis as the last convulsion before the final calm. A capitalistic logic of auto-regulation pervaded moral and artistic critiques of capitalistic excess.

It became apparent to most in the 1930s that the State would have to protect the so-called ‘obstacles’ to capitalist accumulation if they were to have a future together. Welfare-ism—capitalism with a conscience—took advantage of the ambivalent position of lower-middle classes. A letter written by Marx in 1846 captured why petit-bourgeois sensibilities succumb so easily to ad hoc yet ostensibly well-meaning pacts:

In an advanced society and because of his situation, a petty bourgeois becomes a socialist on the one hand, and economist on the other, i.e. he is dazzled by the magnificence of the upper middle classes and feels compassion for the sufferings of the people. He is at one and the same time bourgeois and man of the people. In his heart of hearts he prides himself on his impartiality, on having found the correct balance, allegedly distinct from the happy medium. A petty bourgeois of this kind deifies *contradiction*, for contradiction is the very basis of his being. He is nothing but social contradiction in action. He must justify by means of theory what he is in practice.<sup>26</sup>

The Welfare prospectus did not convince all. Alfred Roberts, Margaret Thatcher’s father, owned two grocery stores in Grantham, Lincolnshire; as the leader of the local council and a Methodist preacher, he believed that the stock market was as morally reprehensible as gambling, that the prosperous owed a care of duty to the less fortunate.<sup>27</sup> Yet as a staunch believer in the Liberal tradition, he was with Leavis in bemoaning the party’s twentieth-century decline, its acquiescence to the new ‘collectivism’.

Thatcher routinely claimed the moral education of that background as a prerequisite of sound judgement. The upper-middle-class background of John Maynard Keynes, the intellectual authority behind demand management and the subsidised arts, was an explicit target in the ex-prime minister’s memoir, *The Path*

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<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx, ‘Letter to Pavel Vasilyevich Annikov’, in *Collected Works: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels*. Vol. 38, *Marx and Engels, 1844-51* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), pp. 95-106 (p.105).

<sup>27</sup> John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher: The grocer’s daughter, vol.1* (London, Pimlico, 2001), pp. 29-30.

*to Power* (1995): ‘My “Bloomsbury” was Grantham—Methodism, the grocer’s shop, Rotary, and all the serious, sober virtues cultivated and esteemed in that environment. Doubtless, there are a hundred ways to coming to convictions about economics, as there are to convictions about politics or religion. But for me, experience of life in the Roberts household was the decisive influence’.<sup>28</sup> There was disingenuousness to this: married to millionaire paint-seller Denis Thatcher since 1947, her interests lay conclusively with big business. Biographer John Campbell provides a description of the Leader of the Opposition in 1975: ‘the public knew her only as an archetypal Home Counties Tory Lady, more famous for her hats than for any outstanding talent: she had a rich businessman husband, sent her children to the most expensive private schools, owned houses in Kent and Chelsea, and sat in Parliament representing Finchley’.<sup>29</sup> Thatcher was rebranded as a stolid housewife to mask the educational path to power; grammar school and an Oxford scholarship were silenced; the Saatchi brothers and Rupert Murdoch’s *Sun* preened ‘Maggie’ for the 1979 General Election campaign. One of the consequences of this provincial artifice was rejection by male and female party elites: the men of the Carlton Club withdrew Thatcher’s honorary membership when she resigned as Conservative leader; Baroness Warnock at Girton College confessed in the pages of *The Telegraph* to a ‘kind of rage’ at the thought of the Prime Minister’s ‘patronising elocution voice’, her ‘neat, well-groomed clothes and hair, packaged together in a way that’s not exactly vulgar just *low*’ (read: not quite working-class, but lower-class all the same).<sup>30</sup>

There was a tendency to credit Thatcher with a almost supernatural authority of person—she was either bewitching or a form of political witchcraft. Stuart Hall fell into the latter trap. In ‘The Empire Strikes Back’ (1982), he argued that Thatcher’s pre-eminence owed to the Falklands War, a ‘highly selective form of historical reconstruction that evoked the bulldog spirit of Churchill and the nostalgia for empire’.<sup>31</sup> I share the interest in anachronism, though the difficulty I have with Hall’s essay is its reproduction of a New Right narrative, that the war was the Providence of the Thatcher Revolution. This is important because it informs the later, influential theorisation of Thatcherism as an ideology

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<sup>28</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (New York: Harper, 1995), p. 565; I discuss Keynes and the Arts in Chapter 4.

<sup>29</sup> Backmatter from Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher*.

<sup>30</sup> Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* (London: Fontana, 1992), p. 320.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘The Empire Strikes Back’, in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the crisis of the left* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 68-74 (p. 71), first published in *New Socialist*, 8 (1982), 5-7.

answerable to signification rather than class. Unmodified in Hall's 1988 collection of essays *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 'The Empire Strikes Back' proleptically captures the Conservative government's pursuit of a marketised society. Consider the attempt of 'Gramsci and Us' (1987), also collected, to digest the stark incongruity between Conservative electoral success and the dismal reality of market-led Britain. The implication is that the Prime Minister cast a spell over the electorate:

People don't vote for Thatcherism, in my view, because they believe the small print. People in their minds do not think that Britain is now a wonderfully blooming, successful economy. Nobody believes that, with 3¼ million unemployed, the economy is picking up [...]. What Thatcherism as an ideology does, is to address the fears, the anxieties, the lost identities, of a people. It invites us to think about politics as images. It is addressed to our collective fantasies, to Britain as an imagined community, to the social imaginary. Mrs Thatcher has totally dominated that idiom.<sup>32</sup>

Conservative strategists knew different. Michael Dobbs, architect of the 1987 Conservative campaign, played down the Prime Minister in response to polls that indicated the majority considered her 'out of touch'. Shortly after that election, he went public with the view that Thatcher did not represent 'the style of leadership the party needs for the 1990s'.<sup>33</sup> An old solution to new problems, the Prime Minister did not dominate an idiom, a party or an electorate (an argument to the contrary would have to establish when, why and how Thatcher abdicated her supremacy.)

There is, though, a more fundamental point to make, one that Slavoj Žižek could not have put more succinctly: Thatcher was not Thatcherism, 'she was merely herself'.<sup>34</sup> Images were part of the answer, but the exclusion of other concerns had its effects. The attribution of ideology to one individual obviated any requirement to discuss the complexity of politics, including intra-Conservative conflicts and developments within the Labour Party, not to mention the decisive role of State violence against (need it be said?) resistance. An alternative politics was rendered inconceivable except as a dissenting theoretical practice. (It must be remembered

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<sup>32</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci and Us', in *The Hard Road to Renewal*, pp. 161-173 (p. 167), first published in *Marxism Today*, 6 (1987), 16-21.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Dobbs, 'Can Mrs Thatcher Survive?', *Evening Standard*, 27 October 1989.

<sup>34</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Resistance is Surrender', *London Review of Books*, 15 November 2007.



that the invitation to think about politics in terms of images was Hall's, not Thatcher's—she attempted to shift the political onto a moral plane.) Hall's formulation of Thatcherism as 'authoritarian populism', 'contradictory discourses within the same ideological formation', had something of the neatness of the 'ogee' line about it, two intertwined S-shaped curves.<sup>35</sup>

There were 'contradictory discourses' that lent Hall's formulation plausibility. Thatcher once remarked that economics was merely the means of changing the nation's soul.<sup>36</sup> In a more definitive statement, an interview with *Woman's Magazine* (1987), she rebuked the unemployed for appealing to society for assistance: 'There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first'—the sound-bite 'There is no such thing as society!' appeared a paragraph later.<sup>37</sup> For Thatcher, this was textbook Burke and Hayek; but if individuals and families were to exist in the same universe, then entrepreneurial individuals led families of fledgling individualists who sneered at stay-at-home identities. Female citizenship within the marketplace increasingly enabled the values and the means whereby individualistic consumption undermined nuclear family ideals. The social disintegration of the 1980s was being counterbalanced by a diversionary family agenda, pretence of cohesion that was exposed by a series of sex scandals during John Major's premiership. The joint targets were the wayward female and the homosexual. The vagueness of Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act was precise in its surveillance of homosexuality—'a pretended family relationship'—and its power relied on the equation of womanhood, matrimony and motherhood.<sup>38</sup> Yet even this was not a static position. Anna Marie Smith has traced the ideological work it took for the House of Lords to evolve the notion of the 'good homosexual', of monogamous

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<sup>35</sup> Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, p. 10. Tony Woods detects similar problems with Stuart Hall's characterisation of Tony Blair's government as a 'double regime'. 'The fact is that New Labour is a *hybrid* regime, composed of two strands. However, one strand—the neo-liberal—is in the dominant position. The other strand—social democratic—is subordinate'. For Hall, there was a '*subaltern* programme'. As Woods demonstrates, there was no such thing. See Stuart Hall, 'New Labour's double-shuffle', *Soundings*, 24 (2003), 10-24 and Tony Woods, 'Good Riddance to New Labour', *NLR*, 2/62 (2010), 5-28 (23).

<sup>36</sup> 'Economics are the method. The object is to change the soul'. In interview with Ronald Butt for *The Sunday Times*, 7 May, 1981.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Keay, 'Aids, education, and the year 2000!', *Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987.

<sup>38</sup> Great Britain, *The Local Government Act* (London: HMSO, 1988), s. 28.

private consumption, against the ‘dangerous queer’, of irresponsibility and Aids.<sup>39</sup> It took so long because the political landscape in which homosexuality was judged was shifting, searching for a blueprint of market-driven Britain that would satisfy broad Conservative opinion. As the publication of *The Citizen’s Charter* in 1991 attests, that was a decade-long process.<sup>40</sup>

The cultural animus against Thatcher was a constant—during her time in office, at least. Director Peter Hall voted Conservative in 1979, but by 1988 he was explaining to *Sunday Telegraph* journalist Graham Turner why ‘well over 90 per cent of the people in the performing arts, education and the creative world are against her’. Turner wanted to know ‘Why Britain’s Eggheads Look Down on Mrs Thatcher’. Snobbery was a factor. Director Jonathan Miller despised her ‘odious suburban gentility and sentimental, saccharine patriotism, catering to the worst elements of commuter idiocy’.<sup>41</sup> Thatcher was the easiest of targets as cuts to HE and arts budgets began to bite because, quite simply, her philistinism was off the scale—she had been ridiculed ever since she picked Rolf Harris’s ‘Two Little Boys’ as her favourite song on *Desert Island Discs* (it had ‘values’).<sup>42</sup> There were moments when the connection was made between anti-intellectualism and government practice; Oxford dons, for instance, refused the Prime Minister (2:1 in Chemistry) an honorary doctorate in protest against the ‘deep and systematic damage to the whole public education system’.<sup>43</sup> But it was kept a strictly cultural matter. Sir Michael Tippett’s self-interest captured the political lability of dominant cultural production: ‘I’m impelled to vote Labour’, he declared, ‘since it’s the only party committed to doubling the arts budget’.<sup>44</sup>

Whatever the truth there was to Eric Hobsbawm’s characterisation of the 80s as the ‘anarchism of the lower middle classes’,<sup>45</sup> the usual suspects, the masters of capital, extended their reach. The reputation of American critic Fredric Jameson

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<sup>39</sup> Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 183-239.

<sup>40</sup> John Major, *The Citizen’s Charter: Raising the standard* (London: HMSO, 1991); see Evans, *Sexual Citizenship*, pp. 1-9.

<sup>41</sup> Graham Turner, ‘Why Britain’s Eggheads Look Down on Mrs Thatcher’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 January 1988.

<sup>42</sup> See *Tracking Down Maggie*, dir. by Nick Broomfield (Lafayette, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Lucy Hodges, ‘Oxford Dons Split over Award’, *Times*, 25 January 1985.

<sup>44</sup> Cit. Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *The Strange Death of Tory England* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 158.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Politics for a Rational Left: Political writing, 1977-88* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 205.

was confirmed with his argument, developed over a series of articles, that the saturation of cultural production in the commodity-form in the 80s represented a new epoch.<sup>46</sup> Postmodernity was the end-point of time, ideology and history. Its expressions were various, but ‘the unity of this new impulse—if it has one—is given not in itself but in the very modernism it seeks to displace’, including ‘the university, the museum and art gallery’ (p. 2). Modernism had been parodic, but there was ‘somewhere behind all parody the feeling that there is a linguistic norm’, whereas Postmodernism, in contrast, evacuated parody of its humour to offer mere pastiche, or ‘blank parody’ (pp. 4-5). To demonstrate the thesis that architecture was the art form most sensitive to the shifting dynamics of capital, Jameson gave an account of the ‘bewildering immersion’ of the atrium of the Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles: ‘not only do the escalators and elevators here henceforth replace movement, but also and above all designate themselves as new reflexive signs and emblems of movement proper’ (p. 14). More than the disjunction of body and environment, it was the ‘symbolic analogue of that sharper dilemma’, the inability to map the disorientation of quotidian Postmodern life (p. 16).

Jameson’s initial formulation was indebted to Ernst Mandel’s *Late Capitalism*, then the latest in a tradition of Marxist thought reading contemporary phases of capital accumulation as the ‘highest’ of possible orders.<sup>47</sup> After reading Giovanni Arrighi’s *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994), however, Jameson modified his position. Rather than a series of jumps to ever higher stages, the resilience of capitalism through crisis after crisis indicated a mode of production of flexibility and resourcefulness underestimated by the left. The constant was the expansive formula M-C-M’—investment capital, the purchase of labour power and the extraction of surplus value. Periodic tipping points, though, saw capital fly from production itself to the rapid maximisation of profit through financial transactions, and, after an orgy of runaway speculation and proclamations of a gravity-less economy, crash.<sup>48</sup> The culture of Postmodernism, patterned like the phase of finance capital in which it is produced, is a ‘peculiar kind of telos [that] need not lie in a straight line, but might well organize itself as a spiral’ (p. 139). As Fernand Braudel phrased it, ‘the stage of financial expansion is always a sign of

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<sup>46</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected writings on the postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998)—all page references for this collection of essays feature in the main text.

<sup>47</sup> Ernst Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Jores de Bres (London: New Left Books, 1975).

<sup>48</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, power and the origins of our times* (London: Verso, 1994).

autumn' (p. 141). In an intriguing aside, Jameson highlighted the affinity between the fixation with the speeding up of non-productive space and the value of land: 'a flow of money capital not backed by any commodity transaction', ground rents were also predicated on the 'expectation of future value' that staked a claim on future labour eerily absent from the scene. Thus the 'value of land is a structurally necessary fiction' in the capitalist societies that spawn fictitious capital, Marx's term for finance capital (pp. 183-4).

These 'spiral' rather than 'linear' pathways of capital drove Jameson from his critique of blanket Postmodernity to a more supple analysis of permutations within a cultural dominant. Far from evincing a descent into relativism, his later work handled the emergence of an unwelcome cultural turn rather than an apocalyptic cultural break, whilst retaining the sense of a deteriorating ideological climate. The incremental commodification of life in Postmodern capitalist society now restructured elements inherited from Modernism. Schizophrenic dislocation from reality was now a virus-like encroachment through continuity and change: 'it is true that we have to do here, not with some new mode of production, as such, but rather with a dialectical mutation of a capitalist system already long in place (profit, commodity production, boom and bust, wage labour); and to that degree the tracing of an internal subplot [...] may not be the most unsatisfactory way of proceeding' (p. 93). Consider, as Jameson does, beauty. During the *fin de siècle*, William Morris and Oscar Wilde championed the 'subversive role of beauty in a society marred by nascent commodification' (p. 134). Now, however, no meaningful zones of cultural production outside the purview of mainstream commodity-production avail themselves. Thus the conclusion: 'the image is the commodity today, and that is why it is vain to expect a negation of the logic of commodity production from it, that is why finally, all beauty today is meretricious and the appeal to it by contemporary pseudo-aestheticism is an ideological manoeuvre and not a creative resource' (p. 135).

## THE LOVE CHORD

*The Line of Beauty's* epigraph, a passage from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), anticipates the novel's themes of parody, misbehaviour, innocence, court

jesters and the ambivalence of style.<sup>49</sup> Turn to the text proper, and the opening image is disequilibrium in politics, literature and commodity-production: a window display features toppled copies of *Landslide!*, a rushed analysis of the 1983 General Election. Gerald Fedden is pictured as one of ‘The 101 New Tory MPs’. According to the (fictitious) hack, Fedden is representative of the ‘dwindling minority’ of Conservative MPs to have passed through ‘public school and Oxbridge’ (p. 3). The first page, then, indicates Lewis Carroll’s parody as a point of reference for an assessment of blank parody within the elite educational afterworld of 80s Britain. To use Jameson’s phrase, allusions to the *Alice* books form an ‘internal subplot’. With that in mind, I want to unpack the following paragraph:

[Catherine] loved anything satirical, and was a clever vocal mimic. When she and Nick got drunk she did funny imitations of her family, so that oddly they seemed not to have gone away. There was Gerald, with his facetious boom, his taste for the splendid, his favourite tags from the *Alice* books. ‘Really, Catherine’, protested Catherine, ‘you would try the patience of an oyster’. Or, ‘You recall the branches of arithmetic, Nick? Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision...?’ Nick joined in, with a sense of treacherously bad manners. It was Rachel’s style that attracted him more, as a code both aristocratic and distantly foreign. Her *group* sounded nearly Germanic, and the sort of thing she would never belong to; her *philistine*, pronounced as a French word, seemed to cover, by implication, anyone who said it differently. Nick tried this out on Catherine, who laughed but perhaps wasn’t much impressed. Toby she couldn’t be bothered to mimic; and it was true that he was hard to ‘get’. She did a funny turn as her godmother, the Duchess of Flintshire, who as plain Sharon Feingold had been Rachel’s best friend at Cranbourne Chase school, and whose presence in their lives gave a special archness to their joke about Mr Duke the odd-job man. The Duke that Sharon had married had a twisted spine and a

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<sup>49</sup> ‘What do you know about this business?’ the King said to Alice.

‘Nothing’, said Alice.

‘Nothing *whatever?*’ persisted the King.

‘Nothing whatever’, said Alice.

‘That’s very important’, the King said, turning to the jury. They were just beginning to write this down on their slates, when the White Rabbit interrupted: ‘*Un*important, your Majesty means, of course’, he said in a very respectful tone, but frowning and making faces at him as he spoke.

‘*Un*important, of course, I meant’, the King hastily said, and went on to himself in an undertone, ‘important—unimportant—important—unimportant—important—’ as if he were trying which word sounded best.

crumbling castle, and the Feingold vinegar fortune had come in very handy.  
(p. 8.)

Gerald insists on calling his daughter 'Cat', sometimes the more sexualised 'Puss'. William Empson, in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), identified the Cheshire Cat as the 'very direct symbol of Oxford's ideal of intellectual detachment'—'all cats', he concluded, 'are detached and since this one grins, it is the amused observer'. Oxford mathematician Charles Lutwidge Dodgson had executed a 'curioser and curioser' satire of the intellectual principle Matthew Arnold was championing as the university's distinct contribution to human knowledge. Empson saw the Arnoldian dream being parodied through the 'child-becomes-judge' motif.<sup>50</sup> Continuing the series of appropriations, Hollinghurst's 'Cat' deflects her father's bumptiousness, exposing its emptiness through mimicry.

In his analysis of the novel, Andrew Eastham identified Rachel as the virtuoso Jamesian ironist,<sup>51</sup> an insight that might be complemented by tapping some Arnoldian resonances. In 1846, Arnold saw the Franco-Jewish acting sensation Elisabeth Rachel Félix, known simply as Rachel. Arnold's three 'Rachel' sonnets were published in 1863. In the second, a Pygmalion-figure rises from Hebraic beginnings to become the 'radiant Greek-soul'd artist'. In the third, the muse balances the European theatre of 'clashed contending powers' through sheer Hellenism of spirit.<sup>52</sup> Hollinghurst's Rachel, also Jewish, an actress at Oxford, hones the Franco-German cosmopolitanism of the Rachel sonnets, and, with the stress on *philistine*, through Arnold-speak. The Master, though, is never far away. Englishness as foreignness dovetails with *The Tragic Muse* (1890), where Jewish actress Miriam Rooth aspires to be an 'English Rachel'.<sup>53</sup> And the name of James's protagonist? Nick Dormer.

Toby, Catherine recognises, is noteworthy for his blankness. That he is difficult to 'get' puns on Nick's chronic infatuation with the heterosexual stud-figure. Like and unlike his mother, Toby's appeal is consistently likened to that of a wooden

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<sup>50</sup> William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), pp. 254, 273.

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Eastham, 'Inoperative Ironies: Jamesian Aestheticism and post-modern culture in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*', *Textual Practice*, 20 (2006), 509-27.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'Rachel', in *Arnold: Poetical works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 167-8.

<sup>53</sup> Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 144.

Hollywood actor. The Fedden marriage had been a complementary union of male pastiche and complex female irony—‘They were each other’s alibi’ (p. 173)—but reproducing that gendered distinction resulted in Catherine, clearly the weakest link in the reproduction of Fedden family power. Toby has passed through Harrow, PPE and the Martyrs’ Club (Hollinghurst’s fictional equivalent of the super-elite Bullingdon Club) at Oxford, reproducing his father’s educational pathway to the letter. Catherine’s educational provenance is perhaps the most important elision in the novel, because it is essential to her construction as the bourgeois black sheep. The implication is that the daughter has bypassed boarding, perhaps even public-school education altogether (no undergraduate study of any description is discussed). The relation between public school and the production of ladies is captured by the motto (still in use) of Abbots Bromley School for Girls, ‘That Our Daughters May Be as the Polished Corners of a Temple’. Far from a ‘Polished Corner’ (as Abbot Bromley alumni called themselves), the Cat exhibits feisty iconoclasm, drunkenness and overt sensuality in the image of provocative commodified forms. ‘She looks’, according to Toby’s girlfriend Sophie Tipper, ‘like a strippergram’ (p. 133), but the observer, not the observed, is the vapid wannabe actress.

Bipolar, Catherine is the novel’s personification of disequilibrium. ‘Catherine’s ups and downs were part of Nick’s mythology of the house’ ever since ‘Toby had told him about them, as a sign of trust, one evening in college’—she was, according to her brother, ‘*pretty volatile*’ (p. 6). That submodifier and adjective is the novel embedding the interest in skewed aesthetics and politics announced by *Landslide!* in the composition of one upper-class family. Music is the failsafe inventory of sensibilities in *The Line of Beauty*, and Catherine’s favourites, Franz Schumann (declared mentally unbalanced) and The Clash (self-explanatory), are indicative of her pathologisation. The non-appearance of female characterisation in Hollinghurst’s previous work raises the concern that this medicalisation of truth errs on what feminists have called the ‘female malady’, the construction of womanhood as victimhood. But with the keenest social observation and the best lines, Catherine’s place within the novel as a moral barometer is licensed by, gives voice to and is privileged by the various non-diegetic ‘amused observers’ sustained by the text, which is to say the third-person narration, the authorial persona and, so the invitation goes, the implied reader. There is a sense in which the 80s were so stultifying that truth could only be known and blurted out by the mad.

The problem of the problem female, then, for the bourgeois-aristocrat family is that her 'ups and downs' destabilise the pre-existing balance between the two 'sides' of her class and racial background. Rachel was the object of exchange between two family lines, the Feddens and the Kesslers and, like her Arnoldian namesake, she brought balance to competing forces through sweetness and light. Gerald's father was a banker, though his *Mail*-reading mother only became a lady with a later marriage to a construction magnate. They crave aristocratic status. The Anglo-Jewish Kessler estate, on the other hand, sought racial assimilation and the protection of its capitalist interests. Fronts for banking conglomerates Fedray and Kessler&Co, the novel is interested in conversions and amalgamations that juggle class and race to reproduce financial elites. The assessment of contemporary marriage á la mode is withering. The proof is Catherine's physiognomy: 'the genetic mixture of two good-looking parents' meant that Gerald's 'large confidence-winning mouth had been awkwardly squashed into the slender ellipse of Rachel's face' (p. 8). The telltale Philistine feature had been forced into the romanticised Jewess's face by what, it has to be said, is figured as class and racial miscegenation. This is the condition of the bourgeois-aristocrat fraction rather than an isolated family: distorted curve, corrosive wealth and biting sexual pun are all there in the concluding titbit—Sharon Feingold married a duke with a 'twisted spine and a crumbling castle, and the Feingold vinegar fortune had come in very handy' (p. 8).

Nick's place at Kensington Gardens is a response to this situation. There are times, Toby says, when Catherine 'can't be alone', and so the invitation of a man of Culture as a companion had to strike a delicate balance to readjust a delicate family façade. He needed to be (i) readable as *homosexual* to the extent that he may forestall any rumours of sexual intimacy with Catherine, (ii) readable as *sexless* to the extent that Toby's homosocial Oxford days were not retrospectively impugned, (iii) readable as *cultured* enough to draw out Catherine's 'Hellenism', (iv) readable as *deferential* to Conservative politics and philistine culture, yet (v) readable as *independent* so as to mask his function, though (vi) *leisurely* enough not to stigmatise the household with (more) trade or (worse still) wage labour. Behind the scenes, any appointee needed to be manipulable if not silenceable (Catherine was a potential scandal, and the home is the central nervous system of Fedray). The quality that covered all necessary criteria, *innocence*, meant that the post could never be fully revealed to the successful 'applicant'. There was 'something about [Nick] they trusted, a gravity, a certain shy polish' that had 'helped the family agree that he should become their lodger', and when Gerald



became MP for Barwick, Nick's (fictional) home constituency, the prospect was 'jovially hailed as having the logic of poetry, or fate' (p. 5). That 'something' was provided by a grammar school product, homosexual, aesthete, PhD student, Oxford friend and constituent. 'Uncle Nick' represents an alliance of compromised positions that trades benign presence for access to the high life. This is the novel's pretended family relation.

Gerald and Rachel had left for France telling Nick that he is 'looking after the Cat' (p. 7), and the first incident after their departure intimates how the 'innocent' is a class intruder for the same reasons he was appointed. Nick returns from the bookshop to find Catherine distressed, surrounded by knives and begging him not to tell her parents. Worrying later that evening as to whether to ring the Feddens or Leo (the date he is missing whilst tending to Catherine), the outcome is determined by the limited experience of his petit-bourgeois upbringing: 'His ignorance about what to do was a sign of his much larger ignorance about the world in which he'd recently arrived' — 'He had a dread of being in the wrong, but was also frightened of taking action' — like his father at home, he 'sidled' around crises with 'evasive sympathy' (p. 12). Nick's default setting of neutrality to maintain the illusion of a pre-existing general sentiment shows up the protagonist as a synecdoche of the lower-middle class.

The first sustained evaluation of this compact between class fractions occurs during the set piece of Part I, Toby's twenty-first birthday party held at Kessler's country seat, Hawkeswood. Every idiosyncrasy of the estate marks it as a fictionalised Waddesdon.<sup>54</sup> Approaching the house, Nick's 'eyes darted critically, admiringly—he didn't know what—over the steep slate roofs and stone walls the colour of French mustard'. He recollects the 'high-minded but humorous' Pevsner entry (p. 48). Nick's appreciative consumption replicates the imbroglio with a scrambled gaze, trivialising a defence of high Culture that stood back and assessed the interrelationship of elements. The imposing symmetry of Hawkeswood is an effort to appease the awkward balance of class and race therein; Lord Kessler has a 'not quite symmetrical face' (p. 49). A bachelor at sixty, his inscrutable sexuality is questionable only in private because of the aloofness he enforces; 'I avert my eyes', he declares, to sleeping arrangements, in what the narration calls 'a strategy of

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<sup>54</sup> Sources for Lionel Kessler include Baron Lionel de Rothschild and David Francis Kessler, thirty years the chairman of *The Jewish Chronicle* and author of *The Rothschilds and Disraelis in Buckinghamshire: An essay* (Aylesbury: Rothschild Waddesdon, 1996).

enlightened avoidance' (p. 50). Lord Kessler's 'interview' with Nick in the library tests this deliberate 'wet' eschewal of New Right moralism and the wet-dry distinction it raises:

Nick found a set of Trollope which had a relatively modest and approachable look among the rest, and took down *The Way We Live Now*, with an armorial bookplate, the pages uncut. 'What have you found there?' said Lord Kessler, in a genially possessive tone. 'Ah, you're a Trollope man, are you'.

'I'm not sure I am, really', said Nick. 'I always think he wrote so fast. That is what Henry James said, about Trollope and his "great heavy shovelfuls of testimony to constituted English matters"?'

Lord Kessler paid a moment's wry respect to this bit of showing-off, but said, 'Oh, Trollope's good. He's very good on money'.

'Oh... yes...' said Nick, feeling doubly disqualified by his complete ignorance of money and by the aesthetic prejudice which had stopped him from ever reading Trollope. [...]

He pressed the volume back into place and closed the gilded cage. He had a sense, which was perhaps only his own self-consciousness, of some formal bit of business, new to him but deeply familiar to his host, being carried out in a sociable disguise. (pp. 52-53.)

Kessler asks Nick whether he went to school with Toby; Nick replies that he went to Barwick Grammar. Pressed further on his PhD topic, the student elaborates by saying that he is interested in 'style that hides things and reveals things at the same time', which unsettles the atmosphere. Stating his preference for James, however, clears the air. Kessler replies, 'Yes, you're a James man, I see now', confessing that the Master thought Hawkeswood and its inhabitants 'rather vulgar' (p. 54). There is a framed photograph featuring high-Anglo-Jewry—Kesslers, Sassoons and Goldsmids—standing alongside the Balfours (p. 55). Later, Nick tells Catherine that 'It was like an interview, except I hadn't applied for a job' (p. 57). The tête-à-tête steers through coded sexual, cultural and social positions. The 'gilded cage', an allusion to James's indictment of Waddesdon, and *The Way We Live Now* are, given Trollope's subject matter, Hawkeswood and Kessler in miniature. The lord defends the constitution of English money-culture as expiated by Trollope despite James's criticism, yet his undisclosed source is a cultured homosexual, W.H. Auden. Once Kessler divines that Nick is a 'James man', a phrase loaded with sexual ambiguity, the interview closes with a wry admission of vulgarity. It is, literally, a little confidence. The prospect of a class threat from a grammar school product's

critique of style is neutered by a meek homosexuality ignorant of money and Jewishness. In short, Nick also invests in the appearances of a see-through closet, his educational afterworld is dependent on Fedden-Kessler interests, and that is enough for the squire.

The after-party in Toby's room is an educational purgatory caught between formal education and the educational afterworld proper. Nick peeps round the door:

[Toby] had been given the King's Room, where Edward VII had slept—the swags of blue silk above the bedhead were gathered into a vaguely comic gilded crown. [...] Somehow they had recreated the mood of a college room late at night [...]. (pp. 85-86.)

Thomas Hay Sweet Escott had complained that the 'initiative of the Prince of Wales' promoted rich Jews, especially his Rothschild friends.<sup>55</sup> Replete with imagery of usurping Jew-kings—fake crowns, thrones and swags abound—an Oxford cabal revels in the nonchalant College life that brought them together and certified their privilege. Told to close the door,

Nick felt the charm as well as the threat of the group... The talk went on, but there felt to Nick's tingling drunk ears to be a residual silence in the room, on which his own movements and words were an intrusion... and yet left no trace. Several of his other pals were here, but the two months since term had distanced them more than he could explain. Some simple but strong and long-prepared change had occurred, they had taken up their real lives, and left him alone in his. (p. 86.)

Whenever Hollinghurst's protagonists are confronted with all the evidence they need to achieve epiphany, ellipses denote the time taken for the cogs of the original self-delusion to process the situation according to pre-established terms. The alienation effect confirms for the reader that the protagonist lacks the right inner world to read things as they really are. The suggestion that Nick leads an 'unreal' life anticipates the fallback fantasy: 'Nick looked around appreciatively, glossing over his inner vision of the night as a long stumbling journey, half chase, half flight, like one of his country-house dreams' (p. 87). In doing so, he missed his appointment with the attractive Portuguese waiter Tristão who was waiting, in

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<sup>55</sup> 'Foreign Resident', *Society in London*, p. 47.

Wagnerian fashion, at the bottom of the staircase. By withholding the content of those obviously significant ‘country-house’, ‘staircase dreams’ from the reader until Part II, Nick is isolated as a character lost in a self-mythologising world.

That ‘long-prepared’ separation is presented as the moment private-educated Oxonians assume their destinies over State-selected contemporaries. What is interesting here is the way in which the scholarship boy’s function as a foil for elite masculinities is reproduced in the educational afterworld. Consider a typical exchange of rowdy banter by the quasi-aristocratic Oxonians. Jewish Sam Zeman corrects Gareth Lane, whose lecture on Nazi Germany has already licensed one of the drunk girlfriends to slur that Toby and the ‘Home Sectary’ are Jewish:

‘You’re in a house full of Jews here, can you shut up about the final solution, it’s a party...’ [...]

You’re Jewish, aren’t you, Nat?’

I am, darling’, said Nat, ‘or half Jewish, anyway’.

‘And the other half’s a bloody Welshman’, said Roddy. [...]

This was the kind of insult that passed for wit at the Martyrs’ Club, and was in fact one of things most often said there. Toby had once taken Nick to the club’s poky panelled dining room, where Christ Church toffs and Union hacks confirmed deafeningly to type and boozed and plotted and howled unacceptable remarks at each other and at the harried staff. It was another world, defiantly impervious, in which it was a shock to find that Toby had a place. (pp. 87-88.)

They are boors, but in a manner that monopolises aspects of dandyism. Eastham’s analysis indicates how the centrality of Henry James for Nick’s identity silences Wilde and Pater in order to ‘deflect any definite sexual interpolation of his Aestheticism’.<sup>56</sup> Before this Jamesian strategy in London, Nick was known and dismissed as ‘the man who likes Bruckner!’ at university (p. 255). Nick was “out” as an aesthete’ at College before he had ‘fully come out in his last year at Oxford’ (pp. 55, 26). The coming-out was—to adopt the typical criticism of Anton Bruckner—attached to a naïve and obsequious symphonist because any strategy that relied on conspicuousness would have been outclassed in advance. Leisurely waiting for their class privilege to gain academic certification, a heterosexual, public-schooled elite-in-waiting has more cause and means to display the ‘vaguely

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<sup>56</sup> Eastham, ‘Inoperative Ironies’, 525.

disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism' Alan Sinfield has identified as the twentieth-century's Wildean image than the class-compromised alien.<sup>57</sup> The long turn to neoliberalism reconfigured elite masculinities from risk-averse cricket to the testosterone of the stock market. Devoid of wit, self-oppressive public embarrassments like Jewishness are traded as tokens of social immunity. The Martyrs' Club is, in embryo, the 'heterosexual queenery' of the oleaginous Tory grandees observed in Part III (p. 382). The change? The last Conservative public-schooled Oxford elite in power, the Eden-MacMillan-Home set, patronised Oxford restaurants as neo-Edwardians, whereas the present Cameron-Osborne-Johnson Bullingdon generation trashed them as Barbarians during the 80s. The relatively unprivileged are silent witnesses in education as they are in the educational afterworld.

Back at Kensington Park Gardens for the fourth chapter, recordings of Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* (1898) during a Saturday morning's 'Building a Library' on Radio 3 explores how Culture repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce. Marx observed in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852) that 'unheroic though bourgeois society is, it nevertheless needed heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war, and national wars to bring it into being', and, once established, 'the bourgeois gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions, that they needed to conceal from themselves the bourgeois-limited content of their struggles and to keep their passion on the high plane of great historical tragedy'.<sup>58</sup> First, the tragedy: the most obvious criticism of *Ein Heldenleben* as a violation of Culture is the deployment of Wagner's leitmotif technique and mythic subject matter to the self-glorification of 'bourgeois-limited content' (the Hero's Victory is comprised of themes from the composer's previous works). The argument is this: what Wagner did for universal art, Strauss did for Strauss. Then farce: Gerald, only interested of the Hero's narrative, conducting the music with a tennis racquet, vanquishes his foes by slamming them into the pantry with a forehand. Romain Rolland's words from 1900 linking Strauss's 'megalomania' to a particular German moment are easily transposable to Gerald and a Britain on the cusp of rampant financialisation:

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<sup>57</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), pp. 16-17.

His conversation shows me how right I was to see in him the typical artist of the new German empire, the powerful reflection of that heroic pride, which is on the verge of becoming delirious, of that contemptuous Nietzscheism, of that egotistical and practical idealism, which makes a cult of power and disdains weakness.<sup>59</sup>

And that was from a friend. It took Theodor Adorno to pinpoint the attraction of Strauss for bourgeois culture: 'philosophy [...] is for sale in Strauss's music', the Frankfurt critic wrote, 'Everything becomes a cultural good to be looked at, to be bought, to be enjoyed as a stimulus for the nerves of the big but tired businessman'.<sup>60</sup> This Adornian complaint is voiced by Nick's indignant inner monologue:

What the problem was was this colossal redundancy, the squandering of brilliant technique on cheap material, the sense that the moral nerves had been cut, leaving the great bloated body to a life of valueless excess. And then there was the sheer bad taste of applying the high metaphysical language of Wagner to the banalities of bourgeois life, an absurdity Strauss seemed only intermittently aware of! (p. 96.)

Eastham rightly notes that these misgivings are so apolitical in expression that they are effectively silenced.<sup>61</sup> The educational afterworld was at work. As Francis Mulhern reminds, Radio 3's highbrow forerunner, the Third Programme, was 'a kind of sixth form of the air'.<sup>62</sup> The 'Strauss feud', Nick's teasing of Gerald's musical love, mapped educational inequality to taste. No wonder 'Nick was maddened by Strauss's bumptious self-confidence, which took no account of his own frustrations', yet slavishly indexed Karajan's *Ein Heldenleben* in Gerald's vinyl collection (p. 95). If tastes are equal, the educational afterworld decides.

We are, though, with culture discussing culture discussing culture, firmly within the obfuscating mirrors and removes of metacultural discourse. The question has

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<sup>59</sup> *Richard Strauss and Romain Rolland, Correspondence*, ed. Rollo H. Myers (London: Caller & Boyers, 1968), p. 122.

<sup>60</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'What National Socialism has done for the Arts', in *Essays on Music*, selected by Richard Leppert (London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 373-87 (p. 379), cit. Eastham, 'Inoperative Ironies', 521.

<sup>61</sup> Eastham, 'Inoperative Ironies', 521.

<sup>62</sup> Mulhern, 'Culture and Authority', 83.

to be asked, then, as to the extent to which a text bringing a de-politicised cultural position into relief reproduces the same deficiency by not stating its own politics in doing so. This is, after all, how Culture hollows out what it surveys to infer a higher plane of meaning for its own exceptionalism. But I say 'extent' because it would seem to me that although Hollinghurst scarcely breaks out of *Kulturkritik* mode, this Strauss section does stage the aestheticisation of politics and the complicity of those unable to translate intuitive unease into an oppositional critical stance. Adorno, writing in 1945, placed Strauss within the long development of National Socialist culture. The composer's relations with the Nazi Party, in fact, were extraordinarily fraught, bound up with the protection of his Jewish grandchildren. Hollinghurst's focus on the Karajan recording, however, makes pointed contemporary associations. Herbert von Karajan was selected to head the 'classical' music star system, launch the compact disc with Deutsche Gramophon and be the copyright-owner of the Anthem of Europe *because* rather than *despite* of his status as an ex-Nazi Party member. A postwar capitalist Continent eager to redeem its recent history produced and consumed in excess of 200m Karajan records, pursuing a new German-led United Europe by means of the Culture Industry.<sup>63</sup> Eastham is right to indicate how the radio presenter's detached commentary is complicit with the vulgarity it criticises:

'But it's possible, isn't it', the clever young man went on, 'to wonder if the sheer opulence of the sound and those very broad tempi don't push this reading over the edge, losing that essential drop of self-irony which the piece can all too easily become an orgy of vulgarity'. (p. 96.)

Yet, I would say, that non-committal attitude does deliver a punch. 'Clever' implies superficial ingeniousness, but it is the 'chap's tone' that riles Gerald (p. 94). The intimation is that contemporary star Culture draws out and magnifies pre-existing qualities inherent to late Romanticism (what was once vulgar is now orgiastically so). Catherine slams the door as she flees the 'God-dammery, her word for heavily scored Romantic music' (p. 96). The reference to the last instalment of the Ring cycle shows the subtlety of an Adornian, indeed Jamesonian argument that heeds the spiralling nature of elements across capitalist societies in time and space. In his Wagner study, the Frankfurt critic argued that the seeds of the Culture Industry were sown by the all-out spectacle of Der

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<sup>63</sup> Estefan Buch, 'Beethoven in the Shadows of Berlin', *Dissent*, 56 (2009), 14-17.

Meister's *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>64</sup> The brushstrokes are broad but integral to *The Line of Beauty*'s thesis that commodification has steadily vulgarised universal art to the extent that, without the necessary publics or qualifications, original genius is tainted by 80s bombast.

When it arrives, the 'love chord' lending its name to Part I is an electrifying acknowledgement of desire that takes these musical anxieties into the deepest recesses of sexuality. A few weeks have passed since Nick first met Leo (they had met in a gay pub then, with nowhere to go, fucked in a private park):

he heard a big orchestral sound in his head. He saw Leo lying on his coat under a bush, his shirt and jersey pushed up under his armpits, his jeans and pants round his knees, small dead leaves sticking to his thighs—and he heard the astonishing chord. It was high and low at once, an abysmal pizzicato, a pounce of the darkest brass, and above it a hair-raising sheen of strings.

Trying to divine the chord's provenance, Wagner's *Tristan* chord is rejected; it is, Nick concludes, probably Straussian in origin, a depiction of some 'vulgar atrocity' (p. 138). This is to say that it was an unholy clash of 'high and low' C/culture 'at once', rather than the transcendence of distinctions in the Wagnerian universal. Love was marred in advance by the way Nick and Leo met through a lonely-hearts ad in *Gay Times*. I defer here to Slavoj Žižek:

Even the process of engaging in emotional relations is increasingly organized along the lines of a market relationship. Such a procedure relies on self-commodification: for internet dating or marriage agencies, prospective partners present themselves as commodities, listing their qualities and posting their photos. What is missing here is what Freud called *der einzige Zug*, that singular pull which instantly makes me like or dislike the other. Love is a choice that is experienced as necessity. At a certain point, one is overwhelmed by the feeling that one already is in love, and that one cannot do otherwise. By definition, therefore, comparing qualities of respective candidates, deciding with whom to fall in love, cannot be love. This is the reason why dating agencies are an anti-love device *par excellence*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (London: Verso, 2005); see Andreas Huyssen, 'Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner', *New German Critique*, 29 (1983), 8-38.

<sup>65</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Permanent Economic Emergency', *NLR*, 64 (2010), 85-95 (92).



The tragedy of gay subculture in *The Line of Beauty* is that love will always be blanced by the anti-love that precedes it. Nick was apprehensive before his first date because of the contradiction, knowing love was ‘pursued through all the obstacles of the system which alone made it possible’ (p. 27). The compromises of gay life give the homosexual imagination over to heterosexual fantasies: ‘Nick’s taste was for aesthetically radiant images of gay activity, gathering in a golden future for him, like swimmers on a sunlit bank’ (p. 25). The construction of gay is, paradoxically, the construction of the ‘homosexual second-best solution’ (p. 84). In this self-thwarting commodity-think, the feel of Leo’s body is ‘cheap and provisional compared to the unattainable bloom of Toby’ (p. 175).

#### ‘TO WHOM DO YOU BEAUTIFULLY BELONG?’

1986, and Nick has ditched his scholarly jacket and the library for a pair of Speedos at a gay cruising area in a London park. He is, soon enough, in the gay-populated office of Ogee, a magazine owned by Nick’s secret lover, Antoine ‘Wani’ Ouradi, dedicated to aesthetically perfect consumption. The aesthete is wearing pinstripe (straight lines). Holding forth, Nick explains that ‘*beautiful*’ and ‘*wonderful*’ were words Henry James had his characters say if he wanted to mark them out as superficial. He cites the moment in *The High Bid* (1907) when a man asks a butler, ‘I mean, to whom do you beautifully *belong*?’ Nick continues by describing a recent trick’s penis in affected pseudo-Jamesian style: ‘it was... *of a dimension*’. The fetish is inflated rather than deflated to titillate the gay staff. The narration cuts in sharply: ‘So he prattled on, mixing sex and scholarship, and wandering from the strict truth’. The focalising perspective of the authorial position, that ‘The worse they are the more they see beauty in each other’, is deviational (pp. 208-9). Thus the appearance of a third person increasingly losing patience with its diegetic representative, the worst offender.

The discussion of Hogarth suggests a mode of presentation that conveys the major cultural frames of reference to the reader by portraying well-meaning miscontrual as the basis of self-deluding hypocrisy. The stage is Wani’s extravagant new flat. Boasting a Gothic bedroom and an Egyptian bathroom, Nick sees that ‘the house was vulgar, as almost everything postmodern was’, but gains ‘pleasure from it’ nevertheless. The bed canopy was

made of two transecting ogees crowned by a boss like a huge wooden cabbage. It was as he lay beneath it, in uneasy post-coital vacancy, that the idea of calling Wani's outfit Ogee had come to him: it had a rightness to it, being both English and exotic, like so many things he loved [...]. The double curve was Hogarth's 'line of beauty', the snakelike flicker of an instinct, of two compulsions held in one unfolding movement.

Running his hand down the curve of Wani's lower back, Nick's thinks it 'was really time for a new *Analysis of Beauty*'. So, the train of thought leads from the ogee to an appeal of the non-white homosexual male in terms of Hogarth's line. The first point to make is that the conception of Nick's misconception occurs after sex with the representative of the novel's second crowned bed canopy—like the Victorian Kesslers, the Lebanese Ouradis are inserting themselves into British high society by flaunting ersatz assemblages of styles at monumental expense. In short, this is a postmodern 'mixing of sources' that oozes capital. The second point is that these concerns map the pedigrees of the dual and singular lines Nick contemplates in an effort to make discourses of beauty correspond with his private world. The ogee weaving two S-shaped oppositions originated (so Nick tells the Ouradis later, p. 255) in the Middle East, whereas the Hogarthian line is indivisible and English. The implication of the latter's 'snakelike flicker of an instinct' is that the Edenic line of beauty is susceptible to seduction by the exotic; the foreign violates Englishness by tapping one of its essential traits, its worst rather than best self. The wider narrative supports the idea that Wani is the bad sexual influence. In his company, glossing postmodern contradiction as ironic contrast—Wani 'likes everything that's the opposite of what it seems' (p. 352)—dulls the aesthete's already-compromised ability to see things as they really are. Nick tells the Ouradis that the line of beauty is 'a sort of animating principle' for the ogee (p. 255), but it has already been firmly established that straight lines of coke literally animate gay-cum-media lifestyles. By the end of Part II, after lines have been snorted over books about young Henry James, criticism from the third person is reminiscent of the 'One Thing Needful' chapter of *Culture and Anarchy*: 'It was beyond pleasure, it was its own motor, pure compulsion, though it gave them the delusion of choice, and of wit in making it' (p. 387).

The text establishes that this critical perspective, made available by an Oxford Eng.Lit. education, is silenced by an educational afterworld where it serves a twee commemorative function; a 'never to be looked at again' copy of Arnold from Wani's College days looks down from a shelf (p. 216). Nick recalls that Wani

feigned interest in the concerns of poor students during discussions of *Culture and Anarchy* at Oxford (p. 188). Nick first encountered the libertine as he waltzed late into his first Anglo-Saxon seminar and effortlessly translated King Alfred (p. 255). The importance of these expository snippets is that they posit Oxford as the meeting-point of class outsiders from 'above' and 'below' the middle classes Arnold charged with the guardianship of Culture. Harrow-educated Wani bears the stigma of—to quote one Conservative party gossip—his 'immigrant orange-and-lemon-seller' father (p. 189). Bertrand Ouradi, the owner of a chain of grocery stores (first store, Finchley), is buying his way into the affections of the grocer's daughter to gain British citizenship and, with it, an English peerage. A literary Oxford education brings the patina of English national culture to the Ouradi project. Leavisism and its feeder institution, the grammar school, had done much to displace Classics as the discipline that accredits 'Englishness' as the lower-middle classes proficient in language staked their claim on English national culture. Alfred's Preface looked forward to an enlightened national community organised through an elite's command of written English, and Anglo-Saxon translation at Worcester is *The Line of Beauty's* metaphor for the social conversions made by class outsiders to access that communion.

Not so easy. Nick and Wani might be best understood as each the reason the other is thwarted from the outset. The paradox of learning culture as a means of assimilation is that it aspires to the condition of the non-taught, even though the processes by which it is desired and acquired are indelible. So Wani's wealth can never unlearn racial, national and cultural exclusions, just as Nick's status as a 'true-born' Englishman can never learn away his petit-bourgeois roots. That they are more 'English' together as an ogee-like pair than apart is evident when Nick says he is working on his thesis at Wani's flat and Wani presents Nick as his office 'aesthete' (p. 233). The mutual social alibi accounts for the awkwardness, durability and inequality of the novel's central sexual relationship. As Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron found, education is 'most successful in imposing recognition of the value of itself and its classifications when its action is applied to social classes or class fractions who are unable to counterpose to it any rival principle of hierarchy'.<sup>66</sup> Wani enters the educational afterworld with the scholarship boy in tow because Nick's remaining tether to literary education shores up an always-incomplete identity. The result of their social translations is

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<sup>66</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, p. 147.

the novel's sorry comment on the contribution made by their respective demographics to the Arnoldian spirit of Oxford. I am suggesting, then, that in Nick, Wani, Thatcher and Ouradi, *The Line of Beauty* presents Culture as something pinched between the petit-bourgeois and the super-rich, a squeezing hand in glove with political alliances between the lower-middle classes and the representatives of capital. It would appear that the Leavis-isation of letters, by opening a gateway to the relatively unprivileged, left Englishness open to the Barbarians.

Following the course of the classic English novel, the 'Barwick' chapter returns to scenes of childhood. The opening dream sequence stages the limits and pressures of State selection in the space that opens up between public school afterworld and commodified gay subculture:

The service stairs were next to the main stairs, separated only by a wall, but what a difference there was between them: the narrow back stairs, dangerously unrailed, under the bleak gleam of a skylight, each step worn down to a steep hollow, turned tightly in a deep grey shaft; whereas the great main sweep, a miracle of cantilevers, dividing and joining again, was hung with the portraits of prince-bishops, and had ears of corn in its wrought-iron banisters that trembled to the tread. It was glory at last, an escalation of delight, from which small doors, flush with the panelling, moved by levers below the prince-bishops' high-heeled and rosetted shoes, gave access, at every turn, to the back stairs, and their treacherous gloom. How quickly, without noticing, one ran from one to the other, after the proud White Rabbit, a well-known Old Harrovian porn star with a sphincter that winked as bells rang, crows murmured and pigeons flopped about the dormer window while Nick woke and turned in his own little room again, in the comfortable climax of home. (p. 263.)

Nick takes his time working up a vision of Toby's 'great innocent rower's arse' on the staircase at Hawkeswood the morning after his twenty-first birthday. As the content of the 'country-house', 'staircase' dreams is finally revealed to the reader, the enormity of the self-delusion is conveyed in the telling: a private fantasy glosses over the very situation the reader knows was itself glossed over with the same fantasy. Let me explain the chain of allusions and delusions as I read it. With a public-schooled literary Oxonian presenting a grammar-schooled literary Oxonian dreaming, Arnoldian legacies are being contested. Empson argued that 'Oxford as dreamy' in *Alice* was Carroll's 'half satire half acceptance of Arnold's "adorable

dreamer” purple patch’.<sup>67</sup> Hollinghurst’s scholarship boy, however, is unwittingly self-satirising. The vertigo of Hoggart’s ‘Uprooted and Anxious’ scholarship boy on the subaltern staircase re-enacts the action of educational selection as a phantasmagoric frieze. Life is a ladder. Moving from low to high, the threat of expulsion is ever-present. The way is precipitous because the means of entry are the means of expulsion: boots sporting tokens of academic success operate the levers, the tutor that ‘sent [Nick] off to Oxford’ is called Mr *Leverson* (p. 268). The distraction arrives in the prospect of a Harrow boy’s teasingly commodified backside. It is soon confirmed that Toby is the Harrovian referent. If Alice fell into Wonderland through a rabbit hole, then the allusions to consumerist gay subculture are sexual (anus) and drugs (trips and absence from general social activity). This is the point where *The Line of Beauty* ‘enters’ and ‘feels’ the protagonist’s unconscious in order to lodge one of its theses as the hardwiring of the lower-middle class: upward educational mobility stymied by social immobility is locked into the doomed gay pursuit of unattainable straight perfection.

It all comes back to Barwick, where, growing up in provincial bungalow, ladders, stairs, social and gay life were the stuff that dreams were made of. Chapter 10 is therefore the exploration of formative Leavisian and Thatcher-like family-school habitats. In Barwick, Hollinghurst strikes the tone of a thrifty grammar-school town of Smithian sentiment. The aesthetic focus of what the third person calls Nick’s ‘moral education’ (p. 112), the eighteenth-century market hall, ‘ranked with the Taj Mahal and the Parliamentary Building in Ottawa in [Nick’s] private architectural heaven’ (p. 285). It stands in ‘Market Square’ (p. 284). Nick’s father Don is a churchwarden and he owns a modest antiques business in town; his mother does the church flowers (p. 156). The bungalow, The Linnells, represents a gentle petit-bourgeoisie acquiescent to the social compact: there are ‘decent post-war houses with plenty of garden, and only a view of fields at the back, and horses leading in from time to time to chomp at the delphiniums and the weeping willow’. Capital trickles through this picture: Nick returned from university one Christmas to find that his father had sold his walnut bed. The fetishism is claustrophobic: Don and Dot Guest are ‘supervised and even a little oppressed’ by ‘crowded families of Staffordshire and Chelsea figures’. With Gerald returning on constituency business, this section is interested in the 80s market town as the meeting-point of worlds bound by capital but antithetical on account of their

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<sup>67</sup> Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 284.

wholly different capital flows. The Guests know that the new greenfield development, part of Westminster's drive towards 'home ownership', spells the end to farsighted, quaintly English postwar comforts. Yet Don has begun to charge 'London prices' to Londoners driving up on day trips in fast new cars, thrilled by the 'throb of possession' (pp. 265-6). A relation is thus forged between speeds and sensibilities of objects and people that personify capital—ever greater commodity-fetishism emanates from the fast-placed metropole, undermining the self-effacing motivation of humble circuits. The Forsterian anxiety of the motor car pervading the chapter links top-down binds of capital with education. The grammar-school town is a social ecology dedicated to the production of mobility away from its centre. Nick passes his father's shopfront in Fedden's open-top car, feeling his 'schoolboy pride and his Oxford snobbery pinch on it from both directions, on his very own name, N. GUEST plumb in the middle' (p. 286). In shades of 'LEAVIS: PIANOS', the shopfront reads 'CLOCKS D.N. GUEST ANTIQUES' (p. 284). So Nick became 'don' Nicholas Guest when he graduated from Oxford, fulfilling the name of the father through education; but the process means that the provincial snobbery *for* Oxford inscribed in provincial life goes unrecognised. A long-prepared break is secured.

The spectacle of Kessler&Co's new Square Mile headquarters can now be read as *The Line of Beauty's* architectural statement on postmodernism, capital and the educational afterworld. Nick meets Sam Zeman at a performance of *Tannhäuser*—the budding Oxford historian that started at Kesslers on forty thousand in Part I is now, at the height of the Wagner revival, a devotee of Strauss. Oblivious to the cultural warning signs, Nick visits the City to ask Zeman if he would invest his five thousand pounds (a self-serving gift from Wani) on his behalf:

When the day came Nick turned up early at the bank and waited under a palm tree in the atrium. People hurried in, nodding to the commissionaire, who still wore a tailcoat and a top hat. On the exposed elevators the employees were carried up and down, looking both slavish and intensely important... He felt abashed and agitated by closeness to so many people at work, in costume, in character, in the know. The building itself had the glitter of confidence, and made and retained an unending and authentic noise out of air vents, the hubbub of voices and the impersonal trundling of the escalators. (p. 203.)

The referent is The Lloyd's Building, which opened in 1986. There were, however, frequent breakdowns in communication between the avant-garde planners pushing for externalised oil-rig aesthetics and the conservatism of a public-school board wanting kudos without the inconvenience. The paradox of big-business insurers betting against the profligacy of others showed itself in one standoff when the board vetoed a biscuit-coloured designer carpet on the grounds that it evinced cheap provincial beige.<sup>68</sup> This contradiction, the City against itself, is evident in the tiering of class, sensibility and culture at Kesslers. On the one hand, the exotic palm feeds the postmodern rejection of place but, on the other, the company introduces the design as a continuity of English power by installing a top-hatted attendant. The two major points of stasis in this scene of public-school motion are Nick at the foot of an escalator and Lionel's Kandinsky in the 'old panelled boardroom' located somewhere in the unseen heights. Nick's immobility is the product of State-led educational selections escalating the linguistic proficiency of lower-middle-class origins. The uplift of this academic capital ends at the foot of the career afterworld because it is unable to convert educational attainment into any other form of social power. The higher and more honed the academic specialisation in the humanities from low insertions into the education system, the more likely a candidate lacks the mouldable thrust prized by recruiters. Overselection into grateful literary sensibilities is woefully ill-suited to a job market where premium is set on self-advancement through force of speech. Trading-hall masculinities at Kesslers pervade the gym—men 'shouted esoteric boasts from stall to stall' in the shower (p. 204)—and restaurant—'there seemed to be one great rough syllable in the air, a sort of "wow" or "yow"' (p. 205). The real escalator, then, is the blank theatre of an elite graduate cohort happy to perform a role if it means submitting to the apotheosis promised by private education (hence their secret knowledge). Lionel's installation of the Kandinsky as a permanent surrogate of himself imposes the aristocratic high-low distinctions of modernist art over the postmodern automata below. A panoptic Olympian loftiness reproduces bourgeois-aristocratic power by staging the reproduction of middle-class power through individual ascent. Needless to say, Jewish Zeman charges Nick, his friend, a cool three per cent.

Elsewhere, the 'incalculable ironies of different kinds of rich people together' (p. 64) that resonated through Part I become the stuff of English social comedy. Tory

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<sup>68</sup> Kenneth Allinson, *London's Contemporary Architecture* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2006), p. 19.

MPs, ladies and donors hobnob at a private piano recital at the Feddens' new upmarket home in Highgate. The Philistinism on show is against itself. Gerald revels in his role as host to Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin—he thinks *Parsifal* is 'great fun' (p. 240)—but the crowd, tolerating the Greats dutifully enough, uses the encore, a machine-gun execution of Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance*, to twitter about their appreciation of music (chief birdbrain: Gerald's mother, Lady 'Partridge'). By association, idiotic culture-talk deflates wildly exaggerated claims about the Falklands, blind Thatcher-worship and the probity of Conservative Party policy. When Gerald's attempt to complement gross Fedray profits with a display of 'Culture' backfires, the pettiness of the wet/dry culture race is foregrounded. Babbling turns to how Gerald's pianist is outclassed by his brother-in-law's Medici Quartet, Denis (yes) Beckwith's hiring of Kiri te Kanawa (the Culture Industry's Strauss heroine) and, ultimately, Heseltine, who is about to enlist the 'whole blinking' Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (p. 245-6), the London orchestra which makes its money from vulgar showpieces. More darkly, the racist women are unsure of what to make of the thrill they feel in the company of Ouradi power.

One of the effects of that satire, however, is that malice in *Wonderland* tends to be reserved for those encircling the Conservative Party core, brushing viciousness away from the direct executioners of the Thatcher project. Bertrand berates a black waitress for her help (p. 250). Wani is calculation itself, but the presence of Sir Maurice Tipper during the Fedden family holiday in France is the most sustained demonstration of the distinction. Tipper is a 'total philistine' (Toby), 'cunt' (Nick) and 'shit' (Catherine)—he even disgusts Gerald. The asset-stripping firm Tipper&Co, to cite Edward Heath's famous criticism of the firm Lonrho, is the 'unacceptable face of capitalism'. Non-Oxford Tipper, then, is of a kind with arguably *The Line of Beauty*'s nastiest piece of work, Gerald's righthand man Badger who, after brutally asset-stripping Africa in the 70s, is known there by 'one of a number of words for hyena' (p. 132). Liquidating Britain's industrial capacity into non-productive concentrations of private capital is offered, then, as a tipping point between Culture and culture. The literary world taken to the tip is Forster's *Maurice*, whilst the measure of the violation is Tipper's recent takeover of Pegasus, the publisher of a study on James Nick is reviewing for *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*. The only traction in Part II against this impingement is Catherine. The daughter defies Tipper when he fails to 'tip' after dining. It is the moment in the *Line of Beauty* where concern about spectacular fortunes is expressed as a theoretical course of action: Catherine would 'stop people having a



hundred and fifty million pounds' (p. 331). When she uncovers Nick's secret affair, he is told that he is the 'mad', 'too hysterical' one, and that Wani (now airing the 'kindnesses' between the Ouradis and Thatcher to all who listen) is 'a parody of a good-looking person'. He is a '*nightmare*' (pp. 348-50). Catherine knows the antithesis of the Arnoldian dream when she sees it.

The Cat remains the amusing observer during the set piece of Part II, the Fedden silver wedding anniversary at Highgate. Curiosity is sharpened by enrolment at St. Martin's School of Art and Design; the antipathy towards vulgarity progresses from intuitive alien dislike to criticism of the supposedly enlightened side of the family. On the one hand, Lionel's present, a Gauguin, is hypocritical poverty porn that condescends the brother-in-law on account of its fabulous expense (pp. 362-3); on the other, Gerald's dream, hosting Thatcher at Hawkeswood, is impossible because Lionel distances himself from 'all the vandalism she's done to everything' (pp. 366-7). At the party, the third person describes Thatcher's packaged image in terms of faux aristocracy rather than tabloid primness: 'She was wearing a long black shirt and a wide-shouldered white-and-gold jacket, amazingly embroidered, like a Ruritanian uniform, and cut low at the front to display a magnificent pearl necklace' (p. 377). Nick confuses the signs of class status with class when he describes her as 'queenly', but the connection between trumped-up glitz and Culture Industry chintz is obvious to Catherine: '*Queenly?*... Darling, she looks like a country and western singer' (p. 381). The premiere, she observes, is 'closely managed', 'not in charge' (p. 380). So when Catherine leaves and Nick is coked up, the scene is set for the communion of grammar-school doppelgangers. A lone Nick invites an isolated PM to dance; she accepts. Their dance, to the Rolling Stones, 'Get Off My Cloud', dramatises the affinity between cultural and political flirtations with public-schooled Conservative power. They spin with the giddiness of the jaded fantasy that their positions in mid-80s Britain could, as Thatcher famously said, go on and on.

## THE END OF THE STREET

Nick is dictating to a secretary in 1987 as the older Henry James did—but against the Master's legacy. He is courting crass gay American directors Treat Rush and Brad Craft who want to make a sexed-up adaptation of *The Spoils of Poynton* (pp. 396-7). Literary pretensions are now expressed through the gas of flattering speech. Leo interrupts the scene in the guise of his sister, Rosemary Charles. In

*Friendship's Garland* (1871), Arnold's satire of *Telegraph* philistinism, 'Leo' is the 'playful signature' that relates the dying words of the poet-critic's *bête noir*, journalist George Augustus Henry Sala, to the Paris correspondent Nick—"The old story [...] *life a dream!*"<sup>69</sup> Correspondent Nick is uncharacteristically pensive when Arnold mentions the word 'curiosity', overwhelmed by the sense that he has heard the word before but forgotten its meaning forever. A life is mourned that never lived. In *The Line of Beauty*, the message relayed by Leo's 'return' is that the dream-life of gay subculture is not what it seems. Rosemary confirms the suspicion Nick chose to ignore, that Leo had Aids, and informs him that her brother died three weeks ago. Nick is all cliché: 'He always looked beautiful', he is sure that Leo's mother 'has been wonderful'. Rosemary is sharp, calling him on the emptiness of 'wonderful', the word he used to describe the Charleses four years ago. Presented with his original *Gay Times* ad, 'He picked up the photo with the guarded curiosity he had for his earlier self. It was an Oxford picture, a passport-size square cut out from a larger group, the face of a boy at a party who somehow confides his secret to the camera' (p. 400). Nick is forced to reflect on an early attempt to cut away from the public school afterworld through the still-raw hopes and fears of the scholar-gypsy. Structured by market relations— Nick is asked to go through the 'applications' Leo annotated to establish who else is alive—the virus symbolises a wider disaster. Alone, an inner monologue finally indicts the décor of Wani's flat as cum-stained vulgarity, the wanton damage to its furniture as inexcusable barbarism. Later that evening, his letter to Leo's mother forces him back to writing and a critical reflection on the shortcomings of his pseudo-Jamesian style.

The denouement is effective enough as the squeezing out of the man of Culture from the House-as-Nation by Thatcherites desperate to contain the fallout of their own failings. The trigger is curiosity. Catherine discovers Gerald's long-standing affair with secretary Penny. Distressed and off her medication, she tells the truth about Highgate and Ogee to a boyfriend with Fleet Street connections. Double-crossed by Tipper, Gerald faces allegations of fraud. Rachel can barely conceal her anger that Nick 'conspired' with Catherine four years previously, stating that 'we'd always supposed you understood your responsibilities'. But the ignorance is not that of the wayward female and the homosexual: Rachel conflates Catherine's medication with its desired result, 'librium', as Gerald had done earlier

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<sup>69</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Friendship's Garland* (London: Smith Elder, 1903), p. 107.

(pp. 486, 278). Toby, now fat and business-slick, deals with Nick in a detached professional manner. Yet the focus is still the public-schooled Oxonian MP. Nick overhears Gerald disagreeing with the vicious New Right moralism of Barry Groom, his anti-Oxford business partner (Groom, an ex-bankrupt and serial adulterer, disowned his son to make him learn the value of money): 'Why have you got a little ponce hanging round your house the whole fucking time?', Groom asks; 'They hate us, you know, they can't breed themselves, they're parasites on generous fools like us who can'. It is, he says, a 'typical homo trick' to lead 'the daughter astray' (pp. 476-7). The MP uses the lines fed to him by Groom to dismiss Nick. Bourgeois-aristocrat pretension rolls on: Gerald wins a new directorship instantly, Wani's wedding goes ahead regardless, and Nat Hamner becomes engaged to a wealthy four-months-pregnant Argentinian widow. Pretended families are Thatcherite families, and the good homosexual and dangerous queer are New Right phantasms describing the same individual, though not before the non-Oxonian is cast as Mephistopheles.

Dropping his key through the letterbox, Nick 'drifted unexpectedly down the street', away from his car and his boxed possessions. The foreknowledge that his Aids test would be positive alters his surroundings: 'They had been revealed. It was like a drug sensation, but without the awareness of play'. He has a vision of the empty street 'projected far forward into afternoons like this one decades hence'.

The emotion was startling. It was a sort of terror, made up of emotions from every stage of his short life, weaning, homesickness, envy and self-pity; but he felt that the self-pity belonged to a larger pity. It was a love of the world that was shockingly unconditional. He stared back at the house, and then turned and drifted on. He looked in bewilderment at number 24, the final house with its regalia of stucco sways and bows. It wasn't just this street corner but the fact of a street corner at all that seemed, in the light of the moment, so beautiful. (pp. 500-1.)

Mortality transports the scholarship boy away from the bourgeois world of property. He is a conduit for things as they really are, a vessel of Arnoldian perception. There is communication with the future, union between the life of the class alien and the universality of Culture. It is the end of 'lines' and the beginning of turns and connections that move beyond the particularity of material things into the totality of an ethical power bound by the interrelation of forms. Number 24 is the last house on the street as it will be the number of years of Nick's life. He

is, finally, a Scholar-Gypsy, 'Wandering between two worlds, one dead: The other powerless to be born'. There is, we can say, nothing to protest against in this world of devotion. The possibility of the metaphor, a street corner, 'seemed' beautiful in the 'moment', but, illuminated by the light of Oxford, that was the ineluctable beauty of it.

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The novel ends there, but if a scholarship boy's two-page connection with Culture rounds off five hundred pages of disapproval from a literary persona constructed to identify with Hollinghurst, a product of elite public-schooling, then we have yet to account for the novel's literary organisation of the educational afterworld. To conclude this chapter, then, I am turning to French work that, I argue, is highly suggestive of the way *The Line of Beauty* structures its educational afterworld in line with established inequalities of the British education system. The backdrop is a position that will be discussed at some length in the next chapter: Louis Althusser pronounced that Art bathes in ideology at an 'internal distance' to illuminate it—an astonishing claim by the theorist who insisted, more than any other, that 'ideology slides into all human activity', 'is identical with the "lived experience of human existence itself'.<sup>70</sup> Étienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey deflated that 'in-yet-out' observational exceptionalism in their essay 'On Literature as an Ideological Form' (1974). In the French school system, literature was predicated on the early division of children according to 'basic' and 'advanced' education. That linguistic division, 'unequal and contradictory relations to the same ideology', determined the hierarchies of French society (what I have been calling the educational afterworld). Dominant, literature was an alchemy that turned the social into gold, 'redoubling' the contradictions of its production into the narrow confines of a linguistic conflict that the social representatives of literature could not, within its own terms, lose: 'Dialectically, literature is simultaneously product and material condition of the linguistic division in education, term and effect of its own contradictions. Not surprising therefore that the ideology of literature, itself a part of literature, should work ceaselessly to deny this objective base: to represent literature supremely as "style", as individual genius, conscious or natural, as creativity, etc., as something outside (and above) the

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<sup>70</sup> Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, int. Fredric Jameson trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 2001), pp. 151-56.

process of education, which is merely able to disseminate literature, and to comment on it exhaustively, though with no possibility of finally capturing it'.<sup>71</sup>

The British situation is more complex. The presence of the private sector means that the distinction between literary and non-literary educations is routed through a three-tiered structure with a number of different binary oppositions. There is still, as Pierre Bourdieu sees, a 'relationship of systematic opposition' between 'two styles of work, indeed, between two systems of dispositions and two visions of the world, an opposition that is continuously reinforced by the sanctions of a universe that is predisposed to recognize its manifestations'.<sup>72</sup> In the British experience, these sensibilities cut across overlapping State/private and selective/non-selective distinctions. The public school and grammar school are bound by the principle of selection but opposed in the principle of the *means* of selection. It follows that a privileged minority outclasses the vast majority within which a few are selected to outshine the remainder in a similar manner. In short, the French system produces haves and have-nots whereas the British produces haves, half-haves and have-nots. This state of affairs is further complicated by the 'constant state of equilibrium in the partition of power' between the dominant thrust of bourgeois capitalist society and the subordinate modifying tendency of a cultured corps.<sup>73</sup> The location of Culture, then, has to be contested across extremely fuzzy linguistic and institutional boundaries.

Bring these various strands together, and we might begin to see the British education system from the standpoint of dominant literary production. The man of Culture produced by the postwar grammar school is inserted into the distinction between the educated literary and the uneducated non-literary. He is a figure wrought in and judged against the image of the public schoolboy yet he espouses the sensibility denotative of the financially unprivileged mass from which he was extricated. The linguistic conflict Balibar and Macherey detected across the entire French system can be seen operating in miniature between State- and market- selected products, within the top ten per cent of educational privilege. The ideological work is particularly intense in Eng.Lit. subculture where the stake,

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<sup>71</sup> Étienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, 'On Literature as an Ideological Form', in *Untying the Text: A poststructuralist reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 79-100 (pp. 85-6, 89).

<sup>72</sup> Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, pp. 96-7.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

social power, is literariness itself. Thus the possibility of a public-school elite holding contradictory sympathies and antipathies towards the scholarship boy thrust into its margins by postwar Britain; an Everyman version of itself, a poor imitation. Public-school identification with the scholarship boy romanticises the principle of selection whilst absolving financial power as a principle for the means of selection.

Review after review applauded how Hollinghurst's English crystallised Thatcher's Britain to fashion the most beautiful of literary commodities. The testaments line the front matter of the novel. Some reviewed an otherworldly intelligence in awe: it is 'almost as if', Alex Clark wrote in *The Sunday Times*, 'it could dispense with plot and characters and exist on a plane of pure perception and connotation'. Anthony Quinn at *The Daily Telegraph* was gripped by Hollinghurst's prose, 'the keenest pleasure English prose has to offer'. Tim Adams perceived the realisation of something already implicit, 'The work of a great English stylist in full maturity'. Commodity-fetishism was synonymous with the aura of pristine literature in Andrew Crumey's cosy piece for *Scotland on Scotland*, which admired 'the sheer classiness of writing that is the literary equivalent of leather upholstery and a walnut dashboard', and sat back 'in the comfortable grip of Hollinghurst's flawless prose'. Going beyond basic literary requirements, the texts foregrounded style on style to redouble contradictions once more.

The reproduction of English equilibrium in 'always stylish and poised' writing (Peter Bradshaw, *New Statesman*) set limits. 'Bourgeois conditionality', David Harvey observes, 'may perform beautifully in market affairs, but it has an extremely hard time in extending its reach into production',<sup>74</sup> and the same may be said of the *Kulturkritik* reaction to the bourgeois commodification of the cultural sphere. The novel tracks the cultural dark side of the FTSE through Philistinism's victory, triumphalism and implosion, which is to say that alternatives are left as inferred yet nevertheless unrepresented sympathies. 'I hope', Hollinghurst has said in interview, 'the reader is aware of the terrible things happening outside the scope of novel'.<sup>75</sup> The Miners' Strike of 1984-85 is elided between the 1983 and 1986 sections. Leo's job at Brent Council does not lead to the politics of local government, the rape-capping crisis of 1984.<sup>76</sup> The turmoil of the first and last

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<sup>74</sup> David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital: And the crises of capitalism* (London: Profile, 2010), p. 103.

<sup>75</sup> Readings, 'Interview: Alan Hollinghurst'.

<sup>76</sup> I discuss the rate-capping crisis in Chapter 4.

Thatcher governments is, at best, penumbral. No member of the Labour Party is seen, speaks or named, apart from 'Red Ken' Livingstone, who is mentioned in passing (p. 316). The point is not that conflicts go unrepresented—this is obvious, and Hollinghurst acknowledges this. The point is that they *must* be unrepresented, unnameable even as lacunae are admitted to exist. 'There is no alternative to Culture' is a position that is only plausible in highly controlled discursive spaces where the political field is evacuated of all formalised political content. Thus Hollinghurst's signature plays around an absent centre: 1) a character is struck dumb by the force of a social determination they cannot know or say; 2) the third person notes the failure by fleshing out the vacuum with the 'as ifs' and 'almosts' of feelings and possibilities but *not*—and this is the critical point—the social determination itself.

Pressures exerted by these limits determine the flow, colour and tone of content. There is a relation, I think it is fair to say, between the clarification of the 80s in style and humour that panders to the apolitical sensibilities of constituencies that, at the level of surface, are targets of the novel. Angel Gurria-Quaintana praised the line motif, 'the ways in which opposite compulsions and conflicting feelings flow into each other incessantly', concluding that it 'must rank among the funniest ever written about Thatcher's Britain' (frontmatter). These are words from *The Financial Times*, a paper so committed to capitalist interests that it named the CEO of Goldman Sachs its 'Person of the Year' in 2009. *Attitude*, a gay magazine promoting cool consumption, paid tribute to the way Hollinghurst's 'style and gently acerbic humour carry the reader through a tumultuous era' to execute 'a beautifully realised tale' (frontmatter). This is possible because of the inability of the cultural framework the novel deploys to assume an explicit political position; *The Line of Beauty* effaces Perry Anderson's emphasis that, 'The present equilibrium in England remains a crushingly capitalist one' (50). If the lifeblood of modern capitalist societies is Philistinism rather than capital, then a critique of capitalistic excess does imply the possibility of a capitalism that is spiritually rather than structurally committed to excess. Redemption, however, is the possibility of redemption. So if Culture involves giving the self over to a higher power, it is unsurprising that it exists in a dialectic with a Philistinism that, oblivious, believes its own beliefs. English social comedy is dependent, after all, on the observation of people doing what they do not know they are doing. It is possible to discern a residual centre away from the ruck of business interests circling the Conservative Party: Gerald is a buffoon, whereas the Ouradis and Kesslers are humourless raced outsiders dripping with the novel's most exorbitant vulgarity. The novel is

arguably most powerful as a demonstration that the prize of social comedy, English equilibrium, is chimeric and the game, Englishness itself, is cannibalistic. It is an advance on the position Hollinghurst started out from, the 1980s as a violation of a constituted national essence. I say 'strictly speaking', however, because the undercutting of all statements and action in the novel collapses all human action into an Englishness of inescapable complicity.

Hollinghurst's piece for *The Guardian* about the BBC2 adaptation of *The Line of Beauty* (2006) is instructive: Nick 'has an exaggerated thing about beauty; but is made to see that there is no common or even worthwhile standard for it'.<sup>77</sup> The appeal to beauty is the demonstration of the scholarship boy's excessive 'thing' for it. The clause that threatens to relativise beauty is the one that actually clinches it; there is no 'common' (read: vulgar, lower-class) or 'worthwhile' (read: 'time-is-money' Philistine) standard. The 'exaggeration' is a way of life amplified yet channeled by social aggrandisement into a distortion of proper literary practice. It might be countered that this insults Arnoldian hopes for selective education, but that would ignore how hope is a front for criticism. The poet-critic's real legacy was a discursive arsenal of assumptions and arguments that would always protect elite education by constantly upbraiding the State's inability to accommodate Culture of the highest public-school standard. In *The Line of Beauty*, the innermost feelings and fantasies of the grammar school product are claimed by a disembodied privately-educated sensibility locatable outside (and above) the processes of education. Dramatic irony invites readers to join an interpretative community led by a magical shareholder of Jamesian capital that knows the student and his environment more than he could ever. Jewishness, it would seem to me, is the primary cultural code withheld from the novel's focalising perspective. The insertion of the Kesslers into the history that ended aristocratic privilege with new alloys of financial and political power is critical to the high cultural politics advanced. The references to Jews would be radioactive if they did not invite the reader into a club that sees the bourgeois-aristocrat faction as 'they really are'.

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<sup>77</sup> Alan Hollinghurst, 'Beautiful People', *Guardian*, 13 May 2006. The adaptation has 'a very good-looking cast, more so than the book, but no one will object to that', Hollinghurst wrote. As Catherine, 'Hayley Atwell is evidently beautiful, but this is simply a bonus'. 'I have a feeling for, say, Nick's size (about 5ft 6). [...] Dan Stevens, who plays Nick [...] is 6ft tall'. *The Line of Beauty*, dir. by Saul Dibb (BBC, 2006).



Ultimately, the use of a State-selected homosexual to centre an artistic critique against the Thatcher years is decisive in the final assessment of complicity. The novel is an intervention by a public-schooled representative of Culture against public-school representatives of Philistinism influenced by a grammar-school set. The case for Culture is articulated by observing an *aspirant* to high Culture ingratiate himself with *aspirant* commodity-culture. The effect is a lingering contradiction: on the one hand, there is no outside of complicity with English Philistinism yet, on the other, Culture operates at a remove secured by narrative form. It took the difference of seventeen years between subject matter and consumption to lend that paradox its currency. If *The Line of Beauty* depends on the inequalities integral to the elite educational afterworld, then the 'innocent' is its fall guy. That, to adapt James, is the force behind the beauty of the process.

## Life as Politics in Mid-90s Britain

Since *This Life* became ‘event television’ in summer 1997, interest in the drama serial has been sustained by epic repeats, a much hyped ten-year anniversary special and even, on occasion, its use as a signpost for a specific moment in British social, cultural and political history. In 2009, Tim Montgomerie (One-Nation Tory, evangelical and founder of ConservativeHome.com) complained on his blogsite that ‘All the mainstream parties have beeb [sic] stuck in 1997, listening to Portishead, watching This Life, reading Philip Gould—all believing that voters still want more spending’ (his emphasis).<sup>1</sup> *This Life*, commissioned and aired by the ‘Beeb’, was itself a product of public expenditure. Montgomerie’s typo was illuminative of both a state of affairs and an ideological attitude. If any institution in Britain manifests the teeth-grinding tension between ‘condescending’ Establishment and ‘dumbed-down’ neoliberal models of Britain, then it is the BBC. Re-emphasising ‘life’ through the plight of Redbrick graduates, this privileged yet deeply vulnerable bulwark of British cultural production was, as the proximal demonstrative of *This Life* suggests, firing a salvo into a fraught educational afterworld.

*This Life* did not, of course, engage fiscal policy head-on. Rather, the depiction of five ‘twentysomething’ lawyers in London—Anna (played by Daniella Nardini), Miles (Jack Davenport), Milly (Amita Dhiri), Egg (Andrew Lincoln) and Warren (Jason Hughes)—marked an inchoate position. In the 1970s, Birmingham’s CCCS saw in youth the ‘compressed imagery for a society which had crucially changed in terms of basic lifestyles and values—changed in ways calculated to upset the official political framework, but in ways not yet calculable in traditional political terms’.<sup>2</sup> The youth of the 70s morphed into the professional classes of the 90s, and, in turn, *This Life* made the explicit statement that a new generation of young

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Montgomerie, ‘The era of increased spending is over’, available at <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/torydiary/2009/04/the-era-of-state-spending-is-over.html>

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order* (London: MacMillan, 1976), p. 9, cit. Stephen Lacey, *Tony Garnett* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 53.

people lived and worked according to new codes. This was 'in-yer-face' television: office politics, stress, washing, sharing tights, alcohol, drugs, clubbing, cruising, impotence and adultery were all offered without apology through an institution charged with the preservation of the nation's moral character. By mid-June 1997, *The Evening Standard* mused that the show 'is now said to dominate conversation at every smart dinner-party in London'. By early August, the tabloids were seesawing between front-page plot speculation and homophobic denunciations against 'trash'.<sup>3</sup>

Attention on this scale had been unforthcoming. The first series of 11 forty-minute weekly episodes ran from March 1996 with a miserable audience share. The longer second series, of 22 instalments, was screened after a repeat of the first, benefitting from the manipulation of programme flow. Moved from the Monday night backwater to Thursday evenings, *This Life* caught a fashionable demographic lured by re-runs of the recently successful sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous* begged off BBC1 for that very purpose. Mark Thompson, then commissioning editor for BBC2, indicated Series 2, Episode 15 ('From Here to Maternity', 26 June 1997) as the turning point. From then on, the programme was discussed as a 'discovery', a 'find', with most arriving at the action by word-of-mouth recommendation. As a typical review enthused, 'part of the charm was that we're not commanded to watch it by endless trailers, but encouraged by friends'.<sup>4</sup> A self-approving Thompson could look back at the media world's 'amazement' at his re-commission: 'wasn't it just a tired eighties yuppie soap that had been mauled by the critics and ignored by the audience?' A few months later, he bragged, and 'the same people would be hailing the programme as a masterpiece'.<sup>5</sup>

If Thompson's assessment is correct, then the division between the 'tired' 80s and 'charm' of the 90s fell between the widespread elation of New Labour's landslide in May 1997 and the screening of the final episode, 'Apocalypse Wow!', on 7 August. Princess Diana died 31 August. As a text in history, *This Life* was caught up in the watershed years 1996/97, the transformation in the public imagination between the hardheadedness of the 80s to the seemingly redemptive 'hearts and minds' of the late 90s. The focus of this chapter is on that fluctuation of

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Bradshaw in *London Evening Standard*, 17 June 1997, cit. Tom McGregor, *This Life: The companion guide* (London: BBC, 1997), p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> Josephine Monroe, 'Television in the nineties', *Observer*, 12 December 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Thompson, 'Media: a soap that never was', *Guardian*, 10 November 1997.

sensibilities as they came to be channelled through neoliberal pressures in cultural production and postwar sexualities, but in ways that were not so neat as that broad homology between the fortunes of New Labour and *This Life* might at first imply. Again, the answers lie within the contradictions of educational and quasi-educational institutions, primarily the Redbrick University and the BBC. Represented subjects (Leeds University Law graduates) and collaborative authorial figures (commissioners, creators and production team) moved within the intersecting educational afterworlds of Redbrick aspirationalism and the metropolitan media loop, principally television (the BBC, independent television companies), newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Independent*) and lifestyle magazines catering to sexual subculture (*Gay Times*, *Attitude*).

The first question is how to handle a text that involved 12 writers, 11 directors and 22 hours of flexi-narrative. I consider the serial prismatic in the sense that it is set in relation to other accounts of 'life' circulating in 90s Britain so that determinations are also partial representations: permutations of Hoggart's 'life' loomed large over the late-twentieth-century Redbrick, Anthony Giddens's 'life politics' was the cornerstone of New Labour's 'Third Way', and David T. Evans's neglected sociological account of sexual liberation mounted a critique of contemporary mores. Broadly speaking, Giddens and Evans are intellectual representatives of two general political positions that find various points of correspondence between the collaborative 'authors' of *This Life*; Thompson at BBC2, veteran television-maker Tony Garnett as executive producer, and ex-lawyer Amy Jenkins as the show's 'creator' and, importantly, the writer of the five agenda-setting 'bookend' episodes of Series 1. Handling the contradictions of *This Life*'s production is a means of discussing life in 90s Britain, so time is taken following each thread. The chapter begins by assessing the postwar institutions and practices represented by Thompson and Garnett, and Giddens and Jenkins; namely, BBC, left-dissident programming since the 1960s and the neoliberalisation of television production, then cynical and idealist expressions of radical-conservative thought. In the last third of the chapter, textual analysis considers the overdetermination of key moments and trends. Ultimately, *This Life* is read as a text that stages the problems of neoliberal Britain.

## THE BBC, NEOLIBERALISATION AND TROJAN HORSE DRAMA

The British Broadcasting Company—the child of British and American electrical companies Marconi, Metropolitan-Vickers, Radio Communication, British Thomson-Houston, General Electric and Western Electric—enjoyed a five-year private radio monopoly before receiving a royal charter in 1927. Thenceforth, the BBC was a public-service broadcaster paid for by hypothecated tax (first by radio, then by television set). In short, Managing Director John Reith became Director-General (later Lord) Reith. Framed thus, what frostiness there might be within the BBC towards the vicissitudes of capital should not be confused with principled opposition to capital accumulation. Reith came to personify the Corporation's hallowed duty to 'educate, inform and entertain', and it would be fair to say that priorities were enunciated in order of weight. The Reithianism of the motto 'Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation' was a corporatism so immersed in Arnoldian first principles that justifications of the BBC ran as near paraphrases of the poet-critic. Reith in 1949:

the responsibility as at the outset conceived, and despite all discouragements pursued, was to carry into the greatest number of homes everything that was best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement; and to avoid whatever was or might be hurtful. In earliest years accused of setting out to give the public not what it wanted but what the BBC thought it should have, the answer was that few knew what they wanted, fewer what they needed.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the BBC's world-famous 'impartiality'. The BBC was and still is committed to reproducing 'Britain' through culture in such a way as to reproduce its place as the fulcrum of due democratic process, the patina of accountability that legitimates the status quo.

As galling as this disinterest was for the radical left, the form that impartiality took did allow a little room for manoeuvre. As William Maley reminds, the BBC might serve to reinforce the established way of things but its sycophancy is 'a product and producer of political pressure'.<sup>7</sup> During the 60s and 70s, dissident programme-

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<sup>6</sup> John Reith, *Into the Wind* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> William Maley, 'Centralisation and Censorship', in *The BBC and Public Service Broadcasting*, eds. Colin MacCabe and Olivia Stewart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 32-46 (p. 32).

makers sought to accentuate the ‘producer’ side of that equation as much as feasibly possible, and towards social democratic ends. For self-conscious products of the postwar Establishment—‘the 1944 Education Act’, Garnett admits, ‘had selected us, and grants had paid for us’<sup>8</sup>—television was the obvious platform from which to hijack the ‘national conversation’. In the unique 29 years of the BBC-ITV duopoly (1955-1984), drama documentaries had the power to dictate conversation the following day at school, work and the pub. 12 million, then a quarter of the British population, watched *Cathy Come Home* (1966), a commentary on motherhood and homelessness that earned director Ken Loach and producer Garnett an audience with the Minister of Housing. Sympathetic to Trotskyist analyses of British economic decline, Garnett and Loach had *The Big Flame*, a drama about a dockyard occupation in Liverpool, ready for broadcast by (of all months) May 1968. The BBC’s in-house M15 presence was exasperated and powerless; Garnett had always been careful not to become a salaried, and therefore disciplinable, employee. Management, however, was loath to see work commanding high ratings and critical acclaim fall into the hands of ITV. Theirs was a ‘Trojan Horse’ drama.<sup>9</sup>

New dramatic forms challenged received assumptions about ‘life’. The transplantation of bourgeois radio drama to the BBC’s new Drama Department ‘pissed off’ Garnett and his colleagues because recruitment was still heavily biased towards a public-schooled Oxbridge set; just as theatrical naturalism had moved sideways to radio, drawing-room mores now condescended to speak to a national television audience.<sup>10</sup> In retaliation, left programme-makers invited amateur writers to submit material. It would not be an exaggeration to say that work like *Up the Junction* (1968) and *Days of Hope* (1975) pushed boundaries. Away from television, Loach and Garnett’s *Kes* (1969) showed what could be done to challenge the ‘terrible education system’ with unknown actors playing roles within their own class.<sup>11</sup> But the reaction from the journal *Screen*, increasingly the centre of gravity of early film studies, was acerbic. In the lead article of the dispute,

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<sup>8</sup> Tony Garnett, speech at ‘On the Boundary: Turning points in British television drama, 1965-2000’ Conference, University of Reading, 3-5 April 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Lacey, *Tony Garnett*, p. 93; Tony Garnett, ‘Contexts’, in *British Television Drama: Past, present and future*, eds. Jonathan Bignall, Stephen Lacey and Madeleine Macmuraugh-Kavanagh (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 11-23 (p. 22).

<sup>10</sup> Roger Hudson, ‘Television in Britain: Description and dissent, interviews with Tony Garnett and John Gould’, *Theatre Quarterly*, 2 (1972), 18-25 (19).

<sup>11</sup> Tony Garnett, ‘The Interview’, *Afterimage* (1970), cit. Lacey, *Tony Garnett*, p. 86.

'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian theses' (1974), editor Colin MacCabe typed the New Drama as a new species of the 'Classic Realist Text' (CRT). The camera-eye of drama-documentary, it was argued, served the same function as the third-person narrative in nineteenth-century fiction—that is, to construct and relay an 'objective' and incontrovertible 'real'. Now, however, the camera placed the viewer in the role of an all-seeing eye that totally immersed the viewer in the subject matter; because of this, there was no space between reality and representation to represent social contradiction. So, MacCabe averred, New Drama presented the working-class subject as the avatar of 'truth', but, with the same gesture, effaced the historical contradictions by which 'truth' could be translated into revolutionary action. Essentially, *Screen* was accusing New Drama of reproducing the ideological appearance of the real at face value. As stillborn reformism, documentary-drama offered itself as a freestanding whole to the established ideological field. Alternatively, the lesson to be learned from Brecht was that any self-respecting revolutionary realism had to go about repositioning the subject within Ideology rather than cementing it.<sup>12</sup>

Polarised from the outset, the debate took part in a fractured postwar educational afterworld. Garnett, a grammar-schooled graduate of London University, had an educational profile typical of left dissident subculture; MacCabe was educated at St. Benedict's School and Trinity College, Cambridge. For Garnett, the category of Art had become 'corrupted and corrupting'—'life', he reasoned, 'is more important than art', 'art should arise from life'.<sup>13</sup> In the sharpest of contrasts, MacCabe's piece was a key crossover text for the Althusserian thesis that the experience of life is Ideology itself and Art illuminative of the fact. When, however, MacCabe stated that the problem of film studies 'within a Marxist theory of ideology is that by and large no such Marxist theory exists',<sup>14</sup> the inadequacy was not so much Marxism's as the fact that Althusser's theory of Ideology (or rather subjectivity) is not Marxist. In 'A Letter on Art' (1969), Althusser wrote:

*I do not rank real art among the ideologies, although art does have a quite particular and specific relationship with ideology. [...] Art (I mean authentic*

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<sup>12</sup> Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian theses', *Screen*, 15 (1974), 7-27.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Hudson, 'Television in Britain', 19.

<sup>14</sup> MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema', 22-3.

art, not works of an average or mediocre level) does not give us a *knowledge* in the *strict sense*, it does not replace knowledge [...]. What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of '*seeing*', '*perceiving*' and '*feeling*' (which is not the form of *knowing*), is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*. [...] They make us 'perceive' (but not know) in some sense from *the inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very ideology in which they are held.<sup>15</sup>

If Althusserianism insists that 'ideology slides into all human activity' and 'is identical with the "lived" experience of human existence itself', then there is a question as to how Althusser, a living person, had access to this impossible knowledge called Theory. To be more specific, what was the social basis for the claims made on behalf of Theory by British acolytes? Terry Eagleton was impressed by Althusser's work, but delivered an early warning regarding the insularity of the 'Letter on Art'—everything, he saw, hung off the initial subjective criterion of 'real' and 'authentic'.<sup>16</sup> Eagleton went, by and large, unheeded.

The projection of agency onto text installed a meaning as dogmatic as any Leavisian pronouncement. By imploding the coordinates of personalism and striking a different attitude within the same (but now desolate) discursive space, Theory elevated an absent centre to an otherworldly position. Projecting politics onto a fetishised text had the convenience of masking social determination, including the faces behind anti-humanist masks—as 'subjects', there was nobody to account for, nobody to bring to account. The CRT reading was, of course, MacCabe's, and evidence enough that the CRT was not the 'perfect representation' his thesis made out.<sup>17</sup> The implicit assumption was that the CRT was *not* total for those magnetised to the supposedly classless tones of the authorial voice articulating Theory (on the one hand, the CRT is omnipotent yet, on the other, a patent charade for knowing subjects). There is a sense in which *Screen* acted as if the working class was too gullible to understand that drama documentaries were things that were made (some had voice-overs and picture cards). The impossibility of MacCabe's reading position rescued the possibility of a filmic Art and, by proxy, the figure of the intellectual able to read over and above class as its cipher. In short, anti-humanism was striking out for superhuman intellectual capital. It is not too

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<sup>15</sup> Althusser, 'A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre', pp. 222-3.

<sup>16</sup> Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, pp. 83-4.

<sup>17</sup> MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema', 8.



far-fetched to see a broad commensurability between the topography of class and the 'levels' of Althusserianism: Ideology is collapsed into and dismissed with working-class consciousness; Art 'bathes' as a self-detached intellectual fraction of the dominant 'middling' classes; Theory occupies the commanding heights as an animating spirit. Not for nothing did Bourdieu characterise Ideology in its Althusserian guise as constitutionally 'aristocratic'.<sup>18</sup>

Raymond Williams offered the sober qualifications the debate urgently needed. In 'A Lecture on Realism' (1977), he observed that sharp differentiation between naturalism and realism is always slippery. On the one hand, there were realist *emphases* of secularism, contemporaneity and extension into social analysis; on the other, there were naturalist *emphases* that turned away from supernatural and metaphysical understandings towards hereditary and environmental determinations. These emphases ought to be weighed against one another. The precise balance is always going to be a matter for judgement and debate; sub-standard work with 'realist' pretensions is likely to be criticised as 'naturalist', 'inauthentic' or 'mediocre' if it is thought boring, laboured or insufficiently extended into the 'social' of somebody's liking.<sup>19</sup> In short, debates about realism and naturalism were about politics rather than immanent truths. Drawing on this, John Caughie, more critical of *Screen's* initial polarisation of the debate than Williams, offers a promising approach. A filmic text might be viewed as a construction of interwoven *dramatic* and *documentary* gazes, the first locating the human subject as the site of subjective experience, the second framing that experience as one amongst many within the full breadth of the social.<sup>20</sup> So, with these emphases and gazes in mind, I want to cut loose from the academicism of *Screen* and the full extent of the New Drama's repudiation of naturalism and focus, instead, on the specific interrelation of elements as they appear within the text at hand. Before that, however, there is another reason to be wary of restricting ourselves to purely aesthetic debates. The main threats to New Drama were not academic interventions themselves but institutional pressures within television production that bore the imprint of Althusserian criticisms against working-class representation.

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<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu and Eagleton, 'Doxa and Common Life', 113.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams, 'A Lecture on Realism', *Screen*, 18 (1977), 61-74 (64-5).

<sup>20</sup> John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, modernism, and British culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 106, 111.

The time bomb of the BBC is that it owes its existence to a historically specific settlement whereby the Corporation gently held the political executive to account in exchange for the production of 'Britishness', though should those historical conditions change, there was the danger that the BBC would have to answer to a sponsor hostile to even token levels of accountability. Such a situation would produce the spectacle of a trapped institution accelerating its own demise. This, of course, has been happening for a while. In hindsight, the pivotal confrontation was the defence of New Drama by BBC management against attacks from Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVLA). Although the BBC collaborated with MI5 against Garnett, management backed New Drama because, at root, it was defending the Corporation's claim to deliver excellence to the many. In other words, the licence fee was at stake. Management stoked a groundswell of moralism by confirming the NVLA's image of itself as a parochial, anti-intellectual movement mobilised against a cultured patriciate. Once Thatcher was elected in 1979, moral distaste for the licence fee and neoliberal animus against the BBC's subsidy converged. Self-righteous letters from housewives were one thing, but they became another once allied with a government (i) headed by a figure desperate to construct and sustain a provincial, housewifely persona and (ii) bent on transforming the whole of British television production into a field of capital accumulation. When the BBC interviewed a suspected Irish terrorist in late 1979, Thatcher took the opportunity to prise apart the contradictions of 'Reithian rhetoric', lambasting a parity of esteem between Irish terrorism and the rule of British law, 'as well as programmes that seemed to many to be scurrilous and offensive'.<sup>21</sup> The BBC's time bomb, once exposed, ticked all the faster.

A series of victories were won over the BBC's patrician ethos during the Thatcher years. In 1982, Channel Four was licensed to provide minority programming through Independent Television Companies (ITCs), a move that, bruisingly, swiped the Corporation's traditional remit. Public minorities were now private market niches. In 1985, the Peacock Report forced the BBC to outsource 25 per cent of programmes to ITCs within two years. By then, 1987, enough Conservative businessmen had been appointed to the Board of Governors to unceremoniously sack patrician Director-General Alasdair Milne. In 1989, the government waived the Monopolies Act to allow Rupert Murdoch the freedom of the market to create SkyTV, the private monopoly subscription broadcaster. Garnett, who had run into

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<sup>21</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper-Collins, 1993), p. 634.

Murdoch at London Weekend Television in the early 70s, knew that the ‘real battle’ of the 90s would be ‘for the BBC’s soul’.<sup>22</sup>

Left television work as it was practiced during the 60s and 70s has been impossible within the BBC since its capitulation to neoliberal pressure. Now the Corporation has to justify its Reithian financial base through the ‘quality’ programming no other broadcaster has the incentive to produce, whilst proving that this settlement is the will of the majority as judged by the crudity of market standards. A panicked BBC meeting convened in the wake of Channel Four’s licence was ‘the first occasion on which the television service had talked really professionally about vulgarity’.<sup>23</sup> The immediate result was the soap opera *EastEnders*, but the wider legacy was the misnomer ‘Producer’s Choice’, the separation of commissioning and production to maximise ratings by top-down executive edict. Minority provision was the logical casualty. One-time employee of the Multicultural Programmes Department Simon Cottle relates how career development was premised on the ability to deliver universal, de facto ‘white’ appeal—‘ghetto programming’, as it is called, is ‘anathema to claims to be treated as equals in the internal competitive market within the BBC’. Unsurprisingly, the department closed in 1995.<sup>24</sup> Cottle’s testimony explicitly states what the vast proportion of the broadcaster’s output mouthed through style, form and content. A revolution had been secured: to be associated in the 90s with what had won the BBC its international reputation for excellence in the 60s and 70s was to confer on oneself as an individual the qualities for which the Corporation was derided as an institution during the 80s. Garnett’s assessment of that sea change is that ‘mandarin is better than multi-national corporation’. This is seconded by Colin Leys’s wider judgement of the relative value of the unique BBC-ITV duopoly: whilst it was ‘not a forum that offered universal or even broadly representative access to the podium’, it was ‘one that was at least more or less universally attended’. To be sure, ‘Establishment values were not neoliberal values’.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Garnett, ‘Contexts’, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony McNicholas, ‘Wrenching the machine around: *EastEnders*, the BBC and institutional change’, *Media Culture & Society*, 26 (2004), 491-512 (499).

<sup>24</sup> Simon Cottle, ‘Making ethnic minority programmes inside the BBC: Professional pragmatics and cultural containment’, *Media, Culture & Society*, 20 (1998), 295-317 (302-6).

<sup>25</sup> Garnett, ‘Notes from the 1996 Raymond Williams Memorial Lecture, Birmingham 1996’, available at [http://www.world-productions.com/wp/Content/reference/tony/tlectures\\_08.htm](http://www.world-productions.com/wp/Content/reference/tony/tlectures_08.htm); Leys, *Market-Driven Politics*, p. 150.

*This Life*, then, was possible due to opportunities made available by the neoliberalisation of television production. Forced to work with what existed, Garnett was fully aware of the contradictions when he co-founded Island World Productions (soon World Productions) in 1990—he knew ITCs were the motor of a casualised market ‘created by Thatcherites to beat up the Trades Unions’ (Garnett had been on the executive of his union in the late 60s).<sup>26</sup> Given the tight room for manoeuvre, genre was all-important. Increasingly unwieldy, the pre-eminence of the one-off television drama was ceding to the soap opera and the classic serial adaptation. The Reithian-esque Sunday-night drama embraced what a swooning industry called the ‘Pride and Prejudice effect’. For Sue Birtwistle, producer of the Austen adaptation (1995), the focus on ‘money and sex’ appealed to ‘an audience with time on their hands, money in their pockets, liberated sexuality and desires’.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, Gareth Palmer writes, ‘the focus of documentary projects has shifted from informing citizens about issues in particular contexts to a wider field in which the subject is human behaviour itself’.<sup>28</sup> If drama and documentary were rejoined, the danger was that ‘money and sex’ would be further naturalised as ‘human behaviour itself’. The BBC had become resistant to endorsements of economic class as a legitimate subject for broadcast, so Garnett pitched his work within the competitive terms of the profession-based television serial.<sup>29</sup> Because they were, by definition, institutional in character, there was the opportunity to broach the neoliberalisation of civil society through the lives of a new generation of workers. ‘This does not mean that the working class will not be represented’, Garnett saw, ‘but it does affect the filter through which they are portrayed, the point of view, the stance taken’.<sup>30</sup> The realities of cultural production demanded new forms of genre, conciliation and altered points of focus as the BBC lurched from Establishment to neoliberal ethoi and structures.

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<sup>26</sup> Lacey, *Tony Garnett*, p. 127.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Giddings and Keith Selby, *The Classic-Serial on Television and Radio* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> Gareth Palmer, *Discipline and Liberty: Television and governance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> World Productions sold *Between The Lines* (1992-94), *Cardiac Arrest* (1994-96) and *The Cops* (1998-2000) as police and medical dramas.

<sup>30</sup> Tony Garnett, ‘Working in the field’, in *Looking at Class: Film, television and the working-class in Britain*, eds. Sheila Rowbotham and Huw Benyon (London: Rivers Oram, 2001), pp. 70-82 (pp. 80-1).

The recognisable look of *This Life* was, Garnett tells, conjointly economic and 'ideological'. New handheld Betacam technology meant 11 minutes of final screen time could be shot on location each day, with each scene shot up to a dozen times from different angles to provide the vast amounts of material needed for fast-paced editing. 'What is immediately striking about the drama is its energy', Lez Cooke observes, 'the fact that it moves along at a very fast pace while still enabling the viewer to get involved with the characters and to identify with them'. In his analysis of average shot lengths (ASL), Cooke found that *This Life*'s ASL of 4.6 seconds compared to *Heartbeat*'s sedating ASL of 9 seconds.<sup>31</sup> Agitated, unsteady close-up frames, often linked by disorienting whip-pan turns of the camera, lent the programme to an exploration of the personal dramatic and the social documentary through the pointed interrelation of gazes. This use of the Betacam won the production team the much needed creative freedom to stray from the initial, tactical brief on a minority channel where intervention is primarily motivated by the fear of overrunning costs. But it was not without paradox: Garnett's evasion of neoliberal strictures led to an efficiency drive that was so successful that, with final screen time running at £175,000 to £200,000 per hour, *This Life* became the BBC's in-house production model.<sup>32</sup>

The dramatic and the documentary mapped Garnett's dual interest in the 'psychic' and 'economic', Freud and Marx. His intellectual preoccupations appear to linger in a Lyotardian universe: the producer told Cooke that there 'are no more grand narratives, in these postmodern days, [so] I suppose I'm just an old relic of the enlightenment'.<sup>33</sup> This, as we are about to discuss, took capitalist hegemony at its word. Self-portraiture as an anomalous leftie within a postmodern consensus retains a residual critical distance for itself, though there is a question as to what extent and with what confidence it can be extricated from the critique of what it surveys. If, as Michel Foucault did in his backhanded slight, Marx and Freud are to be credited as 'founders of discursivity' because they established 'the possibilities or the rules for the formation of other texts' (that is, more subjection),<sup>34</sup> then Garnett's status as an 'old relic' is comparable to a hobbyist

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<sup>31</sup> Lez Cooke, *British Television Drama: A history* (London: BFI, 2003), pp. 182-3.

<sup>32</sup> Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the reinvention of the BBC* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 167, cit. Lacey, *Tony Garnett*, p. 135.

<sup>33</sup> Cooke, *British Television Drama*, p. 182.

<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 101-23 (pp. 113-7).

within a subjective matrix of Giddensian 'life' options. There is a creeping sense that the uncompromising critical stance of the 60s and 70s is forced to justify itself within the hegemonic discourse of the 90s. In those conditions, left analysis is in danger of being relativised away as just another lifestyle choice; but lest we fall into that personalist cul-de-sac, there is the historicisation of Jenkins and Giddens to consider.

## RADICAL-CONSERVATISM, THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS AND LIFE POLITICS

In 2005, Amy Jenkins, in one of her many accounts of *This Life*, situated her creation within 90s geo-politics. 'The Berlin Wall', she declared, 'had been destroyed more by McDonald's than missiles, crumbling in the inevitable march of benevolent capitalism'.<sup>35</sup> Radical-conservatism had secured that narrative as early as the formal cessation of the Soviet Union in 1991. World events, so the story ran, were proof positive that socialist experiments were hardwired with a death instinct in flattering contrast to the rugged survivalism of capitalist enterprise. In *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), Francis Fukuyama, the leading academic exponent of the shift, argued that the inexorable outcome of the world's ideological struggles would be the 'choice' of a secular, liberal, free-market democracy—a *fait accompli* that relayed the platitudes of ascendant capitalist power.<sup>36</sup> Perry Anderson distilled the problem facing the left when he observed that the challenge was not the intellectual prowess of the End-of-History thesis (far from it) but its tidy capture of the ideological and material state of the world.<sup>37</sup> Anderson was later forced to admit that the left critique he had called for never materialised; the 90s saw the consolidation, extension and intensification of neoliberalism without serious opposition.<sup>38</sup> Jenkins was not being ironic; politically, as far as she was concerned, there was 'not much to do'.

Jenkins's contribution to *This Life* moved squarely within that radical-conservative frame. Progress was an individual 'journey' towards self-actualisation:

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<sup>35</sup> Amy Jenkins, 'What the This Life generation did next', *Guardian*, 12 September 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>37</sup> Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 336.

<sup>38</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Renewals', *NLR*, 2/1 (2000), 5-24 (19).

Most people of my age are more internally focused, we're not so concerned with politics. We don't want to make a big statement but focus on an individual journey. We're accused of being selfish, but selfishness in the real sense can also mean taking responsibility for yourself. Begin with yourself, and the details you can control. There's a morality in that. Begin at home with the real issues and the broader ones will follow.<sup>39</sup>

For Jenkins, the sphere of renewal is the private rather than the public. The indefinite article knowingly rendered her 'morality' one amongst many; yet this titular openness, barbed with weighty ideological injunctions to self-determination, shunned other quasi-options as personal shortcomings burdensome to and therefore reproachable by others. As pre-determined as Fukuyama's neo-Hegelianism, the choices on offer were false. Jenkins recommends self-help 'classics' as life-bibles, American titles including *I'm OK—You're OK*, *The Road Less Travelled* and *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, a title that reads like a sociopath's manifesto.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, *This Life* was pitched to BBC2 as a 'politics of the individual and intimate relationships'.

I believed—and still do—that the only way to 'crack down' on crime was to tackle the very emotional problems of addiction and low self-esteem. And that philosophy translated into Anna, Miles and the rest being so unapologetically self-involved.<sup>41</sup>

In tune with the political field, Jenkins's discourse is couched in the terms shared by the Conservative's 'Back to Basics' campaign and New Labour's rival slogan, 'Tough on Crime, and tough on the causes of crime'. The metacultural assumption persisted that the masses are predisposed to the violent desecration of property and, deaf to argument, can only change by following their middle-class betters. In this, Jenkins acted as beaming example rather than intellectual authority.<sup>42</sup> The failure to register and respond favourably to the message between Jenkins's lines—selfishness *is* morality; being 'unapologetically self-involved' *is*

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Collins, 'Interview: Amy Jenkins,' *Independent*, 20 April 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas A. Harris, *I'm OK—You're OK: A practical guide to transactional analysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled: A new psychology of love, traditional values and spiritual growth* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1978); Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1987); Collins, 'Interview: Amy Jenkins'.

<sup>41</sup> Jenkins, 'What the This Life generation did next'.

<sup>42</sup> Zygmunt Bauman discusses this distinction as central to 'post-Political' life in *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp. 67-9.

social responsibility; it is for *others* to change—invited censure. Praise for the show's refreshing lack of moralism was oblivious to its radical-conservative didacticism.

Radical-conservative accounts of life still rely on an absent centre. Jenkins tried to convey the meaning of *This Life* by skirting around it:

I wanted to give a voice to my generation, because they've never had one on television. We decided there would be certain themes to *This Life*. We wanted to reflect that this generation is the first who didn't expect to do better than their parents; who can't afford to buy property; who find it very hard to find a job; and who are not threatened by casual drug use. There's a new cynicism—or morality—about relationships because so many of us have seen our parents split up. *This Life* isn't about these issues, but they are there in the background.<sup>43</sup>

Jenkins clearly envisaged the show as part of the BBC's obligation to provide minority programming; a residual Reithianism congratulated the show's representation (which is to say, containment) of a thitherto under-represented group. A competitive job market compromised this generation, the first, it was said, expecting lower material prospects than their parents (though this was surely a leap from the particular to the universal by a product of the liberal elite, as I am about to discuss). The rationale of change was strictly interpersonal; for instance, the turn to 'the new cynicism—or morality' was a generational rather than historical question. Moreover, there was hanging reticence as to whether these were 'themes' or 'issues': it would appear that 'themes' were pointedly attached *to* the programme, which is to say that they were not *in* or *of* it, whilst 'issues' were sharply relegated to the 'background', which is to say that they were 'there' but rejected out of hand as a means of grasping the programme's truth. All this was at odds with the insistence that these 'themes' and 'issues' were the basis for the show's edgy contemporaneity. Jenkins's account turned on the paradox that *This Life* was about what it was not. It was a conceptualisation of cultural production that is not so much Althusserian as Althusser-esque in its gestural allusion. Through half-biography, the ex-lawyer intimated that her voice was the voice of a generation, though she was equally cautious not to pin her own identity to anything other than a bathing illumination of modern life.

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<sup>43</sup> Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big drama on the small screen* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 120.



These triumphalist soundings were part of a domestic struggle against vestiges of the postwar consensus crudely branded 'socialist'. Transformations within the Labour Party were a reliable thermostat. The party was anomalous in twentieth-century Europe as the only major national workers' party to define itself as an existent rather than utopian interest. Enclosing its imaginative horizons firmly within the relation between capital and labour rather than looking out towards social democracy, the party was always susceptible to more overtly conservative impulses. As early as the 1970s, internal pressure groups pushed for strategies that would turn the party away from its working-class base towards the electorally lucrative centre. The 'Conservative Century', the failed promises of short-lived Labour governments, and the power of unyielding administrative elites lent a misleading impetus to their case. In 1981, the breakaway Social Democratic Party (SDP) attempted to meld Thatcher's economics with the compassion of Michael Foot's Welfare-Statism. 'New Labour' was touted as a possible name. In 'The SDP and the New Middle Class' (1982), Raphael Samuels neatly diagnosed the significant welling of developments instigated during the early postwar period. A stratum of professionals educated through the upward stream of the grammar school system and conversant in 60s counterculture had secured influential posts in civil society. The SDP parroted the words 'reason', 'moderation' and 'concern' to distance their professional class from the mass.

Many would falsely regard themselves as classless. The very existence of a self-conscious working class constitutes an affront to their self-esteem. It is also the chief obstacle to the open society of their particular dreams—a gigantic empty space filled with socially mobile, outward-looking people [...] as radical and reasonable, as up-to-date and mobile, as themselves.<sup>44</sup>

Ignoring the Communist Manifesto's warning about 'Conservative, or Bourgeois, Socialism', the SDP's fantasy was 'a bourgeoisie without a proletariat'.<sup>45</sup> A two-to-three-hundred-strong Society of Social Democrat Lawyers was formed before the SDP was formally established, but a similar trade-union group was continually and strenuously barred during the party's seven years.<sup>46</sup> Once Labour committed itself

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<sup>44</sup> Raphael Samuels, 'The SDP and the New Middle Class', in *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain. Theatres of Memory, Vol. II*, ed. Alison Light (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 256-71 (p. 271).

<sup>45</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A modern edition*, int. Eric Hobsbawm (London: Verso, 1998), p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> Samuels, 'The SDP and the New Middle Class', p. 267.

to the single-minded objective of ‘electability’, the SDP lost its meaning and re-amalgamated into an electoral force reorganised according to its precepts. From then on, Slavoj Žižek writes, the ‘message between the lines’ of a revamped New Labour emitted business-friendly vibes: ‘we fully accept the logic of Capital’, they read, ‘we will not mess about with it’.<sup>47</sup> Labour now represented the opposite existent interest to the one in whose name it was founded. Amy Jenkins’s father, Sir Peter Jenkins (Culford; Trinity College, Cambridge), was part of this Labour-SDP-Labour circle. His antipathy towards the left bristled in the titles of his publications *Where Trotskyism Got Lost* and (in an election year) *Mrs Thatcher’s Revolution: The ending of the socialist era*.<sup>48</sup> He became Murdoch’s political columnist at *The Sunday Times* in 1985 before moving to the reputedly anti-Murdoch *Independent* in 1987 as Associate Editor. Peter Jenkins died in 1992. Heavily criticised in Samuels’s article, Amy Jenkins’s stepmother from the age of five, Polly Toynbee (Badminton and a London comprehensive; St. Anne’s, Oxford), became New Labour’s ‘concerned’ opinion-maker in the quality press.

Anthony Giddens is the academic voice most readily associated with these developments, even though the direct ancestry of the slogan ‘education, education, education’ was Philip Gould’s manipulation of focus group analysis rather than the sociologist’s thin idealism. Giddens began his academic career reading Weber, Durkheim and Marx, but a philosophic turn synchronous with the neoliberal turn of the late 70s and early 80s buried what quiet sympathy with them there might be in his early writings. His ‘theory of structuration’ was a flight from structuralism’s repudiation of human agency to find a workable synthesis of *system* and *structure*. Unhelpfully, Giddens’s *system* was the structure of the structuralism that was ‘parallel’ to Althusserianism. Even so, he rightly rejected Althusser’s ‘homeostatic equilibria’ as functionalist in order to carve out a space for *structure*, the generative rules human agents steered through.<sup>49</sup> The academic significance of education for Giddens is the accrual of life experiences that help people through life’s nexus of choices. ‘Men make their own history’, according to Giddens, but the caveat, that

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<sup>47</sup> Slavoj Žižek, ‘Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism’, *NLR*, 1/122 (1997), 28-51 (34).

<sup>48</sup> Peter Jenkins, *Where Trotskyism Got Lost: The restoration of European democracy after the Second World War* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1977); *Mrs Thatcher’s Revolution: The end of the socialist era* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), pp. 14, 117.

‘they do not make it as they please’, disappears.<sup>50</sup> The ideological bar at which sheer existence no longer translated into personal responsibility for one’s position in society, if not the direction of the mode of production, was set so low that Giddens illustrated the all-possibility of agency with hunger-strikes, suicide attempts and (most bemusing of all) the rational pleas of prisoners. Structure and agency evaporated into a weightless voluntarism.

It took a series of books to bridge the gap between sociological first principle and political manifesto. *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981) emptied Marxism of any direct reference to capitalism. Like all poststructuralist postings of Marxism, radical politics was decoupled from the economic to become a floating affirmation of progress. At this juncture, Giddens was confident enough to dismiss the class struggle as something ‘so patently erroneous that it is difficult to see why so many have felt obliged to take it seriously’.<sup>51</sup> In the new radical-conservative climate, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) argued that a qualitative shift in capitalist development had finally ‘disembedded’ (Giddens’s favourite word) life from the rootedness that had thitherto determined existence. Now the market was sufficiently complex and extensive to fashion and cater for all the possible choices of an inclusive ‘life politics’, the self-directed ‘questions of how we should live our lives in emancipated social circumstances’.<sup>52</sup> In *Beyond Left and Right* (1994), the coordinates for progressive politics became ‘old’ conservatism and ‘new’ radicalism. Post-al, the attempt to pass beyond the Left (system) and Right (agency) was more than an intellectual fudge; a variant of the latter, it claimed the spirit of the former. Conservatism was shorn of all its class and philosophic dimensions to become a self-sufficient defence of what already existed. Unapologetically, New Right economics became progressive modernisation while the left’s defence of the Welfare State became the new conservatism. Hyperbole was meant in all seriousness: ‘we might assert again the old slogan mentioned before: too conservative not to be radical! Or to put it the other way around: too radical not to be conservative!’<sup>53</sup> By *The Third Way* (1998), Giddens’s throwaway remarks about ‘socialist planning’ in postwar Britain revealed just how far

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<sup>50</sup> Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, Vol. 1: Power, property and the state* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1981), pp. 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and society in the late modern age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 223-4.

<sup>53</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The future of radical politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p. 49.

Hayekian assumptions permeated New Labour.<sup>54</sup> Thatcherite contempt for the benefits system was palpable: ‘Social democrats’, Giddens wrote, ‘have to shift the relationship between risk and security involved in the welfare state, to develop a society of “responsible risk-takers” in the spheres of government, business enterprise and labour markets’.<sup>55</sup> For all the intuitive grasp of a contemporary middle-class experience, that of the postwar ‘disembedded’, Giddens’s worldview was a naïve underestimation of *Kapitallogik*. Freedom was the internalisation of the logic of capital; one had to invest in oneself. But the Third Way, like all radical-conservatisms, had no means of registering the fact that the increased movement of labour is a consequence of the greater relative increase in the movement of capital that exploits it. Unfreedoms outstripped freedoms.

*The Transformation of Intimacy* (1994) exemplified how apologias for neoliberalism seek, Laurent Berlant warns, the ‘compression of national life’ into ‘apparatuses of intimacy’.<sup>56</sup> Drawing conventionally enough from Foucault, sexualities are constructed. Giddens’s departure is the assumption that sexuality is now divorced from reproduction—‘sexuality is at last fully autonomous’<sup>57</sup>—thanks to the contraceptive pill, leaving present-day sexualities readily mouldable self-reflexive projects with the capacity to enhance the self (sodomites, sodomees and the infertile were, presumably, never subjected to anything). Despite a slew of statements to the effect that heterosexuality enjoyed no privilege within life politics, the substance of the argument indicated otherwise. ‘A new meaning [was] given to transience’ in the bathhouses of pre-Aids gay subculture, eliciting, for Giddens at least, the truth of ‘episodic sexuality’. Eight pages earlier we learned that ‘Monogamy refers, not to the relationship itself’ but to ‘sexual exclusiveness as a criterion of trust’—that is, an ‘important stimulus’ for the pure relationship.<sup>58</sup> The value of the homosexual to the heterosexual? Essentially, he showed that non-reproductive sexualities are constructs like his own, but, unlike his, they were perfectible. Biology redundant, ‘confluent’ love brought together two self-reflexive life projects into a running contract of mutually respectful behaviours. This, the

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<sup>54</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The renewal of social democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992); Laurent Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on sex and citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145-6, 138.

‘pure relationship’, borrowed the jargon of *The Citizen’s Charter*: ‘Rights help dissolve arbitrary power’, Giddens waxed, ‘only in so far as they carry responsibilities toward the other which draw privileges into an equilibrium with obligations’.<sup>59</sup> The transformation of intimacy was its neoliberalisation.

Extraordinarily, past gay behaviour is treated as evidence for the ‘compulsive character of male sexuality’. Giddens’s sexology deflected the onus for change away from the problem-male (he is, after all, inveterate) to the problem-female dependent on him. The disproportionate energy needed to realise the ‘wide-ranging emotional reorganisation of social life’ fell to a female social democrat operating in workless domestic environments rather than anything resembling public space.<sup>60</sup> She was encouraged to turn to the self-help literature that informed Giddens: ‘In such discussion, I shall quite often—although in critical vein—take therapeutic works and self-help manuals as my guide’.<sup>61</sup> The catalogue of discreditable male behaviour (alcoholism, domestic violence, emotional unresponsiveness) and female ‘dependency’ was, of course, classed. The tone of the book and its address to baby-boomers constructed the perfectibility of monogamous heterosexual relations by invoking, appropriating and rejecting elements of gay life to establish, in turn, a mandate over a ‘maladjusted’ underclass. It is taken as read that the pathology of male sexuality in *The Transformation* does not in any way apply to its author because of the class character evinced in the telling, just as the language of ‘addictive programming’, ‘codependence’, ‘carers’ and ‘toxic parents’ does not impugn Giddens’s female colleagues in the educational afterworld of LSE.<sup>62</sup> This superordinate descriptive authority had long been the characteristic feature of the sociologist’s autodidactic personalism. The son of a lower-middle-class transport clerk from Edmonton, North London, Giddens was schooled at Michenden Grammar, read Sociology and Psychology at Hull, and gained positions at a string of universities before Blair elevated him to the House of Lords as Baron Giddens of Southgate. It is the common sense of meteoric educational narratives to convey the happy consequence of spontaneous meritocratic conditions, and the vibrancy of the educational afterworld depicted by Giddens reproduces the embedded concreteness of that particular disembedded experience.

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<sup>59</sup> p. 191.

<sup>60</sup> pp. 3, 75.

<sup>61</sup> p. 64.

<sup>62</sup> pp. 91, 87, 107-8.

Published a year before *The Transformation of Intimacy*, David T. Evans's *Sexual Citizenship* (1993) should have been warning enough that to speculate about the 'truth' of desire in gay bathhouses is to ignore the material construction of sexualities within commercial settings. Undoubtedly, women's lives became 'disembedded' in neoliberal Britain in the sense that substantial market freedoms were opened up—waged labour, financial independence, consumption and leisure-time—and that those freedoms were set against the erosion of traditional safety nets—unstable marital relations, higher rates of divorce, the decline of the male 'family wage'. There were improvements in legal status, including access to the Pill through the NHS (1961), legalised abortion (1967) and the Equal Pay Act (1970). Yet, as the lasting pay gap testifies, 'empowerment' like this is not uncomplicated emancipation. Rather, it is a belated, patchy and ambiguous form of progress where obdurate continuities persist in distorted and often confusing ways.<sup>63</sup> Women are now caught between the liberal economic and moral conservative faces of the marketised State: on the one hand, female citizenship is sponsored by a liberal State dedicated to market participation (in other words, exploitation); on the other, the effects of those freedoms are derided by the authoritarian State in the name of public morality. It is possible, then, to discuss monumental change whilst recognising the persistence of 'woman' as a position still ideologically shackled to an emotionalised domestic sphere.

Thatcher, the effigy of female self-assertion in the 80s and 90s, illustrated this. Assuming a lower elocution voice, a fixing stare, 'conviction' and provincialism, all the parameters of female citizenship summarised by Evans were in play: the age-old prescriptions of female nature—'emotionalism, irrationality, passion, attractiveness and dependency'—were mashed awkwardly with the demands of male-dominated public life—'rationality, reason, independence'. Evans's assertion that 'essential gender and sexual difference have been reconstituted rather than questioned' in Britain, 'recycling anew old influential icons which triumph over the temptations and confusion of rapid social change',<sup>64</sup> was borne out when the Conservatives binned Thatcher. Because female self-determination is achieved by juggling the contradictions offered by a system skewed towards the interests of men, the means of female social mobility always carry with them the means by

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<sup>63</sup> Evans, *Sexual Citizenship*, pp. 240-1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 250-1.

which freedoms may be revoked—and they are dropped as soon as the particular form of exploitation that licenses them becomes surplus to requirements.

The boundaries of homosexual citizenship are similar to though ultimately distinct from those of female citizenship, because of the preponderance of male-centred gay subculture. ‘The potency of the modern homosexual male’s “virilisation” is as much economic as it is sexual’, as we saw in the first chapter, ‘allowed to exercise his rights as consumer but denied “equal” rights elsewhere, and on the whole he doesn’t seem to mind’.<sup>65</sup> Unwittingly confirming Evans’s thesis, *The Guardian* showcased extracts from Andrew Sullivan’s *Virtually Normal* over the course of three days in October 1995. The argument was that homosexual rights, stigmatising and reifying identity, encumbered life—‘Politics’, he trumpeted, ‘cannot do the work of life. Even culture cannot do the work of life. Only life can do the work of life’.<sup>66</sup> Sullivan had already argued in the liberal yet hawkish *New Republic* magazine that ‘gay people [are] already prosperous, independent and on the brink of real integration’ (no means-testing about it, Sullivan’s ‘gay people’ were middle-class).<sup>67</sup> Educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, Sullivan’s hostility to homophobia was hostility to any kind of limit to the upward mobility that had catapulted him from the Sussex town of East Grinstead and nearby Reigate Grammar (then a public school) to the heights of US journalism. Conforming to gender and New Right talk of ‘rights and responsibilities’ (emphasis, always, the latter), Sullivan’s appeal to the mainstream was this: cultivated masculinity should have the material rewards proper to it conferred by an otherwise judicious way of things. But, of course, Sullivan has made a solid career by being the one to articulate that position in ways that flatter his Republican colleagues.

A buoyant mainstream gay press lobbied a Labour government-in-waiting with similar pieties. In the lead article of the February 1996 edition of *Gay Times*, ‘The Nineties So Far’, Simon Edge, author of *With Friends Like These: Marxism and gay politics* (1995), opined as if it were fact that activism confronting ‘injustices and discrimination in the face, has a negative aura. In contrast, the pursuit of young-at-heart hedonism offers positive ways of flaunting, rather than bemoaning,

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<sup>65</sup> p. 100.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Sullivan, ‘The straight and narrow’, *Guardian*, 10 October 1995; *Virtually Normally: An argument about homosexuality* (London: Picador, 1995).

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Sullivan, ‘The Politics of Homosexuality’, *New Republic*, 10 May 1993.

gay sexuality'. The decisive factor was an injunction to consume: 'it is more fun to walk down the street with nice peccs and an espresso'. Edge read a gay politics of pride through a myopic sense of social justice where the masses should be bettered by individual example; 'there must be something worth leaving the closet' for, he wrote, to incentivise the 'open and gay lives' that undermine homophobia.<sup>68</sup> Peccs and espressos on Old Compton Street, however, is hardly one-upmanship displayed for the consumption of the homophobic gaze. Rather, it was a front within a wider 'beat the Joneses' consumerism that enjoined the conflicts inherent to an asymmetric sexual subculture. The benefactors of Edge's lifestyle were gay business owners and those with superior purchasing power like himself. In 1984, the Gay Business Association established itself as a nationwide 'chamber of commerce'. It paid lip service to the wider gay community by promoting itself as the provider of homophobia-free employment. The reality is that workers in London's Soho and Manchester's Village are subject to the same modes of exploitation as other workers in the retail and so-called hospitality sectors, except the presumption that 'gay' employment is a form of charity expects due gratitude, and exacts it.<sup>69</sup> The depth of 'anti-political' feeling was registered by a *Gay Times* poll in the April 1997 issue where gay activist Peter Tatchell was voted the year's number one figure of 'Gay Shame' over Robert Mugabe. A letter accompanying the poll invited Tatchell to 'get a life'.<sup>70</sup> The injuries Tatchell sustained trying to arrest Mugabe in 2001 heightened ironies to a poetic injustice.

## COMING TOGETHER

How—to borrow the title of the first episode—did all this 'come together' in *This Life*? Much of the groundwork of an answer may be achieved by stating where my approach diverges from the few (and brief) academic surveys published to date. As the 'creator' of the show and the writer of the first three and last two episodes of Series 1, Jenkins is clearly instrumental in marking out and capping ideological perspectives, but she wrote no material for Series 2; instead, writer Richard Zajdlie penned five framing episodes. Readings have tended to reproduce Jenkins's 'self-

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<sup>68</sup> Simon Edge, 'The nineties so far', *Gay Times*, February 1996; *With Friends Like These: Marxism and gay politics* (London: Cassell, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> Peter Morgan, 'Class Divisions in the Gay Community', *International Socialism*, 78 (1998), 77, 92.

<sup>70</sup> 'Gay Times Poll', *Gay Times*, April 1997.



reflexivity' and Giddens's statements on life politics without acknowledging or puncturing their voluntarist assumptions and ideological commitments. Sarah Cardwell, for instance, settles for a loop whereby a 'twenty-something' television generation symbiotically views a 'twenty-something' television generation's search for identity.<sup>71</sup> Identities beget identities. There is, in fact, a marked absence of television-viewing in *This Life*, a programme pointedly divided fifty-fifty between work and communal living (if television is watched at 13 Benjamin Street, it is *Match of the Day* rather than self-reflexive drama). Cardwell's 'television generation' was neither the first historically nor was it representative of the contemporary—watching television is still the cultural marker of the working classes, not aspirant professionals.<sup>72</sup> 'Coming together, again' might be a better way of understanding *This Life*: the show pitched the educational afterworld at the point where products of the Redbrick University reconvene to disperse themselves once more into the incestuous world of professional cliques.

Redbricks, like their aspirants, have always been tarnished by their origins. As an expanding education system identified a 'pool of talent' too large for Oxford and Cambridge, urban colleges were granted royal charters to form the large civics, like Leeds (1904). In Malcolm Bradbury's novel *Eating People Is Wrong* (1959), a fictional 'minor Redbrick' sits on 'Institutional Road' oozing philistinism: 'The pile had, in fact, a curious history. When, in a riot of Victorian self-help, the town had finally decided it wanted a university, it had provided it with all that vision, that capacity for making do, that *practicality* which had been the basis of the town's business success'.<sup>73</sup> As the curiosity of that 'curious history' intimates, these academic monuments to vulgarity gave working-class aliens the opportunity to shine in the rough (the son of a railwayman, Bradbury had attended grammar school and read English at what was then University College, Leicester). Carl Bode characterised the frustrated Angry Young Men, including Hoggart, as 'Redbrick Cinderellas', but the lasting statement on the Redbrick type already belonged to M. Somerset Maugham:

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<sup>71</sup> Sarah Cardwell, 'The Representation of Youth and the Twenty-Something Serial', in *The Contemporary Television Series*, eds. Michael Hammon and Lucy Mazdon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 123-38.

<sup>72</sup> Tony Bennett *et al.*, *Culture, Class, Distinction* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 142-7.

<sup>73</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *Eating People is Wrong* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1959), p. 24.

They do not go to the university to acquire culture, but to get a job, and when they have got one, scamp it. They have no manners, and are woefully unable to deal with any social predicaments. Their idea of a celebration is to go to a public house and drink six beers. They are mean, malicious and envious. [...] Charity, kindness, generosity are qualities which they hold in contempt. They are scum.<sup>74</sup>

(Not much difference, perhaps, from the Redbrick lawyers of *This Life*.) Hoggart's time was a point of expansion, with many colleges like Hull (1954) gaining quasi-Redbrick status. The founding of the seven so-called 'Plate-glass' universities and the major polytechnics in the 1960s was a dual strategy by Labour to create 'parity of esteem' between academic and vocational HE institutions. Differentiated aspirations, it was hoped, could be stimulated then contained within mutually respectful trajectories and educational afterworlds.

In a structurally unequal society, this was a naïve and self-defeating project. A bifurcated HE model instituted, exacerbated and seethed with inherited elitisms, and neoliberals were more than happy to harness and commodify the dissatisfied differences. One of Keith Joseph's first questions to stunned officials on his appointment as Education Secretary in 1981 was 'How do you close a university?'<sup>75</sup> Joseph's reading of British economic decline channelled the work of an American, Martin Weiner; his *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981) argued that the chronic limitation of the British economy was a quasi-feudal, toff-schooled Oxbridge crust—but unlike in the Nairn-Anderson theses, the rightful successors were Thatcherites.<sup>76</sup> Neoliberal HE policy has always been about controlling this higher echelon. Political will to impose market forces within the university system as it stood dissipated after 1987 because each large civic was too deeply respected for a chastened government to fold. So instead of pressure from within, the Conservatives imposed pressure from below. Polytechnics were given free rein as players within a league-tabled quasi-market. As the student population doubled overnight, the percentage under each pre-existing

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<sup>74</sup> Carl Bode, 'The Redbrick Cinderellas', *College English*, 20 (1959), 331-37; M. Somerset Maugham, 'Books of the Year', *London Sunday Times*, 25 December 1955.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *Keith Joseph* (London: Chesham, 2001), p. 368, cit. Simon Dixon, 'The University of Leeds and the British Higher Education System, 1963-2004', *Northern History*, 53 (2006), 303-25 (321).

<sup>76</sup> Martin Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

vice-chancellor's care halved, as did their power. Leeds was in crisis by 1994/95: applications were 20 per cent lower than their 1982/83 high. Caught between the New Universities and the London-Oxford-Cambridge 'Golden Triangle', Redbricks played to their relative strengths. Alan Wilson, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds, was frank: 'Because we were large, we wanted to say that we did everything!'<sup>77</sup> Leeds grew larger still. Rises in admissions outstripped rises in applications and, as the city centre began to offer consumerist lifestyles, the university quickly became an 'amalgam of both elite and mass types'.<sup>78</sup>

The typical path to Leeds might not have been local anymore as it was for Hoggart, but wider geographic scope made for limited social diversity. Pluralism is now the predictability of background rather than region, as one 2008 study demonstrates. In areas of the top 50 to 90 per cent of university participation rates, 'the majority of young people are in full-time work [... whilst] the rest of them are clearly split between the South Western and south-west London Redbrick Elysian fields. Apart from notable "holes" such as Slough, Portsmouth and Crawley, there is a near-continuous set of fields across southern England where if full-time work is not your destination, a Redbrick university probably is'. And the rest? 'By contrast, Post-1992 University is the likely future for the majority of the rest of the country outside East London, the West Midlands, Liverpool, and the North East coast. Come from one half of one constituency in Camden (Highgate) and an Elite University beckons'. Because there is 'not only a north-south divide but also intense intra-regional segregation',<sup>79</sup> geographic and social division is complicated by the infiltration of regional aliens into high-status courses (Medicine, Law) at Redbricks. Jenkins's investment in this sieved cohort is in a notional cross-section of youth that masks the middle-class consolidation of power; for Garnett, there was the opportunity to explore those tensions more productively.

The first scene of *This Life* is an intensely worked two-and-a-half minutes juxtaposing three attitudes. A series of close-up shots identify their personifications—Warren, Egg, then Anna—before establishing shots confirm that the action occurs in different locations. Even then, several straight cut shots

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<sup>77</sup> Dixon, 'The University of Leeds', 322.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>79</sup> Judith Watson, John Pritchard and Daniel Dorling, 'Twelve Tribes of English Youth', Society for Research into Higher Education Conference, Liverpool, 9-11 December 2008.

elapse before the specific situations—counselling and job interviews—are revealed. The following is a sketch of that scene, with oblique strokes indicating cross cuts: ‘Out there is chaos’, Warren begins; ‘Out there I can’t do anything about anything. I can’t change anything else. But *here*’, tapping his head, ‘I can decide what it’s gonna be like for me’/ Egg stutters that he is ‘thoughtful’/ Warren looks at his watch/ Egg admits he has no answer to a question/ ‘Anna’ (an authoritative male voice is heard as the camera turns slightly to the near profile of an attractive young woman) ‘was it a happy childhood?’/ Egg declares, with confidence, that he had a ‘happy childhood’/ Anna answers decisively in the negative/ Warren writes and offers a cheque to an unseen figure/ ‘My father left when I was eleven’, Anna confesses. ‘My mother went to bed with a packet of Temazepam. She’s still there’. To questioning, Anna admits that she has taken drugs on nights when she’s ‘lost it’; an eye-line cut establishes a pre-existing relationship with the young male panel member (Miles)/ ‘To be honest’, Egg says, ‘I don’t have any theories, I’m not really into them’/ To ‘why do you want to be a barrister?’ (a documentary shot establishes Anna for the first time in a short skirt encircled by men), the resolute answer (in dramatic close-up) is ‘For the money’/ ‘Theories don’t work, do they’, Egg continues, ‘that much is clear by now. [...] like you can’t do anything about crime like you can’t do anything about the rain’/ ‘It’s in my blood, I think’, Anna elaborates, ‘I feel like a barrister’/ Egg talks about his passion for football/ Anna rises. A little later, at his interview, Warren avers: ‘I’m ambitious, diligent, resourceful, creative, keen, impressed, excited, grateful actually’. Asked whether he has anything else to add he declares: ‘Gay—and honest’ (‘Coming Together’, 18 March 1996). We are, then, immersed in the dramatic gaze before the documentary gaze, the latter finally locating the former as a perspective forced to account for its place in the world, to be judged, tested and allotted within the educational afterworld. For the remainder of this section I argue that the conflicts inherent to Jenkins’s morality-cynicism are teased out and delegated to these personalised Redbrick histories.

Warren’s gay citizenship is the standard-bearer of the new culture/mass civilisation distinction between an ‘in here’ of personalist control of the self and an ‘out there’ of socio-political chaos. Law was a flagship profession for Stonewall, the suited gay lobby group formed in 1989. The Lesbian and Gay Lawyers Association was, Edge reported in *Gay Times*, one of the ‘fastest growing political organisations in the country’ in 1996. The other two ‘fastest growing’ groups were the Lesbian and Gay Police Association and the Tory Campaign for Homosexual Equality. A limited form of progress was made through the direct representatives and

enforcers of capitalist property relations over Anarchy.<sup>80</sup> As the conduit of Jenkins's self-help discourse, a didactic curve to the first two episodes sees an initial iciness to therapy-speak thaw with the symbolic acceptance of its bearer into the nation-at-work and the nation-at-home. Corporatist, Warren joins Moore, Spencer Wright & Partners and moves into the spare room at Benjamin Street ('Happy Families', 25 March 1996).

Gay citizenship, though, is clipped to keep homosexuality symbolically central yet socially marginal. Consider the show's second scene: Warren, entering the office, stops short in the doorway to the far right of the screen because he has interrupted Milly and Egg being couply in the far left—his claim that they used to 'hang out' together at Leeds dies in the distance between when the pair returns blank faces. The charisma deficit between the single gay male and the heterosexual couple is cringing. After one terse dismissal, the media review of *Gay Times* left the show untouched: 'The kidney in this steak pie', Megan Radcliffe wrote, is 'an innocuous gay man who's closeted [to his family] and cautious. While all around him others are burning the candles at both ends, Warren sits behind his desk in his brown pinstripe suit and frets'.<sup>81</sup> For *Gay Times*, exploitation beyond 9 to 5 denotes personal dynamism. *This Life* was excluded from a column that waxed lyrical about the most tenuous allusions to gay, camp or homophobia because the show did not offer the happy gay of Stonewall's role-model politics. The media column had long been the jurisdiction of Terry Sanderson, author of self-help manuals *How to Be a Happy Homosexual* (in Thatcher's Britain) and *Assertively Gay: How to build up gay self-esteem* (in Major's Britain).<sup>82</sup> The lifestyle magazines that did feature in the programme were the 'lad mags' of public-school homophobe Miles. Launched in the mid-90s, titles like *FHM* and *Loaded* challenged *Gay Times*'s market position as a forum for brazenly commodified male identities. Mark Simpson dubbed it 'metrosexuality', advertising extending the consumerist image-making road-tested on gay male subculture to a wider male narcissism.<sup>83</sup> In *This Life*, heterosexuality trumped homosexuality. As Hughes, the actor playing

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<sup>80</sup> Edge, 'The Nineties So Far'.

<sup>81</sup> Megan Radcliffe, 'Television and radio', *Gay Times*, May 1996.

<sup>82</sup> Terry Sanderson, *How to be a Happy Homosexual: A guide for gay men* (London: Other Way, 1986) and *Assertively Gay: How to build gay self-esteem* (London: Other Way, 1993).

<sup>83</sup> Mark Simpson, 'Here come the mirror men', *Independent*, 15 November 1994.

Warren, told *The Independent*, he ‘didn’t get to wear the trendiest gear’—his ‘hair wasn’t quite right’.<sup>84</sup>

‘Gay, Welsh, Stupid?’, the title of that interview, took its lead from the programme’s weave of provincialism, therapy-dependence (there in the cheque) and (as Egg puts it) being a ‘wanker’. The long Welsh vowels of Warren’s signature word —‘bowndries’—and accented phrase—‘I absolootely reserve the right not to crucify my parents on my sexual preffrence’—are often mimicked at his, and the periphery’s, expense. Simpson wrote a little cruelly in *Anti-Gay* (1996) about the gay man from ‘a Gap-less town in Wales’ that reminded mainstream gay subculture that ‘once upon a time there were no gays only dreary homosexuals’.<sup>85</sup> Warren’s cruising for ‘cock’ in parks eroticised the furtive, non-commodified ‘pre-liberation’ illegality that Stonewall and ‘vibrant’ gay subculture cannot brook. The upshot of this passive, Welsh gay citizenship was a position that fitted uneasily within both mainstream gay male subculture and the yuppie professional class. Warren’s narrative, then, worked through the initial contradiction of an unhappy homosexual hollowly asserting his gayness. Far from troubling, Warren’s blurring and re-instigation of ‘bowndries’ lent itself as an unthreatening foil for heterosexual self-reflexivity. Hence Giddens: ‘Boundaries establish what belongs to whom, psychologically speaking’.<sup>86</sup> In its ‘homosexual’ gay man, *This Life* tried to exorcise some of its own nonsense.

Egg cuts short a stream of Warren’s psychobabble on his first day at work: ‘Do you speak English at all?’ he asks. Egg, described by Anna as a ‘SNAG’, or ‘Sensitive New Age Guy’ (‘Father Figure’, 20 May 1996), evinces a quiet English authority. As the show’s base-level authority, its ‘good Egg’, he is an uncontroversial vehicle for a ‘thoughtful’ Lyotardian rejection of the political sphere. His assertion that you ‘can’t do anything about crime’ is couched as matter-of-fact Northern observation. Even the comparison with the rain is politics naturalised into intractable, if not folksy Northern ‘life’. As a Manchester-born son of an English teacher, Egg is the only character not to study undergraduate Law; an ‘organic’ educational trajectory through Manchester University is implied (bus journeys to visit Milly are mentioned). As a Bachelor of Arts in Eng.Lit., the ‘conversion’ to Law is reversed when, early in the series, Egg leaves the profession to become a novelist. This

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<sup>84</sup> Janie Lawrence, ‘Gay, Welsh, stupid?’, *Independent*, 19 March 1998.

<sup>85</sup> Mark Simpson, *Anti-Gay* (London: Freedom Editions, 1996), pp. 2, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Giddens, *Transformation of Intimacy*, pp. 93-4. See also pp. 9, 139, 189.

Northern culturalism is reinforced by his father, Jerry, who appears with his about-to-be-published novel about 'real life' in Moss Side, one of Britain's most deprived areas. Mania for Manchester United and *Match of Day* connects with the momentum of Euro '96 and its Anglocentrism rather than cosmopolitan life politics. Arthur Aughey's study of Englishness celebrated the *annus mirabilis* when 'English had come out of the national closet and declared a patriotic love that could now speak its name'.<sup>87</sup> It was a yearning for aspects of unreconstituted working-class authenticity amid seeming disembeddedness. Football, as Eagleton judges, 'blends dazzling individual talent with selfless teamwork, thus solving a problem over which sociologists have long agonised'.<sup>88</sup> Nostalgia for that way of life included monogamy. Jerry's stay about Benjamin Street poses an inter-generational test (he is only there because Egg's mother has left him for another man). The question is whether Milly and Egg's five-year pure relationship will succeed in a disembedded world when the marriages of Welfare-contract Britain have failed.

Anna steals the opening scene and, it is generally agreed, the entire programme. As the embodiment of women's claims to power within the male-dominated professions, the representation of female citizenship was the claim to equality of access to dominant positions within unequal relations. A whirl of sexed and gendered contradictions bolted female self-promotion (Anna) to women's social history (Anna's mother). The corrosion of the family wage and marriage was visited on Anna's mother as a traumatic event that shifted marital dependence to codings of Welfare-paralysis (prescription drugs and, if bedridden, benefits). The return of the Welfare-female oppressed promising to right the wrongs of patriarchy through neoliberal zeal, Anna's flight from her mother's narrative is a refusal to become trapped in passive cycles of withdrawal and support. Articulated through 'blood', however, Anna is ideologically tied to the family. As this force of nature, the unfolding of Anna's bodily drive to succeed is also her sexualisation. Warren presented himself as a grateful gay man, but Anna offered herself as a fully-fledged barrister; her appeal is to a certain justice that would see an essential inner identity matched and vindicated by the material gratifications controlled by men. She sells herself as a take-it-or-leave-it product. The pitch reconfigured Thatcher's masterclass in how to hold a captive male audience from a subordinate position;

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<sup>87</sup> Arthur Aughey, *The Politics of Englishness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1-5.

<sup>88</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Football: A dear friend to capitalism', *Guardian*, 15 June 2010.

unwavering forthrightness, social advancement, hard monetarism and the blurring of nature and rationality in ‘conviction’ remained, but provinciality was now unabashed brassiness, and a fixed stare was now a roving gaze. The first comment after she left was about her legs. The elusiveness of occupational and sexual commitment goes on to structure the on-and-off casual sex with Miles, her fling at Leeds, interview panel member and subsequent rival at work. In sum, *This Life*’s apologia for female self-determination is a sexualisation, heterosexualisation and feminisation always already contained by the power of men. The refusal of female victimhood entered a zero-sum game where the only defence is to launch ‘attitude’. It is no an accident, then, that Anna delivered the show’s best lines, nor that *The Evening Standard* found it sexy: ‘Pamela Anderson is but a Kraft cheese slice to the ripe Stilton sensuality of Ms Nardini’.<sup>89</sup>

The Redbrick was at work in these interviews, an original bottleneck for a national geography restricted to de-politicised emergent subjects from traditional Labour heartlands; the Valleys, Glasgow and the urban Northwest. The serial begins, we can say, with ‘unselected’ State-comprehensive products (there were no grammars in Wales or Scotland by the close of the 80s) ‘selecting’ themselves through Law, a credentialised path that provided a degree of insulation against competition bearing higher social capital. In work as in ‘life’, the prize for the emergent Redbrick sexualities is the symbolic citizenship of ‘tenancy’—Anna begins the show living in a bedsit and working for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), which is to say the State; Warren is sleeping on the sofa of an elderly relative. Egg was already living at Benjamin Street, and heterosexual monogamy protects him (Milly pays his rent). *This Life* is not quite the British full house it made out to be; Northern Ireland remains a silence throughout. So the programme is not so much interested in lawyers or representing ‘*This Britain*’, but rather the the working-class and lower-middle-class profile of the contemporary Redbrick squeezed between Oxbridge and the New Universities. For all of Anna’s conflict with public-schooled male incumbents, the propulsion of that conflict is, like the HE sector more generally, from below. In the first episode, a desperate Anna admits she cannot afford to ‘cruise’ for a moment because ‘there are too many people from the University of Back of Beyond paddling up the stream’ behind her.

Once the house-as-nation is established, tensions represented by new arrivals Warren and Anna work to eject a rival candidate for residency. Miles meets his

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<sup>89</sup> McGregor, *This Life*, p. 18.



heroin-addicted, bulimic ‘shag’ Delilah when Anna defends her on drugs charges. Delilah moves into Miles’s room. Throughout the 90s, Giddens used people with addictions, particular food disorders, as the ‘negative index of reflexive modernity’, aligning passive dependency and a passive ‘underclass’ against the active life politics of ‘active’ seekers of the labour contract. Addiction was a ‘fundamentalist’ conservatism because, for Giddens, it marked ‘the influence of a past whose impelling power has no rationale other than itself’.<sup>90</sup> When Miles accuses Anna of hypocrisy for slurring Delilah as a drug-user, he receives a lesson in the public-private division of work-hard-play-hard yuppie life: Anna takes her drugs ‘At the weekend—there’s a difference’ (‘Happy Families’, 25 March 1996). Within the show’s terms, Anna is right: Delilah’s violation of each housemate’s property culminates in the ransacking of the house by Truelove (her lover, dealer and co-defendant on charges of housing benefit fraud) while everyone is at work (‘Living Dangerously’, 1 April 1996). At the subsequent house meeting, Warren and Anna strike different emphases within a Citizenship discourse of rights and responsibilities against Anarchy. Egg has just started to pay rent again:

WARREN	What we want is to draw up some ground rules.
ANNA	Rule number one: no anorexic bimbo blondes.
DELILAH	I’m part of this house!
ANNA	No. You are a guest. And one that’s totally outstayed their sodding welcome.
DELILAH	What about Egg?
ANNA	Egg pays rent, you stupid tart!

Warren plays a role akin to the Welfare-patrician by lending Delilah money and advice, though his emphasis on self-esteem and repayment lurches towards neoliberal Fabianism. Anna has no truck with inalienable rights because, guest-like, citizenship is fundamentally conditional. It is fitting, then, that Warren should finally eject Delilah acting on Anna’s underhand actions: throwing away Warren’s bio-yoghurt, the trigger is the disrespect for the ethical food choices Giddens regards as symbolic of the successful reflexive projects people suffering from anorexic do not make (‘Sex, Lies, and Muesli Yoghurt’, 8 April 1996). In their defence of the House-as-Nation’s property, a mutually supportive distribution of roles and labour between ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’ strands of Citizenship removes the ‘uneducated’ cockney rent-seeker to prove the corporatist

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<sup>90</sup> Giddens, *Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 76; *Beyond Left and Right*, pp. 82-3, 176.

mettle of emergent, provincial sexual identities. In the following episode, Warren advises Delilah and Miles on HIV-testing, effectively shifting the stigma of Aids to drug-use, the wayward working-class female and (to a lesser extent) the cross-class 'slummer' ('Fantasy Football', 15 April 1996). The end result of the tumultuous appearance and disappearance of Delilah is a tried-and-tested commitment to the diversity of professionalised hierarchy over the diversity of social difference.

The loose ideological knot Jenkins ties round the flexi-narrative is pulled tight in the final two episodes of Series 1. Anna severs the symbolic link with her suicidal Scottish drug dealer Lanky Roy when he faces drug charges. His language of solidarity carries a potential threat to Anna's career: 'You and me, right, we're on the same team, if you get my meaning. You know, I know you'll do your best by me. You see, we're in this together, people like us, aren't we?' Recoiling from the possibility of blackmail, Anna vows never to be a 'fuckwit' again ('Father Figure'). In the last episode ('Let's Get It On', 3 June 1996), Anna and Miles 'get it on' and Milly and Egg emerge jubilant from their tense relationship counselling with Warren's therapist. The life politics attempted by the gay man mediated the straight couple's success. An impasse is broken when the pair commit to heterosexual monogamy through contracted female self-regulation. The defining moment is Egg laying down the law of life politics: 'If you have a relationship with another man whilst you're going out with me', he insisted, 'then it's over'.

#### APOCALYPSE WOW!

The atmosphere of Series 2 is re-calibrated by the promotion of existing working-class characters. Warren's cousin Kira (Luisa Bradshaw-White) and on-and-off lover Ferdy (Ramon Tikaram) no longer form a backdrop for the Welshman's sexuality. They pursue 'non-pure' relationships. Kira launches a long campaign to catch the legal clerk Jo (Steve John Shepherd) and, breaking down all resistance, eventually gets her man. In Series 1, Ferdy had been introduced in the painfully safe terms of a wannabe businessman; his dream was to go to business school, earn some qualifications, begin a sandwich shop in the City and expand into an empire ('Just Sex', 13 May 1996, wr. Matthew Graham). Series 2 silences that. The self-defeating question Giddens offers as the cornerstone of the pure relationship—'Is everything OK?'<sup>91</sup>—is refined out of the sexual relationship that develops between

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<sup>91</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 92.

Ferdy and Scottish plumber Lenny (Tony Curran). The final rejection of ‘us-talk’ to laughter ends their angsty turbulence (‘Diet Hard’, 17 July 1997, wr. William Gaminara). Their no-nonsense attitude to work and home life has been rightly regarded as a move away from the obsequiousness of Warren’s gay sensibility. Ferdy takes a crowbar to a homophobe’s BMW (‘Men Behaving Sadly’, 15 May 1997, wr. Ian Iqbal Rashid) and floors Miles after a homophobic remark (‘Diet Hard’)—in Series 1, Warren stood immobilised as Miles shouted ‘Fuck off, you Vaseline-arsed fairy’ (‘Sex, Lies and Muesli Yoghurt’). As new educational demographics came into view, old ones were shown up. Warren condescends to Kira that she has ‘no GCSEs’ (‘Small Town Boyo’, 14 April 1997, wr. Mark Davies Markham). Kira (mail-person-cum-secretary) and Ferdy (courier) are seen doing the thankless work of Law.

The obtrusive speculation about Ferdy’s sexuality in Series 1 is now complicated:

KIRA	There’s gays, right? There’s bisexuals and then there’s ‘men who have sex with men’. That’s what you are.
FERDY	Yeah. A poof.
EGG	So... am I a heterosexual then? Or am I just a ‘man who has sex with Milly?’ See? I’m all confused now. I’m in gender crisis. I need a shag.

That is from the episode ‘Milly Liar’ (24 July 1997, wr. Joe Ahearne). Dramatic irony severely undercuts Egg’s self-confessed ‘Milly-sexuality’ for much of the series; Milly has been conducting a full-blown affair with her boss, O’Donnell (David Mallinson). New character Nicky (Juliet Cowan) also undermines Benjamin Street assumptions. Egg’s colleague at the local ‘caff, she offers a position within the text to view the house critically from the perspective of a working-class single parent at work. When asked about the identity of her five-year-old’s father, Nicky is a defiant product of sexual and educational exploitation: ‘He’s my university tutor, actually’, she explains in the (strictly speaking, incorrect) present tense; ‘He’s married. He didn’t want George, so we didn’t want him’ (‘Men Behaving Sadly’). Egg suspects that Nicky is attracted to him, but his arrogance is exposed; the imposition of life politics, a professional-executive phenomenon, is misplaced. By keeping a working environment at a distance from life politics, the elements of Egg’s Northern sensibility compromised by Benjamin Street are brought into relief. During a Mexican-themed evening at the caff organised by Nicky, the condescension of the housemates is flagrant (‘Diet Hard’).

It is the introduction of Rachel (Natasha Little) that most forcibly transforms the show. New dynamics plunge Spencer, Moore & Wright into the corrosion of no-win office politics. Over twenty-one episodes, Milly's desire to gain professional and sexual partnership with O'Donnell is expressed in bizarre passive-aggressive brinkmanship. Rachel's sexuality is impervious to any blur across domestic and professional boundaries, though Milly, blinded by life politics, reads Rachel's championing of anti-sexual harassment in the workplace as a double bluff by the attractive blonde to air coyness. Milly is often dubbed the 'boring' housemate within the series, though she is also the only non-white member of the original household, and the only one without a lengthy backstory. All we know (and it is from one fleeting remark) is that Milly has a sister. In contrast, Anna often refers to her mother, we follow the sex lives of Egg's father and brother, Miles's father and Warren's cousin, and we meet his brother. So when the dialogue skirts around Milly's non-whiteness, the silence is loud. When a British Asian man comes to view the spare room and asks 'Where are you from?', Milly repeatedly answers 'Barnet' ('A Room with a Queue', 8 May 1997, wr. Ian Rashid Iqbal). The refusal to acknowledge any link with the Subcontinent shores up her claim to a de-racialised female citizenship premised solely on professional conduct. Even so, Milly cannot help but be read, as Tom McGregor's *Companion* to the serial puts it, as a 'product of the Asian work ethic',<sup>92</sup> but leaving it at that misses how the disavowal of racial identities is part of a more general rejection of solidarity at Benjamin Street. Rachel wants the spare room to escape her stepfather's abuse, but Milly always vetoes her attempts; after one misunderstanding, she even volunteers to tell Rachel to stop unpacking her things and leave ('A Room with a Queue').

In general discussions about *This Life*, interest in the Milly-Rachel feud is only matched by continued speculation about the ultimate representative of self-help in the serial: the viewer is refused a sight of Warren's counsellor (voiced by Gillian McCutcheon) to the very last. The establishing shot just to the right of the therapist does, however, change. Milly vents her 'hate' for Rachel to the shrink, but, always posing questions, the therapist never calls Milly on her deeply embittered, if not crazed obsessions (Rachel's non-existent affair with O'Donnell). Nor does she pick up on Milly's moments of detached self-awareness (that she initiated her affair with O'Donnell to spite Rachel). In Series 1, therapy sessions functioned as a narrative tool to showcase the dramatic gaze, but by Series 2 the

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<sup>92</sup> McGregor, *This Life*, p. 83.

therapeutic gaze is the projection and exacerbation of conflicts rather than an unmediated facilitator of free electivity. Jenkins's disembodied therapist had signalled the supposed benefits of an ever questioning life politics in 'disembedded' Britain; but with no forthcoming answers, never given any substance, the centre of life politics is left hollow.

The life politics that reconciled relationships in Jenkins's first series detonates the second. Tabloid speculation, fuelled by Miles's three-week engagement to Francesca (Rachel Fielding), focussed on the prospect of heterosexual reunion with Anna. In the penultimate episode, Anna and Miles are kept apart by the inability of mutually agreeable life politics to make provision for disparities of social power. As the pair slowly play their respective hands, Anna has to pull away because she cannot 'agree' to anything without effectively making Miles's decision to call off his wedding hers ('Secrets and Wives', 31 July 1997, wr. Richard Zajdlic). The final episode comprehensively deflates the anticipation of an altar showdown by having no further interaction between Anna and Miles whatsoever. In fact, we do not even see the wedding ceremony. Instead, attention shifts to Milly, who, after confronting O'Donnell's professional and sexual exploitation, accepts Egg's proposal of marriage. Thinking herself immune from the pettiness of life politics, Milly finds its lowest level when Rachel implies that she could move into Miles's room:

MILLY	Rachel, why don't we stop pretending and admit the truth?
RACHEL	Sorry?
MILLY	We don't like each other.
RACHEL	Yes we do.
MILLY	No, we don't. We never have. Why on <i>earth</i> should we live together? I mean, I'm sure you're a really nice person, but I'm sorry: there's something about you I really can't stand.

Rachel hints to Egg that Milly slept with O'Donnell. Shouting the compact that ended Series 1, 'I told you that if you slept with someone else when you're going out with me then it's over', the resolution of Jenkins's script is the show's hostage to fortune under Zajdlic. The trigger was Milly articulating the existence of an all-determining yet indefinable 'something'. The imperative of life politics to render the determinate social contradictions of work unmistakably and unavoidably personalist is the problem *not* the solution.

As the screw turns on ‘pure relationships’, the camera cross cuts to Ferdy and Lenny, high on ecstasy, fucking in the toilets: ‘I love you’ belongs to the context of a mind-altered, post-coital embrace rather than the smartly billed heterosexual jamboree. Leaving Egg crying in the cubicle of another set of toilets, the memorable last scene begins with Milly still obsessed:

ANNA	Have you seen Egg? I think he’s scarpered?
MILLY	It was Rachel, wasn’t it? She told him.
ANNA	I dunno.
MILLY	I do.

This is the steely-faced vow of the wedding episode—and there is consummation, of sorts. The camera turns to show flip-flopped feet ascending the stairs. The momentum of the hand-held camera keeps pace with Milly as she strides across the dance floor to the build-up of John Paul Young’s ‘Love is in the Air’. The deliriously saccharine chorus breaks out as Milly hits Rachel across the face. Arms flail and dresses are torn. The camera cuts to identify the unknown figure as Warren (new hair). The last dramatic shot invites the viewer to read the last documentary shot—his view of Lenny and Ferdy grappling each other manically in front of a kicking and screaming scrum— as ‘outstanding’, a word that would suggest that there is something to take from this scene that is exceptionally good, clearly noticeable but yet to be realised. Warren toasts to this. The rush of the closing seconds is the spectacle of the tensions that had structured *This Life* finally released in petty fury and the gesture, as they explode, towards the possibility of other ways of living beyond the delusions of professional-executive life politics.

## THE AFTERLIFE

The serial has to be judged by the proximal demonstrative *this* that pitched *life* as led by an aspirant salariat as an intuitive expression of 90s Britain. It is a testament to the distance made by the second series—by constants (the cast, Garnett) and new contributions (notably Natasha Little and Zajdlic)—that the socialist playwright Mark Ravenhill was invited to draw up storylines for a possible third series. Jenkins’s claim that Garnett ‘just relied on my experiences as me’ was a half-

truth that effaced the history of left dissident programming within the BBC.<sup>93</sup> The show eventually managed to deflate that egoism through a chokingly neoliberalised mode of cultural production. As the executive producer of an ITC, the power was always Garnett's to steer the emphasis of *This Life* away from the self-presentation of an individual life towards its critique.

The show could do little to contain, however, the cultural free-for-all that followed. Many claimed the edginess of the show's last couple of months for their own mediated interests. *Gay Times* had ideological backtracking to do: Megan Ratcliffe had 'yolk all over [her] face' in the August 1997 issue because, she averred, *This Life* was now a 'gay cult hit'. Anna took pride of place as a 'rapier wit that covers an empathetic but susceptible heart. Her veneer has been engineered to cope with living in a man's world' (read: just like Stonewall, *Gay Times*, mainstream gay subculture).<sup>94</sup> The 'gay icon' was a retrospective substitution for Warren's failure as a gay role model, but even this rang hollow as go-getting politics; during July, the month the August issue was on the shelf, Anna descended into utterly desperate substance abuse (alcohol at home, cocaine at work). *Attitude* magazine, styling itself on punchy, unapologetic sexuality since its launch in May 1994, predictably took the same approach to Anna: 'she could be on the British fag-hag team at the next Olympics'. More so than *Gay Times*, it constructed icons for the male erotic gaze in Egg ('sex on legs'), Miles ('why must the cutest boy be the straightest?') and Jo (whose confused expression ought to be 'wiped off by a good rogering').<sup>95</sup> Although Warren was 'the most realistic gay man on TV', it was straight Andrew Lincoln who made it to the front cover of the December issue. Straightness was the prized commodity; after all, the magazine interpellated its readership as 'strays', straight gays. *Attitude* was a sharp instance of a generation that wore old proscriptions of gender and sexuality as new badges of contrarian spunk. Hence '*Attitude*', an alternative way of being in a world of assumed fact.

The single-drama special *This Life+10: Ten Years On* was broadcast on 2 January 2007 on BBC2. The poor reception of the reunion, it would seem to me, is a testament to the original's achievement. The attempt to contain the conclusion of Series 2 is best summarised by the caption to the photo attached to Jenkins's account of the one-off in *The Daily Mail*: mother smiling with toddler in new

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<sup>93</sup> Richard Brooks, 'Tony Garnett: TV's secret godfather', *Observer*, 11 October 1998.

<sup>94</sup> Megan Ratcliffe, 'A Slice of Life', *Gay Times*, August 1997.

<sup>95</sup> McGregor, *This Life*, p. 83.

designer kitchen, it read 'Loving This Life'. Jenkins expressed her gratitude to feminists—'they're partly the reason I'm sitting at my laptop earning good money today'—but was sad 'that the message I got gave me a tendency to turn my nose at the joy motherhood and family can bring'. Replete with injunctions against 'liberal parents' and women's rights, she favoured 'family values'.<sup>96</sup> The eighty-minute weekend reunion begins with: hotel-chain-owner Miles in a disastrous second marriage; barrister Anna (somehow) crippled by maternal pangs; Warren, now a counsellor, addicted to herbal remedies and suicidal; novelist Egg overworked; Milly, his housewife and mother to his children, considering divorce because of her husband's work commitments. (Ferdy is dead, though a ten-year monogamous relationship with Warren is stressed.) By the Sunday: Miles's marriage is over; Anna and Miles have declared their love for each other; Anna's paralysis and Warren's suicidality are cured by a sperm-donor arrangement (read: unhappy homosexuals are unhappy because they are not happy gay fathers); Egg and Milly are rejoined after the breadwinner commits to a new work/life balance. The power of the original was that it rendered the contradictions of life in mid-90s Britain across work, home and play more plausible and fluid than the pat coherence of workless inter-personalism. The special brought that into relief. Ten years since 1997 rather than 1996, there was a sense that the same vacancy characterised a decade of New Labour. Tim Montgomerie used the 'Beeb' programme as a symbol for a tax-and-spend society when *This Life* was, in fact, a farsighted rehearsal in life politics of what happened to its inspiration, capital, at the beginning and close of the 2000s—*crash*, the real legacy of mid-90s Britain.

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<sup>96</sup> Amy Jenkins, 'The best kept secret is the joy of having a baby', *Daily Mail*, 11 January 2007.



## The Theatricalisation of Urban Politics

Tony Blair delivered a key speech on education policy at the opening of the Bexley Business Academy in Thamesmead, Southeast London, in September 2003. The salience of the South London Estate is, as Edward Robbins sees, that ‘it reminds us of a time when government was committed to large scale interventions on behalf of the poorer sectors of society and remedying the inequalities which they suffered’.<sup>1</sup> The idea of Bexley Business Academy was that ‘students’ would identify with the interests of capital over the course of a sixteen-year ‘career’ (it was a joint nursery, junior school, secondary school and sixth form). ‘My passionate belief’, Blair told cameras, ‘is that educational success is the route to social justice—for each individual young person, and for our nation as a whole—and there is nothing more important for us as a nation than to invest in new and better schools in areas which have been failed in the past’. He had a message for critics who advocated a State-run comprehensive system. ‘I say: come here to Thamesmead, visit the local community, hear about the failed school of the past, compare it with the Bexley Business Academy which is already a beacon of hope and aspiration to the whole community, and see what a change for the better has taken place’.<sup>2</sup> It was a hostage to fortune. The private company managing the academy was called 3Es in homage to ‘Education, Education, Education’, but the name soon reflected sub A\*-C GCSE grades, mismanagement and the elevation of donors to the House of Lords who, on receipt of their honours, took their capital abroad (to Dubai).<sup>3</sup> Despite Blair’s presidential endorsement, cutting-edge architecture costing £37 million (designed

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Robbins, ‘Thinking Space/Seeing Space: Thamesmead revisited’, in *The City Cultures Reader*, eds. Malcolm Miles, Iain Borden and Tim Hall (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 29-35 (pp. 30-1).

<sup>2</sup> Tony Blair, ‘Radical Reform is the Route to Social Justice’, speech at Bexley Business Academy, September 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Marie Woolf, “‘Cash for Peerages’ row as Blair honours top donors”, *Independent*, 23 October 2005.

by Sir Norman Foster, no less) and discriminating admissions procedures, Ofsted slammed the academy in 2005.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter is about the city as an educational afterworld. It takes a long view of how areas associated with Welfare-failure came to set the stage for neoliberal self-projection. Fantastic promises and material failures are explored as the theatricalisation of urban politics. The example of Jonathan Harvey provides, I hope to demonstrate, a compelling way of thinking about that urban theatricality in terms of sexuality. Something of the homology that exists between the dramatised city and buoyant gay narratives is captured in the punning subtitle of *Beautiful Thing: An urban fairytale* (1993). Set in Thamesmead, focussed on two romancing schoolboys, Harvey's most successful play intervened in an educational afterworld of large inter- and intra-urban scope. 'I'm hopeless at answering questions because I don't really know why I write what I do', Harvey told *The Sunday Times* in 1994—he did not know what his 'big message' was.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, meaning had been very much produced, circulated and contained in a world that had rejected 'metanarratives'. Instead of explicit statements of authorial purpose, writer and production were left to speak for themselves through the vague nexus of associations and understandings fed through numerous articles and interviews invoking Harvey's Liverpoolian origins and his work as a secondary-school English teacher in Thamesmead.

Dominic Dromgoole, one of the critics energised by the play, declared that the 'first preview of *Beautiful Thing* was one of the more significant nights in post-war theatre'. Dromgoole was the artistic director at the Bush Theatre when it premiered the play.<sup>6</sup> If 28 July 1993 is to be read through the history of British postwar drama, then it is difficult to ignore the lasting impression of 8 May 1956, the Royal Court's premiere of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, on postwar theatre. Fortunately, there is work that demonstrates how 1956 was not so much the start of postwar drama as the focal point for a myth that established a particular type of stagecraft as natural to it. *Beautiful Thing*, I argue, is highly invested in that construction. The stakes are exposed by Dan Rebellato who, in

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<sup>4</sup> Steven Morris, 'Schools fear fallout from local academy', *Guardian*, 9 July 2004; Press Association, 'Ofsted criticises London academy standards', *Guardian*, 7 March 2006.

<sup>5</sup> John O'Mahoney, 'Double helping', *Sunday Times*, 4 September 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Dominic Dromgoole, 'Dominic Dromgoole', in *The Bush Theatre Book*, ed. Mike Bradwell (London: Methuen, 1997), pp. 70-73 (p. 71).

*1956 and All That* (1999), insinuates that Michelene Wandor's *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the family in post-war British theatre* (1987) suggests that postwar writing unspools from Osborne's play as if it had ended the Second World War in 1956.<sup>7</sup> The 'post' of postwar British theatre, then, should denote determination rather than schism. However, this is not the only approach seeking to disrobe 1956. Dromgoole distances *Beautiful Thing* from its social determination by rejecting all historical references. In his view, gestures to the *annus mirabilis* are 'culturally obtuse' because drama begins with 'writers working things out alone with their VDUS' [Visual Display Units, or computer screens].<sup>8</sup> I want to locate Dromgoole's socially obtuse pronouncements about *Beautiful Thing* within the urban history of postwar British theatre he negates.

The urban history presented in the first section digests the changes visited on Liverpool and Thamesmead; I then show how those conditions lent a dramatic structure to *Beautiful Thing*. The second section, turning to the political origin and development of British postwar theatre, accounts for the spectacular reception of the play. Returning to Thamesmead for the third section, I map the re-deployment of postwar motifs to neoliberal ends. I end with a brief consideration of *Gimme Gimme Gimme* (Tiger Productions, 1999-2001) for a number of reasons. The better-known of Harvey's works, the sitcom is the dystopian complement to the earlier play and carries over our interest in the BBC from the previous chapter. Moreover, academia's glancing interest in the show evinces the tendency of queer theory to impose assumptions on texts that theatricalise sexuality and gender as a put-on performance. This last section is an opportunity to look ahead to what a future study might broach. My intention is to signal how texts paraded as inconsequential prurience are tethered to an educational afterworld like any of the other texts we have discussed that produce, as part of their ideological power, a sense of intuitive social commentary in action.

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<sup>7</sup> Michelene Wandor, *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the family in post-war British drama* (London: Methuen, 1987); Dan Rebellato, *1956 and All That: The making of modern British drama* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Dromgoole, 'Dominic Dromgoole', p. 74.

## URBAN STAGES

'Few cities, if any', Stuart Wilks-Heeg remarks, 'can match Liverpool's dubious claim to have descended from "world city" to "pariah city" during the course of the twentieth century'.<sup>9</sup> That decline is undeniable, though Liverpool's pre-eminence was hardly halcyon: in the words of Gail Cameron and Stan Cooke, 'Liverpool was not just the economic capital of the slave trade, it was also its political capital'.<sup>10</sup> During the Industrial Revolution, Liverpool became Manchester's port, the link between the immiserated Northwest and the world market. After the Great Irish Famine (1845-1852), one-quarter of Liverpool was Irish-born; the city returned an Irish Nationalist MP to Westminster between 1885 and 1929.<sup>11</sup> After the New Towns Act (1946), two villages near the Mersey, Speke and Halewood, were developed as part of 'an outer ring of municipally owned housing estates'.<sup>12</sup> As the Northwest declined as a major industrial centre and shipping was containerised, the government proffered these satellite estates to car manufacturers as ready pools of pliant skilled labour. Three plants were built during the 1960s; the largest, Ford in Halewood, employed 15,000 workers. 'This place was a bit of an Eldorado at the time', one steward told Huw Beynon; 'Everybody wanted to come here. They came from all over Lancashire'.<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Harvey, born in 1968, grew up in Halewood. Plants, though, began to close as part of a city-wide freefall. The transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation cost Liverpool 192,000 jobs between 1971 and 1996, and a drop in GDP of 90 per cent between 1981 and 1996

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart Wilks-Heeg, 'World City to Pariah City: Liverpool and the global economy, 1850-2000', in *Reinventing the City?: Liverpool in comparative perspective*, ed. Ronaldo Munck (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. 36-52 (p. 36).

<sup>10</sup> Gail Cameron and Stan Cooke, *Liverpool—Capital of the Slave Trade* (Liverpool: Picton, 1992), p. 24. An estimated 1, 171,171 slaves were transported to the New World on Liverpoolian ships; see Kenneth Morgan, 'Liverpool's Dominance in the British Slave Trade, 1740-1807', in *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*, eds. David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 14-42 (p. 15).

<sup>11</sup> John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The history of the Liverpool-Irish, 1800-1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> R. Meegan, 'Paradise Postponed: The growth and decline of Mersyside's outer estates', in *Localities: The changing face of urban Britain*, ed. P. Cooke (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 198-234 (p. 200).

<sup>13</sup> Huw Beynon, *Working for Ford* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p. 108.

(despite national growth of some 50 per cent).<sup>14</sup> Liverpool has since been subjected to every urban redevelopment scheme imaginable: the city has been an Enterprise Zone, had an Inner Area Study, an Urban Development Corporation, a City Challenge programme, a Community Development Project and even the absurdity of a Garden Festival—‘festival of litter’ was Bill Bryson’s lasting put-down.<sup>15</sup> For many outsiders, the deterioration of the housing stock in fringe estates was understood as the Anarchy of its working-class population: as one resident told David Hall, ‘If you mention to someone outside Speke the word “Speke”, they automatically think, well, “Beirut—I wouldn’t live there”’. Paddy Ashdown likened Speke to Sarajevo.<sup>16</sup> Liverpool was conceptualised as car-crash urban theatre: ‘They should build a fence’ around Liverpool, a *Daily Express* journalist wrote in 1982, ‘and charge admission. For sadly, it has become a “showcase” of everything that has gone wrong in Britain’s major cities’.<sup>17</sup>

Construction began on Thamesmead, a child of the Greater London Council (GLC), in 1965. Envisaged as a New Town internal to the capital, 26,000 housing units were built in the spirit of utopian modernism, winning, for the planners at least, the prestigious Sir Patrick Abercrombie Award from the *Union Internationale des Architectes*. The fantasy was that, as a paragon of class diversity, life in Thamesmead would attract lower-middle and middle-class City workers. Teachers were courted; ‘Education in Thamesmead’, one promotional brochure ran, would ‘provide countless opportunities for members of the teaching profession to play their part in founding a new community’.<sup>18</sup> The problem was that projects like Thamesmead lifted segments of the working class out of Blitzed slum conditions only to straitjacket them in environments that precluded any working-class agency or, for that matter, any reconfiguration of space by capital.<sup>19</sup> The GLC’s chief architect included lakes because the latest evidence from Sweden suggested water features reduced crime by calming youth.<sup>20</sup> Shot on location in Thamesmead, Stanley Kubrick’s adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* obliterated

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<sup>14</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 141-73; Paul Jones and Stuart Wilks-Heeg, ‘Capitalising Culture: Liverpool 2008’, *Local Economy*, 19 (2004), 341-60 (344).

<sup>15</sup> Bill Bryson, *Notes from a Small Island* (London: Black Swan, 1996), p. 235.

<sup>16</sup> David Hall, ‘Images of the City’, in *Reinventing the City?*, ed. Munck, pp. 144-59 (p. 151).

<sup>17</sup> Cit. Tony Lane, *Liverpool: City of the sea* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), p. xiii.

<sup>18</sup> GLC, *Thamesmead: A riverside development* (London: Keystone Press, 1967), p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Robbins, ‘Thinking Space/Seeing Space’, pp. 30-1.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Collins, ‘Dreams set in concrete’, *Guardian*, 16 April 2008.

that presumption.<sup>21</sup> So the iconicity of the estate drew criticism from anti-authoritarians—*Orange*'s 'Municipal Flat Block 18A, Linear North' linked standardised social housing to oppressive regimes—as well as free-marketeters—Thamesmead came to manifest Adam Smith's bogeyman, the 'man of system' who organises 'the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board'.<sup>22</sup> Even so, David Harvey is mindful that these ventures were not the 'unalloyed failures' readily scorned today. After all, unprecedented resources were committed to alleviate the squalor exposed by war at a time when the laissez-faire capitalism that had created it was neither a moral nor practical alternative.<sup>23</sup>

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), David Harvey argued that a dramatic sensibility informs regeneration schemes, interpreting and constructing urban space in terms 'more like a theatre, a series of stages upon which individuals could work their own distinctive magic while performing a multiplicity of roles'.<sup>24</sup> The big talk of Charles Landry is typical of the theatricalising sensibility that has aggrandised the neoliberal reconfiguration of British cities. Since the 1980s, a turn to municipal entrepreneurialism in Northern cities has led to the 'cappuccinofication' of lucrative city centre space. One result of the complementary yet competitive set of relationships set in motion by municipal entrepreneurialism is a race for 'distinction' that has been a race to the bottom of homogenous shopping experiences, looks and public behaviours. Urban centres have been styled so that the businessman and the shopper share a theatricalised space that blurs the working city into a misnomer, the city of leisure. Nonetheless, according to Landry's obligatory third-person website, 'He helps find original solutions to seemingly intractable urban dilemmas such as marrying innovation and tradition, balancing wealth creation and social cohesiveness, or local distinctiveness and a global orientation'.<sup>25</sup> That harmony, impossible for a structurally unequal society, was conferred on the speaker as personal cachet. Take passages from *The Creative City* (2000) where Landry rationalises urban change as one white, middle-class man's epiphany that the city acts like him:

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<sup>21</sup> *A Clockwork Orange*, dir. Stanley Kubrick (Warner Bros., 1971).

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, pp. 233-4.

<sup>23</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> 'Biography', available at <http://www.charleslandry.com/index.php?l=biog>

Cultural resources are the raw materials of the city and its value base; its assets replacing coal, steel or gold. [...] Every crevice in the city had a hidden story of undiscovered potential that could be re-used for a positive urban purpose. [...] I thought of the city as having a personality and emotions, with feelings uplifted at one moment and depressed in the next. The city conceived of in this way was a living organism, not a machine.

The Creative City approach is based on the idea that culture as values, insight, a way of life and form of creative expression, represents the soil from within which creativity emerges and grows, and therefore provides the momentum for development.

Outsiders are important, but they are not a complete answer: it is also vital to harness endogenous intelligence, creativity and learning potential to motivate people and create local self-reliance and ownership. [...] Finding the right balance between insider and outsider knowledge is a key leadership task.<sup>26</sup>

I want to spell out some of the Arnoldian constants here. In this liquidation of the material in the cultural, creativity, it would seem to me, is comparable to curiosity. Landry writes as one of American Richard Florida's 'Creative Class', which is to say a congregation of aliens defined by cultural attitude rather than any burdensome social determination.<sup>27</sup> Special people remain the basis for renewal; Allen J. Scott boils down the cant, ' $X \rightarrow Y$ , where  $X$  is the creative class and  $Y$  is local economic development'.<sup>28</sup> An artistic 'way of life' still pits organicist metaphors of 'soils' and 'cultivation' against the machine to steal the dominant spirit of a 'living' city away from embodiments of industrialism. Implicit racialism also persists. Darwinian-capitalist, Landry's culture is 'the sum total of original solutions a group of human beings invest to adapt to their environment and circumstances'.<sup>29</sup> There are, it seems, coercive laws of culture. For all the Hoggart-like respect for the alien potential buried within each 'crevice' of the city and the

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Landry, *The Creative City: A toolkit for urban innovators* (London: Earthscan, 2000), pp. 8, 173, 112.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life* (New York: BasicBooks, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Allen J. Scott, 'Creative Cities: Conceptual issues and policy questions', *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 28 (2006), 1-17 (11).

<sup>29</sup> Charles Landry, 'London as a Creative City', in *The Creative Industries*, ed. John Hartley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 233-243 (243).

dash of 'cosmopolitanism' outsiders bring to middle-class experience, the self-appointed 'endogamous' leader marshals 'local' constituencies into capitalistic definitions of 'self-reliance' from a position-less inside-yet-outside position. In many ways, the Creative Industry professional is an alien with an AppleMac.

Urban change is a political happening. Compared with other Northern cities, Liverpool had always lacked a 'moderate' Labour Party because of a longstanding division between 'rough' unemployed and 'respectable' manual workers.<sup>30</sup> In the 1970s, Trotskyism gained purchase. In the 1984 rate-capping crisis, a Labour-led council, refusing to set a limited budget, severely misjudged the political will of a government that had just had five of its senior members assassinated by the IRA. Thus Thatcher in November: 'At one end of the spectrum are the terrorist gangs within our borders, and the terrorist states which finance and arm them. At the other are the Hard Left operating inside our system, conspiring to use union power and the apparatus of local government to break, defy and subvert the law'.<sup>31</sup> It was, however, the aggressive style of the Liverpool campaign and the city's Irish-Catholic associations that brought it national attention rather than the substance of their demands (this is why nobody talks about Lewisham Council). After half of Labour's councillors were stripped of office for wilful misconduct, the city budget was subjected to a root-and-branch government audit. Liverpool City Council has been effectively pro-capital and anti-citizen since.

The announcement that Liverpool would be European 'City of Culture' (or at least one of them) in 2008 crowned as well as accelerated changes. 'Nobody wants to be labelled the most deprived', one council spokesman admitted; the 'capital of culture is about changing the perception of the city'.<sup>32</sup> The claim only made a kind of sense if it was understood that the theatricalisation of cities is an exercise in dissociating premium space from actually deprived people. This was the first principle of Liverpool's marketing strategy because, Lane laments, 'it is seen as a city of problems where the people themselves are reckoned to be part of the problem'.<sup>33</sup> The culture of the Capital of Culture belonged to the propertied. There was jubilation in some areas when house prices rose by 10 per cent within a

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<sup>30</sup> This is a theme throughout Lane's *Liverpool*.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Thatcher, 'Why Democracy will Last', speech to the Carlton Club, London, 26 November 1984.

<sup>32</sup> Sara Gaines, 'Liverpool is England's most deprived district', *Guardian*, 30 April 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Lane, *Liverpool*, p. xiii.



week of the announcement. Neoliberal regeneration has created poorly paid, low-skilled short-term jobs in leisure, retail and ‘hospitality’ in lieu of more sustained investment. Zero-tolerance fines on ‘civil disobedience’—like skateboarding (£1000)—police the public into chain-store consumption. Social inclusion has been reduced to maximising participation in ephemeral public events, like firework displays. According to one councillor, the attraction of ongoing plans to privatise 35 city centre streets is that it would let the private sector ‘control and exclude the riff-raff element’.<sup>34</sup> Similar assumptions broker industrial regeneration. Invoking Adam Smith, Charles Cohen attributes the re-opening of the Halewood Ford plant to a re-education: workers have learned that ‘faults are their failures, and no one else’s. They’ve learnt to love the division of labour again, and it works’.<sup>35</sup>

Liverpool is curiously twinned with East London. In 1981, Michael Heseltine toured scenes of Liverpool riots with thirty top development financiers in a bus; the Merseyside Development Corporation (MDC) was established later that year alongside a sister project, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC). The latter defined the turn to neoliberalism in Britain; the 1980s ‘gave the term “docklands” a new meaning. It suggested a world created by the enterprise culture, the era of the “yuppie”, and the eastward extension of London’s financial core’.<sup>36</sup> Rotherhithe, within the LDDC’s Southbank jurisdiction, was suburbanised into an area of ‘waterfront living’, and today the neighbourhood boasts a patchwork of small-scale ‘creative’ businesses. For neoliberal urban developers, working-class people were either not people or did not exist; an LDDC’s Corporate Plan from 1982 alarmed campaigners representing the 40,000 people who already lived in the Docklands by stating that the ‘first priority’ was ‘repopulation’.<sup>37</sup> After sinking an obscene proportion of the State’s urban renewal budget (35 per cent in 1990), Britain’s corporate white elephant even failed to exploit the public interest efficiently; developers Olympia and York went bust in 1992.

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<sup>34</sup> Jones & Wilks-Heeg, ‘Capitalising Culture’, 356, 349-50.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Cohen, *Corporate Vices: What’s gone wrong with business?* (Oxford: Capstone, 2002), p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> John Barnes, Bob Colenutt and Patrick Malone, ‘London: Docklands and the State’, *City, Capital and Water*, ed. Patrick Malone (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 15-36 (p. 15).

<sup>37</sup> LDDC, *The Corporate Plan* (London: LDDC, 1982), pp. 4-5; Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo, *Selling Places: The city as cultural capital, past and present* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1993), p. 159.

Thamesmead, like Speke and Halewood, was left to the boosterism of the Conservative's 'Right to Buy' policy. In 1980, Heseltine forced local authorities to offer council homes for sale to tenants at massively discounted prices. Mortgages, in many cases, cost less than rents. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), David Harvey reminds how the manoeuvre 'satisfied traditional ideals of individual property ownership as a working-class dream, and introduced a new, and often speculative, dynamism into the housing market that was much appreciated by the middle classes'.<sup>38</sup> Thamesmead was subject to the first transfer of responsibility for housing from the public to the private sector. 'Thamesmead Town' sounded like a football club but it was a private, non-profit convenience for the mediation of private profit. It was formed after the government, spurred by its success over Liverpool, abolished the Left-led GLC in 1986. In 'The Right to the City' (2008), Harvey rightly concluded that the 'lasting effect of Margaret Thatcher's privatization of social housing in Britain has been to create a rent and price structure throughout metropolitan London that precludes lower-income and even middle-class people from access to accommodation anywhere near the urban centre'.<sup>39</sup> Diversity of political stance accompanying ghettoisation by income gave rise to the misleading impression that the 'man of system' once derided by Adam Smith had finally given way to his preference, an autonomous social organisation wherein 'every single piece has a principle of motion of its own'.<sup>40</sup>

This neoliberal story is told by the stage of *Beautiful Thing*. The audience hears 'It's Getting Better' by American singer Mama Cass before the lights go up on a set depicting a walkway in front of three Thamesmead flats. The song, taken from the album *Bubblegum, Lemonade, and... Something for Mama* (1969), primes a scene of poverty through the ideological lens of American 'sunshine pop' (music primarily associated with the Beach Boys). 'What can sunshine pop hope to prove in this evil, angry world?' Chris Davidson asks; 'Sunshine pop—the effervescent song of rampant happiness. A thousand hummingbirds grooving to newly discovered nectar. The virginal essence of pop, wispy and white and skimmed off a cool vanilla handshake to be infused with gleeful melody'.<sup>41</sup> Sunshine pop

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<sup>38</sup> Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> David Harvey, 'The Right to the City', *NLR*, 2/53 (2008), 23-42 (36).

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, p. 234.

<sup>41</sup> Chris Davidson, 'Sunshine Pop', in *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth*, eds. Kim Cooper and David Smay (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), p. 190.

transmuted the pain of difference into commodified alien delirium. In hindsight, Harvey's use of 'It's Getting Better' chimed with New Labour's adoption of D:ream's 'Things Can Only Get Better' for the 1997 General Election campaign. Integral to both is the coaxing promise of modest yet near-certain improvement through individual wish-fulfilment rather than collective endeavour. The number of children in poverty tripled between 1979 and 1997, reaching 4.5 million, or one in three; 9.5 million adults, one-quarter, lived below half the mean income after housing costs.<sup>42</sup> New Labour committed itself to eradicating child poverty within 20 years, defying, in Blair's words, 'the frustration, the impatience, the urgency, the anger at the waste of lives unfulfilled, hopes never achieved, dreams never realised'.<sup>43</sup> *Beautiful Thing's* sunshine pop invited the audience to read the stage for signs that life on the British estate was indeed getting better. According to the playnotes, sixteen-year-old Ste lives in a 'Quite run-down' flat to the left with his father Ronnie and older brother Trevor; both are abusive, alcoholic and unemployed boors. To the right, Leah lives in a 'pretty nondescript' flat with a 'child's rusty bicycle' leaning outside; we soon learn that her mother, Rosie, is a sex worker who blames 'The System' (p. 8). The flat fifteen-year-old Jamie shares with his mother Sandra is (again, playnotes) a 'rose between two thorns' displaying all the recognisable signs of house-proud ownership; there are neat net curtains, tendered hanging baskets, the door is freshly painted. In this radical-conservative frieze, progress lay in the comforts of the centre away from any excusing talk of 'System' or left paralysis.

Wandor's argument, that *Beautiful Thing* celebrates 'public space over the private', reads as if Jamie's bedroom is not onstage.<sup>44</sup> The bedroom, the private space of consumption interior to the middle flat, is 'represented by a single bed and bedside light' throughout. There are three commodity-purchases, and two—a copy of *Hello!* magazine and a 'small Body Shop bottle'—are visible from the start. *Hello!* was launched in 1988 as part of the rapid expansion in lifestyle journalism; it produced the stilted 'private lives' of celebrities and lesser European royalty for an aspirant consumer market. *Beautiful Thing* was tapping territory usually reserved for marketers, and precisely so. 'Where *HELLO!* readers do score well', Sally

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<sup>42</sup> David Piachaud and Holly Sutherland, 'Child Poverty in Britain and the New Labour Government', *Journal of Social Policy*, 30 (2001), 95-118 (95).

<sup>43</sup> 'Tony Blair's Speech in Full', *Guardian*, 28 September 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Michelene Wandor, *Post-war British Drama: Looking back in gender* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 236.

Cartwright prattled, 'is in what they spend on themselves, which is critically important to our advertisers. They are, for instance very heavy users of perfumes and eau de toilettes. These indulgences are in keeping with the whole ethos of *HELLO!*'<sup>45</sup> In 1993, the Body Shop's image as a hub of social responsibility was exposed as a sham marketing strategy; nonetheless, it was still commonplace to hear the view that the firm was 'feminist', 'natural' and even 'anti-capitalist'.<sup>46</sup> In addition to these visible commodity-purchases, we are made aware that the middle flat has SkyTV. In this, the middle flat is something of a forerunner: as of 1993, Murdoch's private monopoly had so few subscribers opting out of the ethos of public-service broadcasting that it was still operating at a loss. Harvey did not underestimate the significance of these leisure items when he recalled the enthusiasm of an unnamed BBC executive: 'I just thought it was amazing', the playwright was told; 'Here you have a woman who lives on a council estate and yet actually shops at the Body Shop'. Vindication enough for Harvey. 'That such a detail could make a play amazing I find incredible. That such a fact could in itself be amazing I found even more so. I took heart, maybe *Beautiful Thing* could lay some widely held misconceptions to rest'.<sup>47</sup> The determinants were not American in a direct sense, though the umbrella of American sunshine pop did gesture towards the land of consumerist liberation. *Beautiful Thing* shares something of the pseudo-democracy of *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975), where drinking coke is cosmic parity with Elizabeth Taylor and the President of the United States.<sup>48</sup>

Stipulating an Irish accent for Ste's father Ronnie invited the audience to read the urban setting through racialised class difference. Heard but not seen, Ronnie is given four lines, each one offensive. First- and second-generation Irish constitute the largest ethnic minority in Britain. Historically the Empire's internal Other, the Irishman in England is typed as primitive, alcoholic, indolent, illiterate, brainless and politically leftist, if not terroristic. As Eagleton remarked, the politics of mid-nineteenth-century Britain was such that '*Culture and Anarchy* might well have

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<sup>45</sup> Sally Cartwright, 'The World of *HELLO!*', *Serials*, 11 (1998), 142-46 (144).

<sup>46</sup> See Jon Entine, 'Shattered Image: Is the Body Shop too good to be true?', *Business Ethics*, 8 (1994), 23-28.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Harvey, 'Commentary', in *Gay Plays 5*, ed. Michael Wilcox (London: Methuen, 1994), p. 210.

<sup>48</sup> Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), pp. 100-1.

been rewritten as *Britain and Ireland*.<sup>49</sup> Early in the play, Leah stands on her bike to peer at Ste, muddy and naked after football, through the end flat's bathroom window:

JAMIE                    Can you see anything?  
LEAH                    Yeah  
RONNIE (*off*)        What the fuck?!  
LEAH                    Ooh, sorry, mate!

*Laughing her head off, and trying to get down from the tricycle, she goes flying.*

RONNIE (*off*)        Y' dirty slot!  
LEAH                    It's his dad! Takin' a dump!  
RONNIE (*off*)        Y' dirty slot!  
JAMIE                    Oh no!

*SANDRA comes out, dressed for work. She is buttoning up a light jacket as she speaks. (pp. 10-11.)*

Leah mediates the spectacle of a raced underclass. As our 'eyes', the audience experiences the overturned expectation (showering stud becomes squatting Irishman) as the uproarious victory of youth over an abusive boor. The contrast is Sandra, who leaves the middle flat beaming with the Protestant work ethic.<sup>50</sup> There are, as Leah points out, no 'women to lib', or liberate, in the end flat (p. 34), which is to say that, discursively speaking, a den of inveterate males is deaf to Giddens's reflexive modernity and the Third Way's manifesto of social renewal through female self-realisation. (A sarcastic Jamie confronts Ste at the beginning of Act 2: 'things getting better then, are they? Life a bowl o'cherries in the end flat?' (p. 48)). Ronnie is next heard and not seen after Ste takes refuge at Sandra's for the second time. Act 1 Scene 2:

SANDRA                His bloody family. Wait up. I gotta do somin'.

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<sup>49</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Nationalism, Irony and Commitment', in Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 23-42 (p. 33).

<sup>50</sup> 'I had a very strict church upbringing [...]. Church of England. I was expected to go to church every week and I went until I was eighteen'. Jonathan Harvey, 'Baby Talk', interview with Robin Hooper.

*She goes to STE's door and bangs on it. We hear STE's dad, RONNIE, shout from inside.*

SANDRA            Ronnie? Trevor? It's me, Sandra! (*To TONY [her ineffectual lover].*)

You go in, love.

*TONY gets up and goes indoors. SANDRA opens the letter-box and calls through.*

SANDRA            Your little Steven's round at our place tonight. I've every mind to report you! Ronnie? Ronnie, are you listening to me? This is Sandra here! I am NOT happy!

RONNIE (*off*)      Ah, fuck off, y'arl nacker!

SANDRA            This has got to stop!

*She lets the letter-box drop. She goes to go indoors. She stops at her plants and picks off a few dead leaves.*

You look parched love.

*She goes indoors. (p. 24.)*

Ste, second-generation Irish with a 'southeast London accent' (playnotes), is the alien shepherded from working-class violence to the sanctuary of a thoroughly English household. Sandra is the only character to express anger against Ste's 'bloody family' and, tending flowers, that criticism is directed from a 'moral', organic working-class way of life against an 'immoral' underclass of (the benefits) system. Harvey is 'glad about this decision to keep Ronnie off stage because the play becomes more of a celebration',<sup>51</sup> but the Irishman was still needed. A dismissible 'Welfare-dependency' left no alternative to consumerist working-class identities.

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<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Harvey, 'Commentary'.

The real coming-out of *Beautiful Thing* is Sandra's revelation that she and Jamie are to move from Thamesmead to Rotherhithe. In Act 2 Scene 4, Leah has been in a drug-induced fit for some time:

*They all watch as LEAH drinks. As she does, SANDRA speaks.*

SANDRA            There's a pub in Rotherhithe. The Anchor. The brewery  
   want me to be temporary licensee. (*They all, bar  
   LEAH, look to SANDRA.*) It's got a little beer garden,  
   and a piano. And you can watch the boats go up and  
   down on the Thames. And it's got a nice little flat  
   above it. Room for a family. (p. 76.)

This scene-stealer trumps Jamie's earlier coming-out because, in this instance, the audience has no prior knowledge; 'Why didn't you tell me?' the son demands of his mother, 'You coulda told me before'. (p. 76.) The Anchor is nostalgic for a cohesive, even Liverpudlian way of life in name, setting, view and style. In a sense, it righted the Merseyside of Harvey's upbringing; 'A full two-thirds of the dock system lay silent and inert', Lane laments, 'and the ferries no longer needed to weave in and out of river traffic and dodge the stern of a ship swinging to the tide'.<sup>52</sup> But for all the quaint imagery of The Anchor, anyone familiar with London's geography knows that to 'watch the boats go up and down the Thames' from Rotherhithe is to take in publicity-shot views of the Isle of Dogs. The play knows this. In Act 1 Scene 2, Jamie '*Looks out to Canary Wharf*' as he tells Tony about his mother's abusive ex-lovers (p. 20). Even if a production decides not to represent Canary Wharf as a literal beacon in the night, the function of the reference is inexplicable if it is not to stir within the actor the same symbolic charge of yearning and hope as the rainbow in the opening daylight scene. In *Beautiful Thing*, the totem of neoliberal Britain is a symbol of defiance against homophobia and domestic violence.

The impression that everything just happens to work out beautifully is an ideological effect. The progression of the stagenotes is indicative. 'It's Getting Better' '*fades*' into the opening scene with Leah, the Cass-fanatic, onstage. Cass's

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<sup>52</sup> Lane, *Liverpool*, p. 126.

'California Earthquake' *'leads us'* into Act 1 Scene 4. The fifth scene ends with 'Sixteen Going on Seventeen' from *The Sound of Music* when we know Sandra left to watch the film ('It's on Sky, Jamie!' (p. 42)). At the end of Act 2 Scene 1, Cass's 'I Can Dream a Dream, Can't I?' *'gets louder'* from Leah's flat, *'linking to the next scene'* (p. 58). 'Make Your Own Kind of Music' *'links us'* into the fourth (p. 64). For the final curtain, Jamie and Ste, Sandra and Leah dance to 'Dream a Little Dream of Me' by The Mamas and the Papas when—

*The music turns up of its own accord, blasting out. A glitterball spins over the stage, casting millions of dance hall lights.* (p. 86.)

Fantasy is gradually disembedded from the play's social realism by the agency of commodity-music. Until the end, the music is diegetic in the sense that it has been the result of human actions (Leah listens to Mama Cass) but not executed as part of a human design (the music is turned on or up at 'profound' moments). The narrative closes when commodified forms become fully autonomous of human intention—*'The music turns [on and] up of its own accord'*—to assume a physical manifestation. Resolution is the knowledge that a market-based agency has been looking down benevolently over events all along. The two institutions fused in the glitter-ball are the gay pub the characters are going to, The Gloucester, and the working-class dance hall commercial gay subculture is pitched as a natural extension of. This is all possible because, at the last minute, Sandra drops her plans for a 'girls night out' with the colleagues she is leaving for The Anchor. If the play has a motto, then it is Leah's attitude to the San Andreas Fault (inspired by 'California Earthquake'): 'You should look where you're going. Or move house. No use moaning about it in books' (p. 30). Transliterated, contradictions within the mode of production, a 'geology' here to stay, are 'solved' by self-determined urban mobility. If the fairy godmother of Harvey's urban tale was the invisible hand of theatricalised urban politics, then the question we need to ask now is how and why 90s theatre was so conducive to the spectacle in the first place.

## POSTWAR BRITISH THEATRE

The triangulation of State, culture and education in postwar theatre can be traced to meetings held in September 1939. The resulting Council for the Encouragement of the Arts (CEMA) organised exhibitions in disconnected villages and theatre company tours of industrial areas like the Welsh Valleys and Tyneside



to boost the war effort. On John Maynard Keynes's appointment as Chairman in 1942, culture was dropped as an emergency-service. Instead, preparations were made for a 'top-down' postwar cultural policy. That victory was far from certain highlights the use of Culture as a domestic weapon—the chief threat to Keynes's Bloomsbury was not National Socialism but shifting class relations within Britain. After the war, the cumbersome 'CEMA' was discarded for the majesty of the Arts Council of Great Britain, and a royal charter duly followed.<sup>53</sup> The Council has been a long class war waged through Culture to erase the memory that Covent Garden had been a Mecca dance hall during wartime. Keynes could only bring himself to refer to the incursion as 'other purposes' when he outlined 'The Arts Council: Its policy and hopes' (1946) in *The Listener*. The Council had come together in a 'very English, informal, unostentatious way', he declared, so as not 'to socialize this side of social endeavour'. The anxiety of the paradox—unsocialised sociality—was that Culture would lose its elitist edge if it became an NHS of the best that has been thought and said. Education was mobilised. Establishing 'provincial' theatres would, like the Arnoldian grammar, widen a pool of talent: 'New work will spring up more abundantly in unexpected quarters and in unforeseen shapes'. It was a mass alien-spotting exercise to sharpen the imperial apex, London, 'a great artistic metropolis, a place to visit and wonder at'.<sup>54</sup> Thereby a hegemonic national framework implanted submissive aspirations, identified talent and siphoned the cream to the metropole. Emphases change, but the Arts Council treads this quasi-independent triangulation between bourgeois government finance, aristocratic consent and middle-class patricianism to this day.

The first decade of the postwar era ensured that the amateurism, tours and regionalism of CEMA were inverted into the professionalism, permanent residences and London-centrism of the Arts Council.<sup>55</sup> The nation's beacon for drama, the English [not British] Stage Company (ESC), was established in 1956. The subculture that coalesced there perceived itself as an educational institution. For manager George Devine, it was 'a sort of school'; John Osborne said of its intensity that it 'made you feel that term had started'; the actress Joan Plowright believed she was 'getting a very broad education'; playwright Nicholas Wright declared, 'When I have to fill out a form, and it says "Where educated?" I always think I

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<sup>53</sup> F.M. Levanthal, "'The Best for the Most': CEMA and State sponsorship of the arts in wartime, 1939-1945', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1 (1990), 289-317.

<sup>54</sup> John Maynard Keynes, 'The Arts Council: Its policy and hopes', *The Listener*, 12 July 1945.

<sup>55</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and all That*, p. 41.

ought to put down, “Royal Court”); Richard Burton lectured seven hundred London schoolchildren in a ‘reaching out’ project—‘I love to eat chocolates when I’m in the audience [...] but I take it as a favour if the audience doesn’t when I’m on stage’.<sup>56</sup> The openness of this quasi-educational institution was its condescension, and, at times, outright loathing for (as Devine once put it) ‘the same old pack of cunts, fashionable arseholes’.<sup>57</sup> In this, the Royal Court was part of a wider theatrical attitude. At the National Theatre, Peter Hall (educated at Leavis’s grammar, Perse) argued that quality ought be realised by theatre so heavily subsidised that drama played to nobody: ‘Oh for empty seats!’, he cried.<sup>58</sup>

*Look Back in Anger* was the third play to run at a new theatre that was going to attach cult status to one of its plays sooner or later as a projection of converging social affiliations. *Anger* was not the cry of a ‘solo dash [...] fuelled by a reckless frenzy’ as Osborne had his devotees understand his writing.<sup>59</sup> Rather, the play was the focal point of a dissident middle-class fraction rooted in subsidised grammar school education that recognised itself in subsidised theatre, but—and this is the crucial point—*not* as subsidised, tutored or educated. Disciples conceptualised the theatre as an education as if they had not received the one that had primed them to it. The rationalisation was the Leavisian principle of ‘life’ then dominant within the postwar school humanities. ‘I want’, pedagogue Osborne declared in 1957, ‘to make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling’.<sup>60</sup> So when Jimmy Porter appealed to ‘something strong, something simple, something English’,<sup>61</sup> he was appealing to the constructions of Englishness lionised by the very name of the ESC and the arrangements of Keynes’s ‘very English’ Arts Council.

It was politics, rather than any cryptic notion of artistic excellence, that dictated what cultural production was patronised by the State and what was left to fail. Thus the plight of the Theatre Workshop. The company had passed through a number of incarnations since beginning as an open-air agitprop group, the Red

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>57</sup> Recalled by John Osborne, cit. Rebellato, *1956 and all That*, p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Brook, ‘Oh For Empty Seats!’, in *New Theatre Voices of the Fifties and Sixties: Selections from Encore magazine, 1956-1963*, eds. Charles Marowitz, Tom Milne and Owen Hale (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), pp. 68-74.

<sup>59</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and all That*, p. 76.

<sup>60</sup> John Osborne, ‘They Call It Cricket’, in *Declaration*, ed. Tom Maschler (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957), pp. 61-84 (p. 65).

<sup>61</sup> John Osborne, *Look Back In Anger* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 18.

Megaphones, in Platt Fields Park, Manchester, in 1931. As the Theatre of Action, its manifesto held that the working class was ‘debarred from expression in the present-day theatre’.<sup>62</sup> Confirmation was 1948, the year Covent Garden took a quarter of the Arts Council’s budget and the Theatre Workshop received nothing. Faced with spiralling touring costs, the company settled in Stratford East in 1956 to stimulate East End radicalism against Oswald Mosley’s resurgent Union Movement in nearby Bow and Bethnal Green. From 1958 to 1963, the Theatre Workshop was bled dry by the Arts Council in relation to the Royal Court to the tune of £9000 to £46,500, despite the introduction of cutting-edge European material, acclaimed interpretations of classics and spectacular home-grown premieres, notably Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey* (1958).<sup>63</sup> Manager Joan Littlewood knew that the Council ‘would have liked to see Theatre Workshop in hell since it challenged all the standards they held high’.<sup>64</sup> Political divisions were those of an educational afterworld: ‘Stratford East’, David Edgar realises, ‘was the secondary modern to Sloane Square’s grammar school’.<sup>65</sup>

For all that friction, the ‘social problem plays’ of the period were creatures of Welfare-capitalism. Keynes was, of course, also the architect of international postwar economics and, by proxy, the political consensus that lent itself to it. The welcome advance of Keynesian economics was the blasting apart of closed neo-classical models of exchange; by appreciating the destabilising effects of repeated commodity-circuits, the concept of time was back on the agenda. The failure of Keynesianism, though, lay in its origins as an attempt to stabilise capitalism at a time, the 1930s, when its faults were hair-raisingly obvious. Keynesianism could not extend beyond the myopic immediacy of crisis-management; realities of boom and bust slid into euphemistic trade cycles and, with theory rationalising practice, the logical casualty of short-termism was any lengthier socialist perspective. In *Out on Stage* (1999), Alan Sinfield outlines the homology of economic, political and dramatic form. The demand-management State intervened against an identifiable wrong, assuaged imbalance and fostered improved circumstances within Consensus. The hope, at times firm, at times desperate, was that under-

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<sup>62</sup> Howard Gourney, *The Theatre Workshop Story* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since the War* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 63; *Beautiful Thing* is often compared to Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey* (London: Methuen, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Robert Leach, *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the making of modern British theatre* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), pp. 113-9.

<sup>65</sup> David Edgar, ‘Stalking Out’, *London Review of Books*, 20 July 2006.

consumption and under-representation could be juggled without any fundamental change of system.<sup>66</sup> The social problem play's consonance with Keynesianism meant that it, too, was unable to conduct any searching economic and political analysis of the impossibilities of capitalism. Jimmy Porter's diagnosis of the 50s Britain (there are no 'good causes' left) begged a question: what were the Angry Young Men actually angry *about*? Metacultural, anger was the expression of another absent centre. Blanket hostility was the gravitational pull of an up-and-coming grammar-school base keen to declare its hand against a diffuse Tory-Labour 'Establishment' in equally *cultural* rather than pointedly *political* terms. As compromise-formations, Keynesianism stoked inflationary pressures in the economy whilst the social problem play was susceptible to hot air.

Raised to the status of official social problem by the Wolfenden Commission, homosexuality coloured the ambience of Royal Court subculture from the outset. Theatre hosted dissident sexual identities, but during the post-Wilde, interwar period it could only be said that a sexual subculture was dominant in British drama on the understanding that it was contained as an 'open secret'. Fizzing double entendre—in for example, the plays of Noël Coward—sustained a clique as just one of theatre's multiple audiences. There was a certain licence for this: the personification of the State, the Lord Chamberlain, was not the censor of sexuality in this reckoning but, rather, one of the determinants of a specific production of it. In response, a perturbed Royal Court met sexual subtext with forthrightness intelligible in every aspect of its drama. That included, Rebellato notes, the internal deployment of glass that meant the stage was always visible from the bar. The message? The ESC is about what goes on *onstage* not *off*.<sup>67</sup> The complexity of the class situation was indicated by socialist playwright Mark Ravenhill's sardonic defence of the privileged upper-middle class on account of gender and sexuality: 1956, he wrote, was the moment the 'straight boys arrived to sort everything out'.<sup>68</sup> Sinfield's is the supple reading. A strident new form of middle-class dissidence was responding to a theatrical sensibility comprised of indivisibly homosexual and leisure-class motifs. Anxiety had to be continually worked over

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<sup>66</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Out On Stage: Lesbian and gay theatre in the twentieth century* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 238.

<sup>67</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and all That*, pp. 190, 216.

<sup>68</sup> Mark Ravenhill, 'Looking back warily at a British heterosexual classic', *New York Times*, 17 October 1999.

because the institutional associations lingered. ‘That voice that cries out’, Jimmy Porter asked, ‘doesn’t *have* to be a weakling’s, does it?’<sup>69</sup>

After the cessation of formal censorship in 1968, an increase in submissions and a speeding up of production time led to an explosion of ‘fringe’ venues in the more affordable outskirts of central London. Where there were half a dozen or so at the beginning of the 1970s, there were around one hundred by the decade’s close. The boom owed to an educational afterworld where the State-selected middle classes, coming of age, constituted a educated market for dissidence. As Sinfield explains, this was the emergence of audience profiles whereby plays ‘that were designed to disconcert them will reassure them and confirm their possession of cultural capital’.<sup>70</sup> Increasingly, Culture was marketed proleptically as ‘controversial’. The appeal to the ‘ground-breaking’ spoke to the scholarship-winner’s self-understanding as a ceiling-busting trajectory *and* a disinterested ascension into a cultured way of things. The fringe Bush Theatre opened above a pub in Shepherd’s Bush in 1972 to showcase new writing, though eyes were firmly set on the mainstream. In the prescriptive words of artistic director David Hughes in 1976, ‘you can’t remain constantly a fringe theatre. Everyone’s ambition should be to make fringe theatre the mainstream theatre, in the sense of making what was unorthodox a couple of years ago what everyone wants to see today’.<sup>71</sup>

Hughes’s words need contextualising within the crisis of crisis-management that precipitated the neoliberal turn. Arts Council literature is a sound barometer. Publications entitled *The New Pattern of Patronage*, *The Arts and Public Patronage*, *The Priorities of Patronage* and *Partners in Patronage* became working papers called (desperately) *Keeping the Show on the Road* and (as pure political theatrics) *An Urban Renaissance: The case for increased private and public sector co-operation*.<sup>72</sup> Decrying the ‘consistent intellectual Poujadism’ of Thatcher’s

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<sup>69</sup> Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, pp. 100-1, 260-4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>71</sup> Malcolm Hay, ‘Showcasing the Fringe’, in *Dreams and Deconstruction: Alternative theatre in Britain*, ed. Sandy Craig (Ambergate: Amber Lane, 1980), pp. 153-64 (pp. 159-60).

<sup>72</sup> Arts Council, *The New Pattern of Patronage* (London: Arts Council, 1958); William Emrys Williams, *The Arts and Public Patronage* (London, Arts Council, 1958); Arts Council, *Partners in Patronage* (London: Arts Council, 1960); G. Devlin, *Keeping the Show on the Road: A report into some aspects of middle- and small-scale drama touring in England* (London: Arts Council, 1985); Arts Council, *An Urban Renaissance: The case for increased private and public sector co-operation* (London: Arts Council, 1986).

government, Hoggart spoke of his ‘manipulated departure’ from the vice chair of the Arts Council; ‘it was a political decision’, he complained, ‘a response to what was felt to be the wish of “No. 10”, and broke 30-odd years of useful precedent’.<sup>73</sup> Without minimising the weight of this breathtaking sea change in *ethos* from Keynesian patricianism to hardnosed neoliberalism, the transition was enabled by and moved through pre-existing economic, cultural and political *forces*. Both had circuits attuned to the episode of capitalist accumulation to which they were obliged. Common to Welfare-statist social management and ruthless bottom-line marketing strategies were cyclic patterns of emergence, controversy and mainstream incorporation that occluded questions pertaining to capitalist class relations. The result was an exacerbation of the uneven cultural development inherited from Keynesian Britain. Landry’s cultural asset assessment of London as a ‘Creative City’ in 2000 looked back over the 90s to showcase a ‘creative’ workforce of 680,000, a 47 per cent increase in the number of ‘Actors, stage managers, producers and directors’ and a 43 per cent rise in ‘authors, writers, journalists’, all contributing to 40 per cent of the UK’s total cultural infrastructure.<sup>74</sup>

Playwrights and their plays are determined by these conditions. ‘Jonathan Harvey comes from Liverpool and now lives in London’ is how the author-note to *Beautiful Thing* pithily expresses the urban politics of the educational afterworld.<sup>75</sup> It is characteristic of Harvey to account for sexuality as a predisposition to theatricality by inscribing their indivisibility within a Liverpoolian landscape. Take the following instance:

most lads in my street were discovering the delights of Anfield and Goodison Park and kicking a ball about up the back alley, dreaming they were Kevin Keegan. I, on the other hand, had discovered the delights of the Liverpool Record Library and was dancing round the living room to My Fair Lady, dreaming I was Julie Andrews.<sup>76</sup>

The formative distinction is between public and local culture (for the many and the mass) and access-points to a universal commodity-culture of private pleasures

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<sup>73</sup> Richard Hoggart, ‘The gravy train runs amok’, *Observer*, 29 December 1987.

<sup>74</sup> Landry, ‘London as a Creative City’, p. 235.

<sup>75</sup> Jonathan Harvey, *Beautiful Thing: An urban fairytale* (London: Methuen, 1994)—all the page references for this play feature in the main text.

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Harvey, ‘Musicals’, *Independent on Sunday*, 3 October 1999.

(for the alien and the minority). Sexuality and gender follow cultural affiliations struck up by fully autonomous children in the absence of familial and educational socialisation. Cultural consumption is destiny because class is culture. Although his parents (a social worker and a nurse) had ‘middle-class jobs’ and he pursued a ‘middle-class job’ as a teacher, Harvey asserts that he comes from a ‘family of dockers, really’ because of the ‘tales’ they told.<sup>77</sup> Harvey was educated at the all-boys Liverpool Blue Coat School in nearby Wavertree, the city’s only grammar. Elsewhere, he briefly characterises that school as failed theatricality: ‘I went to the “Blue Coat School”. It was very strict and disciplinarian and tried very hard to be a private school’.<sup>78</sup> The pretentiousness here is exclusion from public-school status rather than selection over the Anfield-obsessed boys. In *Beautiful Thing*, Harvey wanted to ‘redress the imbalance’ he saw between his ‘personal experience’ and gay ‘role models’ of the 80s that drew on images of ‘public schoolboys punting through Cambridge in cricket whites’.<sup>79</sup> The redress, however, was limited to the appearances of role-model politics in an educational afterworld which assumed parity between State grammar and State comprehensive.

Harvey accounts for *Beautiful Thing* by the fact that he was ‘24 and desperate to get out of education’,<sup>80</sup> yet he was already moving within an educational shadow-world of scriptwriting competitions, productions and commissions structured by the same scholarship-winning behaviours of a grammar-school education. In 1987, Harvey won the National Girobank Young Writer of the Year Award for *The Cherry Blossom Tree* at the Liverpool Playhouse Studio (supported by the Arts Council). In passing, he describes his Redbrick university degree at Hull in Psychology and Education as an exposure to Hull Truck Theatre (funded by the Arts Council), rather than another distanced educational progression through another deprived estuary port. In 1988, he wrote *Mohair* for the Royal Court Young Writers Festival (Arts Council). In 1992, he won an attachment at the National Theatre Studio (Arts Council) for *Wildfire*, a Royal Court Theatre Upstairs production (Arts Council). He wrote *Beautiful Thing* in the summer holidays from his Thamesmead teaching job. He quit teaching to write full-time after the play transferred ‘successfully’ from the (fringe) Bush Theatre to

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<sup>77</sup> Andy Lavender, ‘You don’t have to be gay... Jonathan Harvey’, *Times*, 20 July 1995.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Baby Talk’, an interview with Robin Hooper, available at <http://www.beautiful-thing.com/baby.shtml>

<sup>79</sup> Harvey, ‘Commentary’.

<sup>80</sup> Harvey, ‘Commentary’.

(subsidised, Covent Garden) Donmar Warehouse to the West End (commercial mainstream) Duke of York's Theatre in 1994.

The play was the means by which Harvey cut his immediate ties with the comprehensive system he dramatised. A series of 'outings' had facilitated the move. Harvey had been formally educated out of his class by the grammar and the Redbrick, which is to say his 'breakthrough' play drew not so much on working-class life as the alien's experience of always moving beyond it. The mirrors are such that *Beautiful Thing* was how Harvey extricated himself from the position of educating the class he was educated out of. His follow-up plays edged further into the educational afterworld. *Babies* (1994) is about a gay Liverpoolian teacher working in a large Thamesmead comprehensive.<sup>81</sup> *Boom-Bang-A-Bang* (1995) was about a gay Eurovision party in Kentish Town.<sup>82</sup> There was an appetite within the educational afterworld of London theatre to consume apotheoses into its flock.

## BEAUTIFUL THINGS

Harvey's breakthrough was also a 'coming out' in the sense that his previous plays, written as part of educational initiatives, had been as bound by the strictures of Section 28 as his work as a teacher. 'My sexuality informs my work', he now claimed, 'and I think writing about it is as world-changing as going on a march with Clause 28 banners'. He believed that 'blithely breaking the law every night in front of scores of people, *Beautiful Thing* did more to discredit the age of consent legislation than any amount of hectoring'.<sup>83</sup> The play did no such thing. Jamie and Ste were characters under the age of consent played by actors over the age of consent, though even the reverse would make no difference; we do not as much see a kiss or hear a reference to one, nor any prosecutable sexual offence. Harvey had access to a world that never happens. In an online Q&A the playwright 'confirms' that 'Jamie and Ste have sex for the first time after the massage scene'.<sup>84</sup> The distortions are so serious that it is not too far-fetched to say that Harvey shared something of Mary Whitehouse's diagnostics of sin. Whitehouse had prosecuted

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<sup>81</sup> Jonathan Harvey, *Babies* (London: Methuen, 1994).

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Harvey, *Boom-Bang-A-Bang* (London: Bush Theatre, 1995).

<sup>83</sup> O'Mahoney, 'Double helping'.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathan Harvey, 'A Jonathan Harvey Q&A with Eric Pickles, available at <http://beautiful-thing.com/jhinterview.shtml>



Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980) for public indecency, though she eventually had to concede that there is a difference between simulated sex and rape.<sup>85</sup> For Harvey, dramatic possibilities were as concrete as prosecutable actions.

Commentators were quick to note that *Beautiful Thing* established gay identity as a social problem rather than a doomed psychic drama. Adam Mars Jones saw that 'the problem about their sexuality is not theirs but other people's'.<sup>86</sup> Milton Shulman's article for *The Evening Standard* unwittingly affirmed that. Shulman declaimed a 'Plague of Pink Plays' for making heterosexuals feel 'uncomfortable if not downright unwelcome' in the West End during late 1994.<sup>87</sup> Graham Holland wrote to the Duke of York's in his official capacity as a Conservative councillor for Thamesmead; he complained that advertising billed the 'sickening' production as a comedy. The Hollands were 'intimidated' by 'the sight of older men with younger lads' at the bar. Matching Harvey's misconceptions, Holland described the sight as 'illegal'.<sup>88</sup> In his brief comments about the play, Sinfield notes the distinction audiences were forced to make: by intimating 'homophobic cruelty within the school and the family', the play enlisted well-meaning homophobia that wanted to protect and thus manage non-heterosexual youth.<sup>89</sup> Harvey praised himself in this: who else, he asked, could 'unite *The Daily Telegraph* and Britain's gay press in a celebration of working class homosexuality'? *The Telegraph* had, indeed, described the play as 'euphoric',<sup>90</sup> though it was left to John Peter of *The Sunday Times* to spell out the common denominator between the delegates of general property rights and property rights within gay subculture. Celebrating another of Schulman's 'Plague Plays' (Kevin Elyot's *My Night with Reg* at the Royal Court) Peter welcomed the new 'maturity and understanding' of de-politicised subcultural work since the days of the Gay Sweatshop: 'Its presentation of love and lust, of pain and hope and tenacity', he declared, 'has nothing to do with either exhibitionism or self-pity. There is nobody to hate. The gay condition is part of the human condition'.<sup>91</sup> Class, it seems, only exists in the minds of those

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<sup>85</sup> See Richard Beacham, 'Brenton Invades Britain: The Romans in Britain controversy', *Theater*, 12 (1981), 34-37.

<sup>86</sup> Adam Mars Jones, 'Candyfloss for Converts', *Independent*, 13 June 1996.

<sup>87</sup> Milton Shulman, 'Stop the Plague of Pink Plays', *Evening Standard*, 30 September 1994.

<sup>88</sup> 'The Council calls foul play', *Evening Standard*, 24 November 1994.

<sup>89</sup> Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, p. 340.

<sup>90</sup> Lavender, 'You don't have to be gay'.

<sup>91</sup> John Peter, 'The love that dares speak', *Sunday Times*, 17 April 1994.

who hate, and they are hated for it. That *My Night with Reg* was a play for ‘adults only’ was Peter’s parting infantilisation of a left rightly deaf to his idealism.

Dromgoole’s praise for the preview night was symptomatic of the wider social and political attitudes the play worked back to its audience. *Beautiful Thing* represented ‘a wave of reaction to the miserablist tendency that had predominated for almost a decade before’. The meaning of ‘reaction’ was lost on Dromgoole. His sneery conclusion, that 80s dissident drama eked out ‘small plays’ concerned with ‘small subjects’—by which he meant ‘inane’ topics like ‘pensions’ and ‘signing on’—cast judgement over the ‘small subjects’ dependent on Welfare-ist arrangements. Instead, it was the ‘gay community, ethnic minorities and women’ that had ‘something genuine to complain about’,<sup>92</sup> as if none of these groups had an investment in a society with pensions or benefits. So-called ‘class miserablist territory’ was by default the preserve of the white, heterosexual working-class adult male and, decisively, we see not one throughout the whole of *Beautiful Thing*. The absence of the supposed killjoy licensed a ‘feel-good’ rather than ‘do-good’ atmosphere. Left-Leavisite first principles were pounded home. Political drama exhibited ‘fake pain’ while new drama ‘managed to move in from the edges to become the mainstream’, because it ‘knew enough about real pain not to need to fictify [sic] it’.<sup>93</sup> If *Beautiful Thing* was ‘an evening everyone could love’, then the left-conscious among the audience were non-people. Dromgoole expressed it as an uplifting theatrical experience that oozed urban politics. Instead of miserablism—

it was more as if some large hand took hold of the little black box the hundred or so people sat in, wrenched it out of the old Victorian building that surrounded it, took it out above London, above its theatrical and social context, and chucked it hard and high into the stars where it floated around for a couple of hours, exhilarated by the view.<sup>94</sup>

Something takes the audience on an upward movement that affords a downward gaze over a people-less cityscape; the ‘as if’ quality of the play and commentary on it was the aestheticisation of an educational afterworld into an urban fairytale. There was something disingenuous about Dromgoole’s position: he admitted to Alex Sierz that ‘the situation of new writing was so desperate that the only thing to

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<sup>92</sup> Dromgoole, ‘Dominic Dromgoole’, pp. 71-3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>94</sup> Dromgoole, ‘Dominic Dromgoole’, pp. 70-1.

do was celebrate diversity'.<sup>95</sup> That said, in Dromgoole's vision of ecstatic elevation, the smallness of the theatre stood in for the scene of poverty offered by the play and, sure enough, he is now artistic director at Shakespeare's Globe. The lesson to take from Harvey and Dromgoole is that the theatricalising subject theatricalises its object in order to move socially beyond it.

*Beautiful Thing* begins with deck-chaired Jamie and Leah sunbathing, 'looking out in front of them, up at the sky'. As truants, the unavoidable cultural reference was the Conservative Party's 'Back to Basics' campaign. The murder of toddler Jamie Bulger by two ten-year-old truants in Bootle, Liverpool, in February 1993 set in train a Tory bid to recapture the 'popular authoritarianism' Stuart Hall credited as the secret of Thatcher's victories. During the months Harvey wrote *Beautiful Thing*—July and August—the media was saturated with Home Secretary Michael Howard's vilification of 'evil' working-class children, single mothers and, by proxy, Merseyside. Frenzied promises were made to punish single mothers through the benefit system, force them and their children to live with 'grandparents', and introduce mandatory uniform for all children. Labour gave Howard free rein because the party seized the opportunity to dissociate itself from anything remotely perceivable as socialist or feminist argument.<sup>96</sup> (Adding insult to injury, the party devised their own rallying-call, 'Tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime' for the long 1997 General Election campaign.) By November 1993, the Conservative Party's 'Back to Basics' re-launch was severely misjudging public disbelief and a lack of political opposition as a mandate for more neo-Victorianism. There could be no easy return to Thatcher's rhetoric when consumerist identities produced by the 80s were validated alternatives to the traditional nuclear family in the 90s. Mainstream gay subculture offered one such lifestyle. Westminster's Conservative-controlled planning authority, for instance, had been responsible for the commercialisation of Soho.<sup>97</sup> 'Creative City' movers promoted the idea of village-like metropolitan pockets because, in Landry's junk discourse, that 'hive of activity creates the buzz, vibrancy and sub-cultures that makes London attractive and contributes to its standing as a world city economically, socially and culturally'.<sup>98</sup> A flash of deep neoconservatism provided

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<sup>95</sup> Alex Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British drama today* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), p. 37.

<sup>96</sup> See Angela McRobbie, 'Folk Devils Fight Back', *NLR*, 1/203 (1994), 107-16.

<sup>97</sup> Alan Collins, 'Sexual Dissidence, Enterprise and Assimilation: Bedfellows in urban regeneration', *Urban Studies*, 41 (2004), 1789-1806.

<sup>98</sup> Landry, 'London as a Creative City', p. 235.

the conditions for a neoliberal social problem play where the independent woman (single mother) and safe gay (truant) take their place at a radical-conservative table.

Jamie and Leah are literally looking up but, figuratively speaking, they are enacting social drama. 'In England', Perry Anderson observed, 'a supine bourgeoisie produced a subordinate proletariat. It handed on no impulse of liberation, no revolutionary values, no universal language'.<sup>99</sup> In *Beautiful Thing*, middle-class gazes are offered through the supine working-class alien. Jamie is confirmed as a class alien before he is confirmed as a sexual alien. He is playing truant because he is bullied. It is unclear why Leah is not at school but singing 'It's Getting Better', reading a geography textbook throughout Act 1 Scene 3, and talking about her efforts to find a welcoming school in Greenwich (pp. 29, 34) suggest that the teenager has been hounded out of school. The first line of the play, a mnemonic, is frustrated desire and capacity to learn: 'Richard of York Gave Battle in Vain'. The subcultural associations of rainbow, even 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow', are implicit. Parallel sighs to the rainbow indicate that, given the opportunity, they would ask the Wizard for a proper education:

JAMIE	I wish I was on home tuition.
LEAH	I wish I was at school. (p. 9.)

They mock their 'dago' foreign language teacher in correct Spanish (p. 10). The problem is the local State school and those in it.

Jamie and Ste are more conventional than the heterosexual teenage romance *Beautiful Thing* appropriated. Once the play couches education in terms of unobjectionable futures, gay identity is fed into the same logic. Jamie is a 'plain looking lad' who hates football, wears reading glasses and prefers the inestimably serious *Mastermind* (BBC, 1972-) to his mother's favourite quiz, *Bob's Full House*, a bingo-style game show where contestants, wearing their work uniforms, played for consumer goods and a cash prize (BBC1, 1984-90). The suggestion is that consumerist working-class aspirations produce and now sponsor intellectual hopes associated with the middle classes. 'Attractive in a scally way' (playnotes), Ste is a little older. Prowess on the football pitch, a place on the school relay team and admiration from Leah and Sarah confirm him as the play's stud figure. Rather

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<sup>99</sup> Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', 43.

than cockney slang, 'sally' is Liverpudlian, even Irish in origin: 'A young working-class person (esp. a man); spec. a roguish, self-assured male (esp. from Liverpool), typically regarded as boisterous, disruptive or irresponsible. Also: a chancer, a petty criminal' (*OED*). *Beautiful Thing* invites the safe slumming consumption of a sexualised 'look' decoupled from stereotyped consequences.

Ste's masculinity is a stolid commitment to modest future employment in sport. 'I'm gonna use me sport', he declares, 'when I'm older. Fancy workin' at the sports centre. So I gotta put the hours in, you know' (p. 7). Since the late-nineteenth century, models of masculinity have been inculcated through sport. Fair play within established rules and respect for infallible umpireship is the 'healthy competition' of proper manly conduct in capitalist societies. Sport is tied up with capital in regeneration schemes like Sports City in East Manchester (the legitimisation of the 2000 Commonwealth Games, the area has been colonised by professional flats) and the rejuvenation of East London trailed for the 2012 Olympics (where New Labour advertises the inequalities of British society to promote 'youth'). Gentrification has been sustained, in part, by the belief that compliant working classes can be liberated by tuning the working-class body and the working-class sense of self to the vaulting ambitions of the housing market. The agenda is respect. Ste is never going to lead Jamie's 'brainy' education astray if he has to be repeatedly told by Sandra that he may call her by her first name, or if he constantly worries that leaving beetroot on his plate will appear impolite. Mainstream sympathies are secured by locking the body into self-directed forms of education that assuage, if not supplant, the State. The privately educated are well placed to appreciate the meritocracy of 'letting the best man win'. Dromgoole, for instance, was educated at Millfield: motto *Molire Molendo*, 'to drive forward by grinding', the school specialises in sport with facilities that include two 18-hole golf courses and an Olympic-sized swimming-pool. The implicit target of *Beautiful Thing* is the 'bog-standard comprehensive', and the grammar- and public-schooled middle classes keeping the term of abuse in circulation are unlikely to object.

Sandra's disagreement with Ronnie hangs over Jamie and Ste's first bedroom scene, where the clunkiest double entendres anticipate a sexual act. Sandra jokes that the lads are not to put stains on the sheets; Tony asks, 'What sort?' (p. 24). Once in bed, Jamie asks Ste, "Ere, d'you wanna fork?" (p. 26). Oblivious to themselves, dialogue constructs the pair as more innocent than the audience. Ironies are dramatic rather than subcultural, which is to say that the relation

between pre-1956 sexual subtext and mainstream audience is reversed. The rumblings of homosexuality that disquieted the Royal Court are neutralised (now the audience are 'in the know'). In the next bedroom scene, Ste gets half-naked to show Jamie the bruises dealt by Ronnie and Trevor. Aesthete Jamie has a palliative to hand:

JAMIE                    I got this stuff. It's me mum's. It's from the Body Shop.  
                                  Peppermint foot lotion. It soothes your feet. I use it  
                                  coz I like the smell. (*Pause.*) Lie down and I'll rub it  
                                  into your back. If you want. (p. 43.)

Ste defies his family's taunt that he is a 'wimp' before reiterating his determination to work at the sports centre. Once the lights are out, Jamie ignores Ste's question as to whether he thinks him 'queer' by asking whether he can 'touch' him. Ste says he is 'sore' and the scene is over (pp. 44-6). Fast-forward to Act 2 Scene 1, where the short exchange that reveals Jamie's 'happy' feelings for Ste follows an anecdote about coming out of a shop. Ste had to step over a 'geezer in the gutter' and realised that the man was his father, Ronnie—he carried on (p. 49). The alien goes shopping and, leaving the shop, he is confident enough to step over the class into which he is born (here, decisively, the *underclass*).

Cut to the last bedroom scene and the 'coming out' of *Gay Times*. The magazine had been 'closeted' under Jamie's pillow, but is now consumed in the same inconsequential manner as *Hello!* The only physical exchange between the pair is a hat Ste buys Jamie. In return, Jamie is going to give him 'somin' to say thank you' that he will 'never forget' that involves him lying on his back and closing his eyes. Rather than giving Ste a blow job, Jamie forges a sick note from Ronnie; Steven is 'feeling a little queer', and the scene ends with laughter (p. 64). Signposted from the start, the climax of the bedroom scenes is the deflation of sexual anticipation in double entendre. Throughout, male-male intimacy is the product of an emergency stand against 'The System' and its beneficiaries by a mother's hospitality and a seemingly incidental consumerism. We are never allowed to forget that 'love' snubs white working-class male 'miserablism'.

For grammar-school educated Wandor, the close of *Beautiful Thing* was a triumph; Jamie dancing with Ste and Sandra dancing with Leah meant that 'the conventional hetero-family is redundant—the heterosexual mother now free to find a sexuality outside the dictates of procreation'. The resolution 'for all four is

in coming-out, in same-sex relationships, sanctioned and participated in by Sandra the mother, literal and surrogate'.<sup>100</sup> How are we to judge this dismissal of the heteronormative? First, Wandor focusses on a 'Delaney-like mother', though 'Hoggart-like mother' would bring out the misogyny more. In *The Uses of Literacy*, the fate of working-class woman as the 'pivot of the home' was thus: 'It is evident that a working-class mother will age early, that at thirty, after having two or three children, she will have lost most of her sexual attraction; that between thirty-five and forty she rapidly becomes the shapeless figure the family know as "our mam"' (p. 46). Mother was symptomatic of the 'cruel cartoon' of working-class life: 'she has some of the working-class qualities I am now describing rather larger than life, as in a cartoon—their ability not to permit themselves to be altered, but to take or not to take, as they will and in their own way; their energy in insisting on a place for, and in enjoying, their traditional kinds of amusement and recreation even when circumstances seem unusually daunting' (p. 114). Further, the Mother was the locus of the scholarship boy's cosseted life: 'He now tends to be closer to the women of the house than to the men. This is true, even if his father is not the kind who dismisses books and reading as a "women's game". The boy spends a large part of his time at the physical centre of the home, where the women's spirit rules, quietly getting on with his work whilst his mother gets on with her jobs—the father not yet back from work or out for a drink with his mates. The man and boy's brothers are outside, in the world of men; the boy sits in the women's world' (p. 295). Wandor regards the mother-son dynamic of *Beautiful Thing* as unusual for postwar British drama, but whatever truth there is to that, as in the Hoggart, its form of presentation evokes an understanding of sexuality and education highly apposite to a mainstream audience in possession of high educational capital. They, too, are heavily invested in hierarchised cultural aetiologies of sexuality that privilege 'smotherhood' and bookworming over a 'doss culture' of boorish male heterosexuality. Prejudice need not be as 'essentialist' as many think.

This Hoggart-like mother performs the political dissociations the Labour Party was in the process of finalising. Tony is the only visible heterosexual male and the only visible middle-class person in the play. Far than a point of identification, the oddball stands in for the parodied 60s liberalism associated (if anything is in the play) with the ethos that commissioned Thamesmead. Living elsewhere, always arriving or just about to leave, Tony is the play's misfit, and his rejection is the rejection of middle-class qualms about familial consumerism. The ideological

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<sup>100</sup> Wandor, *Post-war British Drama*, p. 227.

spadework is achieved by the playnotes, which render Tony in far more detail than any other character. 'Middle class trying to rough up', he speaks 'with an irritating middle-class, trying to have street-cred, accent'. He is, in short, downward mobility. Twenty-seven, his only work has been six months in a factory. Jamie, if we remember, is allowed the aspiration of *Mastermind*, but one of the 'Brechtian' intrusions into the play's social realism is a beat that hammers home Tony's failure to rouse the others with an appreciation of the then defunct *University Challenge* (ITV, 1962-87). Jamie and Leah, constantly incredulous that Tony is interested in an older woman, lampoon the parallel between his downward class trajectory and his sexuality. The most painful tumbleweed moments, however, are reserved for politically charged offers of help in situations designated as the Mother's ideological purview. When Tony suggests that Sandra and Leah should stop taunting each other with misogynistic volleys, notions of solidarity are rendered ridiculous by overwrought flower power: 'Hey, remember feminism, yeah? Sisters together, sisters strong!' (p. 32). In this cartoon of working-class life, 'do-good' attitudes are framed as injunctions against a 'feel-good' game where antagonisms are the non-consequential materiel of a working-class sport, 'taking the Mick' (Irishness, again). It is as well as to say that it was offered as sport for the consumption of a mainstream audience, and the casualty is the play's repository of progressive attitudes.

Sandra's relationship with Tony clinches neoliberal Britain as the victory of capitalist survivalism over Welfare-ist touchy-feeliness. In Act 2 Scene 2, Tony, effeminised in Sandra's dressing gown, tenders over-the-shoulder help to the Mother as she completes the pub's staff rota. He suggests that all she wants in life is 'big bucks', but she only wants 'enough handbag to get a decent pair o'shoes'. The metonymy between money-commodity and commodity-purchase is delivered by a competent manager of labour time to the unemployed man (and if money blurs into commodities, then the reverse is also true; 'there is money in booze!'). Dramatic action vindicates Sandra. Tony picks up the five-pound note Sandra leaves him on the floor after he aired protestations against her charity (pp. 60-1). Sexual and financial dependence, then, confirm a fault of character rather than a social situation. Tensions come to a head in the long Act 2 Scene 4 when Tony insists that Sandra is 'fighting' her feelings after Jamie's coming-out:

SANDRA                    'Fighting? I've been fighting all my life. Kids pickin' on



'im—I was there. Council saying bollocks to benefit, I was there. When I had three pee in me purse and an empty fridge I went robbin' for that boy. And you talk to me about fighting? You! What have you ever had to fight for in your life?! (p. 70.)

Sandra gives Tony a lesson in feeling. The indictment moves through a 'life' that encompasses, in turn, a stand against homophobic bullying, rejection *by* the State, utter impoverishment, rejection *of* the State and being forced to break the law before arriving at the comparison between independent single mother and dependent, heterosexual middle-class male. The Darwinist mettle of the former is self-evident, whereas the latter cannot account for his existence. In *Beautiful Thing*, it is the Welfare State *not* the market that creates, rejects and humiliates the destitute. In *Beautiful Thing*, the State's persecution of the single mother *works* in the sense that it has not made a Rosie out of Sandra nor a Ronnie, Trevor or Tony out of Jamie. Compassion for a single mother's plight does not automatically lead to a rejection of neoliberal structures—Blair's regrettable piece for *The Daily Mail*, 'Why we should stop giving lone mothers council homes', testifies to that.<sup>101</sup> The difference is one of legitimation, not practice (the same penury is administered as a bitter pill 'for her own good'). Tony's standing deteriorates rapidly. His knowledge of drugs is useful when Leah trips on acid, but that wherewithal and his physical restraint of Sandra's aggressive interference is construed as evidence of drug addiction and his status as the latest in a long line of abusive sexual partners (pp. 70-4). He and an episode of British social, cultural and political history are brushed off.

It is easy to spot the gendered distinctions. Most commentators of the FilmFour adaptation (1996) compare—to take Ros Jennings's reading—the 'powerful and butch' Sandra (Linda Henry) and the effete 'liberal' Tony (Ben Daniels).<sup>102</sup> Yet observations like these fail to make the connections with neoliberal Britain. Late-twentieth-century Britain was a society that measured itself against the 'soft' liberal intentions of the 'nanny' State, 'wets' and 'Auntie'. The new watchword was 'tough'. In this, *Beautiful Thing* performed a classic neoliberal manoeuvre:

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<sup>101</sup> Tony Blair, 'Why we should stop giving lone mothers council homes', *Daily Mail*, 14 June 1999.

<sup>102</sup> Ros Jennings, 'Beautiful Thing: British queer cinema, positive marginality and the everyday', in *British Queer Cinema*, ed. Roger Griffiths (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 182-94 (p. 188); *Beautiful Thing*, dir. Hettie MacDonald (FilmFour, 1996).

first emasculate sections of the working classes as rent-seeking Neanderthals and type their middle-class allies as ineffectual bleeding hearts, then stoke the conflicts inherent within and between classes by offering the 'respectable' identifications with the muscularity of capital. The creation of the Department of Social Security (D[o]SS) out of the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) is a case in point. The meaning of 'doss' and 'dosser' changed during the 90s from sleep and sleeper to the conscious choice of a 'soft option' and the personage predisposed to it. In December 2001, the latter description appeared in the *OED* as a draft revision.

Now we are better placed to appraise Wandor's argument, where Leah's line 'I intend to find meself a nice dyke tonight, Sandra, coz I'm tellin' ya, I'm through with men' (p. 82) and their dance are read as the pair's 'coming out' in a 'same-sex relationship'. If so, it is quick and unconvincing work. Sandra is only persuaded to ditch her girl's night out by the prospect of a male stripper at The Gloucester, which is to say she is offered a visual rather than bodily consumption of men in keeping with the play's imperative to stick to her role as an independent, consumer-driven, asexual Mother. There was, of course, no traditional nuclear family onstage to reject in the first place. Tying the four principal characters to the freedoms of commercialised gay subculture stood in for the wider neoliberal happily-ever-after of Rotherhithe, a utopian urban space docked of some but not all of its neo-conservative sting.

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*Beautiful Thing* was an 'organic' educational afterworld packaged in the emotionalising tropes of selective and corporate education, postwar theatre and urban theatrics. 'Harvey's skill is to find the exuberant in the everyday, a glitter-ball in the drabest council flat', proclaimed *The Times*; the play is 'an unfakeably truthful portrait of adolescent self-discovery, showing sensitivity and fun pushing up like wild flowers through the concrete crevices of a Thamesmead estate,' raved the *Independent* (Landry's 'crevices' again).<sup>103</sup> This is the postmodern city where, as Timothy Brennan observes, 'resistance already exists', thus it is said that 'political work is an act of looking, discovering, uncovering and interpreting the

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<sup>103</sup> Tim Teenan, 'Coming out again', *Times*, 15 July 2006; Irving Wardle, 'Theatre', *Independent*, 3 April 1994.

dramas of subversion that take place, as it were, automatically in everyday life'.<sup>104</sup> Inequalities that structured subcultural and State-educated afterworlds were flattened out so that gay identity could be nominated as an overlooked candidate for neoliberal life. The play put to work a postwar history, constructing the audience as *consumers* of an easy abstracted utopia not as *producers* of a difficult utopian practice that challenges the thrust of uneven capitalist development.<sup>105</sup> *Beautiful Thing* succeeded because the Conservative Party struck a moralism that was the weaker fantasy. There were intimations (TV shows, in particular) that *Beautiful Thing* was set in the late 80s, though others suggested the 90s (SkyTV). The scenography of Thamesmead and the dynamics of the social problem play extended back without any serious historico-political interruption to the famous heatwaves of the 70s, the mass building programmes of the 60s and the living, breathing working-class landscape of Hoggart's city. The play created a sunnily seamless neoliberal Britain that, de-politicised, was without Thatcher or Major, beginning or end.

Perhaps a little heart may be taken from the way in which offence is defence. In response to the suggestion that his fairytale was a fantasy, Harvey insisted: 'I *believe* that these things *can* happen and *do* happen'.<sup>106</sup> The gesture towards ineluctable possibility articulated the absence and intellectual superiority of a progressive urban politics: *if* it can happen means that it *cannot* happen for all. We should make it happen. The paucity of Harvey's gloss lies in a reliance on selectivity traceable to the British education system. The implausibility of his work is that of an educational afterworld uncritically read through the Eleven Plus. You can take the kid out of the working class, but taking the grammar out of the scholarship-boy is harder. Self-awareness is key. If we look back to when the market theatricalised the narrative that only it could make things better and acknowledge that neoliberalism came out of a Welfare-ist closet, then it is incumbent on us to look beyond the poverty of both.

### GIMME GIMME GIMME

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<sup>104</sup> Brennan, *Wars of Position: The cultural politics of left and right* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2009), p. 160.

<sup>105</sup> This is also Bob Nowlan's conclusion in 'The Politics of Love in Three Recent US and UK Films of Young Gay Romance', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50 (2006), 141-84 (163).

<sup>106</sup> Jonathan Harvey, 'In the Eye of the Beholder', *Guardian*, 15 November 1996—emphasis added.

Filmed in front of a live studio audience, *Gimme Gimme Gimme* staged the paralysis of out-of-work gay actor Tom Farrell (James Dreyfus) and the jaw-droppingly hopeless Linda La Hughes (Kathy Burke) in the garish ground-floor flat of 69 Paradise Road, Kentish Town, London.<sup>107</sup> The twosome played off nymphomaniac newly-weds Jez (Brian Bovell) and Suze (Suze Goddard) from the basement flat, and the elderly prostitute-turned-dominatrix Beryl Merit (Rosalind Knight) who, as landlady of this twisted Eden, lived upstairs. Again, the city was an educational afterworld.

In postwar Britain, Kentish Town proved amenable to successive waves of urban ‘pioneers’, a term that precisely captures the arrogance of a middle-class sense of manifest destiny over working-class ‘wastes’. Joe Moran has written about the early cultures of gentrification. ‘Since many of the pioneers were members of the cultural professions—artists, writers, journalists, academics, publishers, architects, and advertising and television executives—gentrification was a media phenomenon as well as a sociological process’.<sup>108</sup> New metropolitan lifestyles were asserted through the new glossy weekend supplements. A superficial air of classlessness was the covenant between fellow gentrifiers, retaining local ‘colour’ to contrast and counter blunt financial power. The ‘gentry’ of gentrification makes sense here if we consider Nicholas Tomalin’s indictment of ‘conspicuous thrift’ as the manner of ‘a would-be aristocrat, seeking the appearance of plain living to create the impression of high thinking and anti-vulgarity’.<sup>109</sup> Hence the small-scale economy of junk and kudos in Camden and Portobello Road markets. *The Hedonist’s Guide to London* (2007) says it all: ‘The neighbourhoods of Holloway, Archway, Highbury, Stoke Newington and Kentish Town sit just north of Islington and Camden and are largely residential—rent is cheaper, horizons are rugged with industrial wastelands, and there are plentiful pockets of ethnicity—just the edge to attract a cool, creative crowd’.<sup>110</sup> In *Gimme Gimme Gimme*, the kitsch 70s interior life of the ground-floor flat is frozen in a phase of gentrification to the implicit congratulation of the new middle classes that, as its immediate

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<sup>107</sup> The scripts are published in Jonathan Harvey, *Gimme Gimme Gimme: The book* (London: Bantam, 2002)—all the references for the book feature in the main text.

<sup>108</sup> Joe Moran, ‘Early Cultures of Gentrification in London, 1955-1980’, *Journal of Urban History*, 34 (2007), 101-21 (102).

<sup>109</sup> Nicholas Tomalin, ‘Conspicuous Thrift’, in *Nicholas Tomalin Reporting* (London: André Deutsch, 1975), p. 253, cit. Moran, ‘Early Cultures of Gentrification’, 108.

<sup>110</sup> Fleur Britten, *A Hedonist’s Guide to London* (London: Filmer, 2008), p. 17.

outside, frame the sitcom. Beryl mediates as property owner. As a tasteless proprietress, she accommodates deposit-saving Jez (Eton-educated) and Suze, and Tom and Linda (who waste away nosily). Her unshockability shares the anti-moralism of early left-leaning pioneers, their eye for profit and detached relation to the renting working classes. Linda's orange hair, fluorescent cat suits and piled teenage ephemera are at home in the psychedelic flat as the freak anomaly that, through her illiterate exception, credits educated conspicuous thrift.

The status of *Gimme Gimme Gimme* as a 'shitcom' is undisputed, even within the text itself, and queer work, always interested in the failure of the performative, occasionally cites the show as an instance where failure is a discursive position challenging the heteronorm. Stephen Maddison refers to the programme as a 'heterosocial' text where women and gay men configure 'alternative models of gender relations that resist the dysphoria of homosociality'.<sup>111</sup> Linda and Tom are, however, profoundly miserable, dysfunctional stereotypes. For Deborah Thompson, the show is a radical politics that follows 'the fag hag's lead in validating an identifying with distinct from an identifying as—and indeed, in relishing the dialectic between identifying as and identifying with'.<sup>112</sup> Linda actually identifies herself as a victimised ginger minority and, in turn, with the black experience of slavery. She despises lesbians. Moreover, despite Thompson's avowal that her argument moves 'beyond the impasse of "positivist" identity politics', truth is summoned from somewhere to declare Linda a 'positive' fag hag. Borrowing from Kathleen Rowe's celebration of the 'unruly woman', Gilad Pavda's Linda is hated because she transgresses '(hetero)normative formulations of womanliness and effeminacy'.<sup>113</sup> Linda's detractors would be the first to agree that she is irredeemably disgusting; Pavda deploys evidence as a subjective reversal of a general attitude that—and this is the conservatism—leaves everything as it is. Andy Medhurst finds the whole show an 'all-purpose carnival delight of the low, the oozing, the smelly and the aroused' that offers 'some respite from the burdens of hierarchy to audiences stuck on low rungs'. The model of society as a ladder is assumed. Linda clearly occupies a special place in Medhurst's survey of English

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<sup>111</sup> Maddison, Stephen, 'All About Women: Pedro Almodóvar and the heterosocial dynamic', *Textual Practice*, 14 (2000), 265-84 (275).

<sup>112</sup> Deborah Thompson, 'Calling all Fag Hags! From identity politics to identification politics', *Social Semiotics*, 14 (2004), 37-48 (37, 41).

<sup>113</sup> Gilad Pavda, 'Unruly Womanliness, Gender Dysphoria, and Anita Faleli's Iconography', *Feminist Media Studies*, 6 (2006), 25-45 (25).

popular comedy, but even his reading admits that Tom does not escape the 'ideological knot' of 'effeminate homosexuality, depoliticised camp and glitzy frivolity' Sinfield criticises as the 'court jester' role delegated to explicitly homosexual men by the British mainstream.<sup>114</sup> Under pressure to demonstrate that people's sexuality and gender are representations, the tendency has been to treat characters in isolation, as people. Consequently, the social is lost.

Roberta Mock's desire to 'celebrate' the 'inherent' queerness of *Gimme Gimme Gimme* is a case in point. In Episode 7 of Series 2 ('Sofa Man', 18 February 2000), Linda asks Tom for advice about chatting up men. He assumes a stereotyped macho persona so that she can practice. It falls flat. But when Linda assumes the role of gruff builder Mick, they dance in a make-believe bar, touch each other up and edge towards their bedrooms. The episode (indeed the series) ends with Tom lunging back to snatch his forgotten drink, leaving the conclusion of the role-playing unknown (pp. 129-30). For Mock, what 'is made explicit is that identities based on the presentation of gender and subsequent sexual preferences are entirely matters of existential choice and subject to on-going negotiation'. That 'celebration', however, is sealed off from the episode's noted deficiencies, namely humour at the expense of Linda's 'unattractiveness' and 'laddish' behaviour. On the one hand, Linda is not normal, therefore queer; on the other, Linda is not normal, therefore licenses heteronormative jeering. The *deus ex machina* that stops the two poles clashing is personalism. Queerness, it is said, depends on the 'perspective of the viewer', 'resides in the individual reception of the text'. Mock acknowledges that this means that the gender play of *Gimme Gimme Gimme* 'could also be considered reactionary'. A sensibility held all this together: 'I have chosen to celebrate the queerness I read as inherent in this episode of *Gimme Gimme Gimme*' is a statement of purpose that, turning on 'I/'inherent', is the theorist-as-fan's hypostasis of identity-led liberal consciousness in text.<sup>115</sup>

Harvey freely admits that his sitcom was commissioned as a vehicle for Burke—known for Waynetta Slob in Harry Enfield's projects (BBC, 1990-94) and winner of Best Actress at Cannes for *Nil by Mouth* (1997), a film set in an Southeast London estate—and Dreyfus—winner of Best Newcomer at the British Comedy

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<sup>114</sup> Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular comedy and English cultural identities* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 109, 71; Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 146.

<sup>115</sup> Roberta Mock, 'Hetero queer Ladies: Some performative transactions between gay men and women', *Feminist Review*, 75 (2003), 20-37 (31-33).

Awards for playing Constable Goody in Ben Elton's *The Thin Blue Line* (BBC1, 1995-96). Elton's sitcom was an attempt to update the traditional British sitcom for a more 'politically correct' decade by distinguishing between homosexuality and camp; though, as Brett Mills observes, despite Goody's head-over-heels pursuit of Constable Habib, 'it's virtually impossible to see any representational difference' between Dreyfus's Goody and Dreyfus's Farrell. The inseparability became official when the British Broadcasting Standards Commission dismissed complaints levied against *Gimme Gimme Gimme*'s homosexual innuendo. Dreyfus was 'well-known to viewers in other television comedy roles which could reasonably be expected to indicate the nature of the comedy to much of the potential audience'.<sup>116</sup> Camp and homosexuality were, in effect, of each other. Harvey's work is a pointed illustration that 'outing' camp sitcom characters confirms rather than breaks convention.

Tiger Productions and the BBC cultivated the residual novelty of *Gimme Gimme Gimme* to bolster rather than challenge the mainstream. 'Linda and Tom transmogrified into the monsters we know and loathe today', Harvey reels in the tie-in book, during meetings with Jon Plowman, then Head of Comedy at the BBC (p. 8). Audience research for the second series led to more slapstick, or 'Linda punching Tom every episode, that sort of thing' (p. 66). Episode 1 of Series 1 ends with a freeze-frame of Linda punching Tom. By my counting, he is floored ten times, slapped once and thrown out of a wheelchair during the course of the show's 19 episodes (two minor gay characters are also floored). Harvey 'worried that we'd have to sanitise the show for a more mainstream audience' if it 'graduated' (as Beeb lingo has it) from BBC2 to BBC1; fears were allayed, however, when Lorraine Heggessey, Controller of the flagship channel, 'came to one of the recordings with her fella and chortled away'. The change to Series 3 for this wider, heterosexual audience? The gay man 'became a bit more stupid' (p. 134). Harvey's initial apprehension was misplaced because he overestimated the scandal of a hyper-sexualised trash aesthetic.

Heggessey had been drafted in to halt the plummeting popularity of the core BBC1 schedule; it was teetering in the higher reaches of the 20-to-30 per cent audience share considered by many to be fatal for the licence fee. Many feared collapse. Evading the word 'quality' (a radioactive word), Heggessey wanted 'populist programmes that have a great pace and are stylistically in tune with the 21st

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<sup>116</sup> Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London: BFI, 2005), pp. 123-6.

century rather than the middle of the 20th century'.<sup>117</sup> Eschewing the messiness of neoliberalising Britain, the call was for solidly neoliberal programming denuded of any residual Welfare-ist values. In a crisis of mainstream production, the highest premium was set on niche programming that had the potential to net wider appeal. BBC2 was already a seedbed for the premier channel. The familiar traditionalism of *Gimme Gimme Gimme's* end-of-the-pier smut together with the titular edginess of 'gay' was a formula by which established viewers were returned and the prized 'under-34' demographic was won. The third series—with 6 million viewers per episode and 40 per cent audience share—was regarded by the industry as a validation of the BBC's policy to incorporate the emergent marginal into the underfed mainstream.

This all revelled in the egregiousness of 'political incorrectness'. As Harvey boasted, 'a lot of the series' was 'really just an excuse for a load of vile jokes about lesbians' (p. 68). 'To denounce PC,' Bruce Robbins detects, 'is to mobilize a visceral Orwellian wrath against the supposed violation of ordinary language, identifying the status quo with a reassuringly familiar vocabulary, and inducing resentment and ridicule toward anyone trying to change either the words or the things'.<sup>118</sup> In mainstream debate, the charge of PC champions 'freedom of speech', deploys a knowing generalisation to illustrate a certain 'truth' and, in many cases, a holier-than-thou advantage is won by letting it be known that the position from which it is articulated is itself prejudiced against to some degree. Put another way, *Gimme Gimme Gimme*: (i) tapped and maintained an abstraction; (ii) held up self-aware pre-judgements based on prior observation as a distinction between offhand spontaneity and the a priori hate of the working-class Far Right; and (iii) did so to sustain a dog-eat-dog competitiveness for the consumption, flattery and preservation of mainstream identities. As a minority sexual subject, Harvey was, in the sense Robbins uses to describe the US academy, 'righteous *because* disempowered', a highmindedness made possible by and espousing middle-class privilege.<sup>119</sup> Harvey, gay, lived in Pimlico.

Politically incorrect stereotypes are knowingly deployed in the presentation of Tom. The gay man is a sexual failure in a scene similar to the one celebrated by

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<sup>117</sup> Lorraine Heggessey, 'Squaring the BBC1 circle', *Broadcast*, 6 July 2001.

<sup>118</sup> Bruce Robbins, 'Tenured Academics, the New McCarthyism and "PC"', *NLR*, 1/188 (1991), 151-57 (155).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.



Mock: Linda kisses Tom only to reveal that ‘it was even worse than Samson’, the horse that had been her first kiss (‘Millennium’, 29 December 1999). We learn that his mother is having sex with the fantasy ice cream man of his youth (‘Dirty Thirty’, 4 February 2000). A virgin tells him that he is a ‘crap shag’ (‘Glad to be Gay?’, 11 February 2000). Tom’s brand of camp is implicitly understood as the deluded affectations of ‘posh’ theatrical subculture. From the first episode, we know that he went to an all-boys’ boarding school (p. 16). His out-of-work thespian, even atypical public-schooled leisureliness is the leverage that enables the taunting commentaries of Linda’s degeneracy. Endless interpretation brings out Linda’s linguistic, cultural and sexual illiteracy. The hour-long ‘Millennium’ special was an ‘exercise in refining the characters of Linda and Tom’ (p. 66). In a dream sequence, Oscar Wilde thanks Tom for his inspiration (‘Thomas you are so earnest. If only everyone in life was as earnest as you’ (p. 74)). Elsewhere:

LINDA	Here what do you have to do to be a television presenter?
TOM	Well, you’ve got to be attractive.
LINDA	Right.
TOM	You’ve got to sleep with loads of producers.
LINDA	Really?
TOM	Read autocue.
LINDA	Ah no see I’m dyslexic.
TOM	Thick.
LINDA	Dyslexic.
TOM	You are too working class to be dyslexic.
LINDA	Owning class, mate, me dad owns his own council house.
TOM	Yeah, cut your veins open you’d have blue blood pumping away there wouldn’t you?
LINDA	Everyone knows blood’s red. And you call me thick?
TOM	Blue blood you daft trollop. As in the Royal Family.
LINDA	Oh I hope they’re not on tonight. Moaning northern ponces.
TOM	Sorry?
LINDA	You know that docusoap. You know the one where they all sit around talking about television and smoking. I mean how many people do you know who actually do that eh? (p. 71.)

Linda is second-generation Irish.

According to Harvey, there was ‘only one way it could go’ in the last ever episode (‘Decoy’, 14 December 2001). Tom has left for a job in Nottingham with the soap *Crossroads* (ITV, 1966-88, 2001-2003):

*Linda turns and walks away from the window. She scratches her head then pulls at her hair, it comes off. It’s a wig. She throws it onto the dressing table and gets into bed. She pulls a tea cosy onto her bald head, she sucks her thumb and switches off the light. She is all alone. (p. 188.)*

How are we to read this supposedly inevitable ending? It would seem to me that the camp of *Gimme Gimme Gimme* was always a release of the claustrophobic conflicts between working and aspirant lower classes, the spectacle of a maladaptive Philistine-Populace pact. A conclusion that performs that already-implicit severance was, in its way, fitting. “Camp” is’, as David T. Evans writes, ‘a defensive manoeuvre by a group so oppressed that it has no other socio-cultural or political alternative. In coded terms it denies the means of its oppression whilst enabling the necessary underlying masculinity and mutual sexual self-interest of its participants to survive’.<sup>120</sup> The point-scoring camp of *Gimme Gimme Gimme* shared the grinding maliciousness Adorno and Horkheimer subjected to critique: the animated short hammers ‘into every brain the old lesson that continuous friction, the breaking down of all individual resistance, is the condition of life in this society’.<sup>121</sup> It was there in *Beautiful Thing*, where the zero-sum gutter was sport for a middle-class audience: ‘It was largely the laughter’, Dromgoole remembers, ‘which pounded out of everyone, until your eyes wept and your head ached from the sheer noise [... and] nobody could believe they were allowed to be happy’.<sup>122</sup> Nobody *really* believed that *Gimme Gimme Gimme* was good TV; the (literally) licensed carnival, like Mock’s queer politics, ‘ultimately [strove] for its own redundance’.<sup>123</sup> But it invoked irony, the last redoubt of the vacuous, as the self-deprecating adjunct of a conservative anti-PC reflex. Beryl Merit was the silent authority who oversaw this meritocracy with bemused detachment and continued unchanged; she had not ‘danced since the day Thatcher resigned’ (p. 38), and therein lay the ambivalence of an urban monetarism neutered of open conservatism.

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<sup>120</sup> Evans, *Sexual Citizenship*, p. 97.

<sup>121</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 138.

<sup>122</sup> Dromgoole, ‘Dominic Dromgoole’, p. 71.

<sup>123</sup> Mock, ‘Heteroqueue Ladies’, 34.

Like the Docklands, *Crossroads* was not the resolution Harvey's work made it out to be. In 2002, the soap was taken off the air in preparation for a re-launch that would appeal to a gay audience. Despite Tom's fate, Harvey found the marketing strategy 'offensive'.<sup>124</sup> The soap was axed five months after its re-vamp with the loss of 350 jobs.<sup>125</sup> Hopes had been high. Executive producer Yvon Grace:

I've cut out anything about broken-down washing-machines, rats in the cellar, terminal illness. This is about the human condition. We all want great sex, a fantastic body, lots of money, a family, a baby. We're tracing human roots [...]. King's Oak is not parochial, it's a fantasy place where drama happens. All references to Birmingham are taken out.<sup>126</sup>

The theatricalisation of urban politics rolls on.

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<sup>124</sup> Jonathan Harvey, 'On the Box—Prison Camp', *Broadcast*, 14 March 2003.

<sup>125</sup> 'ITV axe to fall on Nottingham studio', *Broadcast*, 16 January 2004.

<sup>126</sup> 'At Another Crossroads', *Broadcast*, 6 January 2003.

## Conclusion

My opening contention was, simply, that such a thing as the ‘educational afterworld’ exists, that it possesses certain features indebted to unspent histories, and that all this is worthy of attention in these new, though not wholly unprecedented, times. I would like to end with a return to that original claim by way of the embellishment that, with the detail of the chapters behind us, may now be afforded it. Where the Introduction proceeded historically to convey the direction of one-hundred-and-fifty years of change, this conclusion progresses conceptually. The aim is to begin to develop a formal outline of the educational afterworld through its key aspects; conditions of existence, class, the provision of public education, culture, the job market, and so on. The latter half of the conclusion reflects on what has—and has not—been achieved by this ‘British’ thesis. The answers form the basis of suggestions for what might be done with this project, how it might even ‘travel’ to other contexts.

Beginning at the beginning, the educational afterworld relies on determinate conditions of existence. ‘In the money relation’, Marx wrote, ‘the ties of personal dependence, of distinctions of blood, education, etc, are in fact exploded, ripped up’. In notes that would later form a paragraph of the *Grundrisse*, he was turning over in his mind how the primary mechanism of exchange in capitalist societies forces people to view their place in the world in a certain way.<sup>1</sup> Cash in hand, individuals *seem* independent, ‘free to collide with one another and to engage in exchange within this freedom’. Money seems to give the individual access to all the human wants money can buy. But this magical free electivity ‘abstracts from the *conditions of existence* within which these individuals enter into contact’. If the abstraction is taken at face value then *society*—that is, the relations between all these ‘independent’ individuals—is only perceptible as a landscape of *natural conditions* beyond human design or influence. People realise themselves through their relations with one another, Marx saw, but from within the confines of the

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse: The foundations of the critique of political economy* (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 163-64.

money relation the opposite impression is more influential: the 'definedness' of individuals seems to be a strictly personal affair. Self-definition is conducted against the inhospitable backdrop of 'society', the lump sum of relations external to 'independent' man.

Marx's thoughts carry a warning about the stories that arise from these conditions. It is said that the cause of 'freedom' is furthered whenever a particular individual gets the better of relations thought 'external' to him—he is treated as living proof that every limit to self-determination is artificial and conquerable. But the rise of an individual to the top of the conditions of existence does not make them cease to exist. On the contrary, the ascendent individual expresses the mass subordination of all the individuals in their shadow. Yet even as these confessedly 'independent' individuals reject their dependency on others, they are appealing to a dependency of sorts. What Marx calls 'objective dependency relations' are generalised away to form the 'foundation' of an antithesis, 'personal dependence', the interaction between fully autonomous individuals. Philosophers, Marx observed, hail every consecutive present as the triumph of ideas over conspiracies to thwart free individuality; what they like to think of as independence, however, is more properly understood as indifference towards others. As abstractions, ideas are expressions *of* rather than merely substitutions *for* conditions of existence, even in the most avowedly 'personal' of stories about 'blood, education, etc'. Marx's articulation of this demonstrated that ideas concealing forms of dependency can be re-interpreted to disclose their indelible debts.

If individuals depend on others, then there is no getting away from the importance of *class* in the educational afterworld—namely, of how these nominally separate individuals move with and against the material interests of others. In societies like ours, class is about property relations. A capitalist bourgeoisie, owning the means of production, purchases the labour power of others. A proletariat, not owning any means of production or the ability to purchase labour, sells its own labour. A petit-bourgeoisie assumes a position between the two, owning some modest means of production without purchasing the labour power of others. That said, any one individual has to perform a number of roles due to the contradictory demands of life in bourgeois-dominated society. At any one time, people are wearing different 'hats' that are indicative of mutually contradictory interests. (As a worker, the individual wants a higher wage; as a consumer, the individual wants a cheaper purchase; all the while, they may be in possession of savings or investments doing the work of driving down wages).

How individual members of a class approach these relations and their often convoluted roles varies considerably. This is especially the case among what is called the ‘middle classes’. The plural recognises that many people work but purchase the labour power of others through intermediaries, and with different sources and magnitudes of income. Dominant educational afterworlds are thus comprised of different fractions—financial, business, industrial, managerial, professional, administrative, political, intellectual and creative elites. Situations are inherently contradictory as coalitions form within and across classes. This is why nobody can uncomplicatedly ‘win’ in the educational afterworld; people are suffering one another wherever there is power to be had.

This complexity means that any quick equation between birth and destination is bound to distort the hegemonic reality of the educational afterworld. ‘The middle class is a class of education’, Marx wryly declared: ‘*Voilà tout!* Hegel gives us an empirical description of the bureaucracy, partly as it is, and partly according to the opinion which it has of itself. And with that the difficult chapter on “the Executive” is brought to a close’. Thus the *Philosophy of Right* evaded difficult questions.<sup>2</sup> Tensions in the educational afterworld are exacerbated by the way the transmission of property is mediated by education *after* schooling. The aristocracy has the convenience of property passed through the generations, whereas the proletariat, with only its labour power to its name, has nothing to bequeath or inherit. Meanwhile, the middle classes furnish their children with the self-possession they might need to win property as ‘independent’ individuals. Hence the value of effaced educations for this class. The elusiveness of the middle class is that it *is* and yet at the same time it *is not* the class of education.

Like the society it mediates, public education is dominated by the capitalist bourgeoisie; however, the State is continually reaching out to classes formerly debarred from skilled occupations so that capitalists, dangling the promise of individual ascent over collective wellbeing, can recruit from an ever-larger ‘pool of talent’. The educational afterworld that results—lower wages, devalued labour, intensified competition and restless corporatism—benefits the capitalist bourgeoisie at the expense of the proletariat (the petit-bourgeoisie, in accordance with its social position, is typically torn). There will be middle-class losers in this

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1970), p. 45.

cut and thrust by necessity, the individual class sacrifices that maintain social mobility within ‘winner-takes-all’ capitalism. So, a complex division of labour, a hegemonic class against itself, and adaptation through downward extension: class coalitions sponsor ill-matched *educations*. Collectively, they produce disagreement among agreement in every aspect of education provision; content, spirit, mode of delivery, institution, class base, and so on. What would conversation in staff rooms, university corridors and ‘The Executive’ be without it?

Within its conditions of existence, objective educational relations engender the idea that they merely form a broad stage for individuals to act out their own scripts. There is a common sense to this: any curriculum worth its salt has to impart a general account of collective life—society as *culture*—if it is to come alive as a worthwhile undertaking. By expressing social relations imaginatively in this way, educations and their bearers are designated special missions. Every education paves itself with good intentions. Alternative educations are variously typed as ornaments and scourges.<sup>3</sup> Rival images of society position different institutions, disciplines and schools of thought as distinct contributions and hindrances to human wellbeing. Whatever the narcissism or self-abnegation involved, it would be a mistake to regard this as people just thinking highly or lowly of different educations and cultural attitudes—it is about the establishment of social authority over the direction of material resources in a class society.

It is logical that a money relation ruled by the abstraction of ‘independence’ should produce ideas of culture that are authoritarian injunctions to free oneself from the shackles of the money principle but not the money relation itself. This is contrary to the intuition and common-sense expectation of most cultural workers and consumers but nonetheless true. Drawing from Marx, I argued that in the money relation ‘self-definition is conducted against the inhospitable backdrop of “society”, the lump sum of relations external to “independent” man’. Matthew Arnold understood those conditions of existence as a distinction between the ‘alien’ and the ‘Philistine’ in a world he, as an alien, happened to find himself. F.R. Leavis, in a more subcultural vein, conceived those conditions as an opposition between ‘minority culture’ and the twentieth-century ‘mass civilisation’ that engulfed it. This is why representatives of Culture fulminate against industrialism whilst always finding new depths of outrage for their nemeses in high finance, who

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<sup>3</sup> Even functionalist sociology does this. Famous instances include the ‘Two Cultures’ debate in Britain and the ‘Culture Wars’ in the United States.

(not even having the decency to produce shoes and nails) make money from money. The memory of unmechanised agricultural capital animated the imagination of *Scrutiny* because although land was, like the stock market, investment in future value, it was the beatific complement to the unnatural urban landscape of mass society.

The idea of culture as an alternative principle of human action to that of money is precisely what lends it to dark educative uses in the educational afterworld. Because the capitalist market is immiserating, destabilising and ultimately self-destructive, the capitalist State is periodically impelled to act the part of its social conscience. Arnold codified the imperative to embark on cultural overhaul rather than economic transformation. The State is in possession of a superego, a repressive apparatus, but its authoritarianism is incapable of guaranteeing a peaceable existence. The State must strengthen its ego, the cooperation of every independent individual's best self, lest the capitalist-bourgeoisie unwittingly provokes an irreversible irruption of the id, working-class Anarchy. To do this, the State must make a leap of faith and believe the modernisers when they say that the selection and education of the few independent special people already sensitive to the good society is the first step to seeing a pacification of all classes under the auspices of a corporate cultural identity. Should the working class not listen, then the State has a moral duty to act with force until it does, because there is no alternative. Once successful, the State's best self can fully take over and its worst self, bureaucracy, can recede. The story re-casts the proletariat as the disintegrating force of capitalist-bourgeois society. Public service steps in to correct the latter's moral oversight (they are, after all, busy creating 'our' wealth). The narrative has been told many times; the 'learning culture', 'social enterprise' and the 'Big Society' are variants.

The humanities have historically been the hallmark of elite institutions and their afterworlds. Homogenising disparate class bases, the 'rounded' educations of selective schools aim to create 'rounded' individuals capable of 'rolling' into a dominant educational afterworld where the passport to success is sensibility rather than objective specialist training. The purposeful overproduction of dispositions for positions means that the outclassed are outshone. The humanities, by rewarding linguistic capital and receptiveness to compliant values, manufactures rather than spots aliens. Striking down through the education system, the early identification of linguistic capital is the key discriminator in the production of academic attainment; by compounding probabilities, selection can spark a chain



reaction that upwardly accelerates individuals. The theorisation of how educationally mobile figures come to focalise the cultural tensions of dominant educational afterworlds may be found in Chapters 2 and 3, so I will not reproduce it here.

The educational afterworld, then, is a response to a problem. The life after education designated by the phrase ‘real world’ is one of hard-boiled workdays cut off from the imposition of naive schooldays. The term relies on the common sense that people get paid for what they do: pay cheques reward the personal capacities individuals demonstrate in the workplace. Leading from this, it is generally agreed that there is a moral and practical duty to bend the stick of policy towards a conception of the ideal society, one where the right people are allotted to the right places; a just school system would leave no stone unturned identifying, equipping and maximising every child’s potential. Yet while a belief in ‘equality of opportunity’ has recognised the prime role of education in determining social outcomes in theory, the full implications of that insight are, in practice, attenuated by social authority that speaks to the ‘real world’ as if it derives from a position free of educational bias.

The discrepancy the educational afterworld draws attention to is between the logical conclusions implied by many claims about education and the inferences of their terms of address. On the one hand, a radical language of change is tendered: systemic educational inequality, it would seem, exists as a wrong to be righted through a root-and-branch transformation of how we organise ourselves as a society. But on the other (and this is the stress), the authority of the speaker is assurance enough that the notion of systemic educational inequality is a misdiagnosis, suggesting a pervasive rottenness is being falsely extrapolated from unfortunate but hardly unresolvable local circumstances. Rather than complete reorganisation, then, the disadvantaged are best helped by extending best practice, the good work already found towards the top end of what is, essentially, a sound system (to say otherwise is to be accused of disrespecting the skills, aspirations and hard work of young people taking GSCE, A-level and university exams). This double message—meaningful change through rejuvenated corporatism—is pitched as a war against resistant cultural attitudes and the perverse incentives that sustain them. The discrepancy is surreptitious because it allows undeclared interests to deepen educational inequality in the name of fairness.

The educational afterworld is a critical re-description of that so-called ‘real world’. Instead of displacing education to an ‘unreal’ somewhere else, it is possible to discuss social relations as they are structured by educational experience. What I am calling the educational afterworld is, then, that structural reality as well as its articulation as ideas, the discourses that variously disclose or mystify educational experience and its effects. We have seen the notion of ‘talent’, as discoverable natural aptitude, bearing an understanding of education as a process that taps and neglects rather than creates ability. Because the social is rendered personal in this way, we are licensed to talk about the seemingly self-enclosed educational afterworlds of individuals and their institutions too: objective biographical outcomes as they come to be represented by the stories we tell ourselves and each other.

The critical task is to re-position society as a dynamic field of contest, one where the idea that people make their own luck is part of an inescapably political rather than natural landscape. The emphases conveyed by ‘real world’ are to be seen as part of a dynamic. The limits and pressures exerted by educational experience in adult society are obscured by appeals to cultural difference—inequities traceable to specific educational arrangements are transposed into hierarchies of cultural difference: but those values are themselves shaped by and work to re-shape education. Importantly, nothing is certain as that obfuscation of interests takes place because of the discrepancy between the generality of culture and the specificity of politics it diffuses. So, on the one hand, the educational afterworld is a social reality; it is the ‘place’ where education plays a powerful yet untidy role in the systematic maintenance of things as they unequally are. On the other, the educational afterworld is the theory that illuminates that state of affairs.

This project moved within definite bounds in order to achieve certain aims. The plural of the title, ‘Afterworlds’ rather than ‘Afterworld’, establishes the thesis as a proposed way into a problem rather than the final word on contemporary life. Those limits recognised that it was neither feasible nor desirable to indiscriminately include everything that might come under the bracket ‘educational afterworld’. By illuminating some gestures and recurrent arguments in determinate contexts—ones necessarily inflected elsewhere—texts and their circumstances were made to evince the transferable truth that they must bear as products of inherently contradictory social organisation. The subject matter (in the business of masking itself) and the boldness of the central claim (an inconspicuous absence is pervasive) meant that more depended on successful

demonstration through careful historicisation and close reading than might usually be the case. Theory and analysis were shown to go hand in hand in making the seemingly unstickable stick, not to a determinism in the unhelpful sense of education-as-destiny but, rather, to a dynamic and multi-accented social contest that opens more questions than it closes.

The educational afterworld was coined to articulate situations where the actions of formal schooling are expressed through diversionary cultural rather than revealingly social terms, and that thesis was then explicated through the analysis of a range of educational afterworlds in late-twentieth-century British culture. The evidence—taking its lead from two novels, a drama serial, a stand-alone play and a television sitcom—was grounded in the period during which neoliberalism was implemented and consolidated in Britain, which is to say from the late 70s to the tri-party consensus that had formed by the year 2000. All the while, attention was paid to sexuality, in particular commercialised gay male subculture and ‘empowered’ female heterosexuality.

The educational afterworlds of this project were chosen to be representative of power rather than demography. The reason was simple: the aim was to elucidate past and present phases of an education system that continues to compound long-constituted forms of social advantage. A focus on selective schooling lent itself to the construction of a selective history. On the surface, the texts spanned the Thatcher, Major and early Blair years, but their representations were built on the foundations of ‘re-written’ pre-neoliberal pasts. The educational afterworld is made intelligible by comparing and contrasting different episodes of history. Drawing out a text’s communication with the past has the effect of dispelling the notion of education-as-destiny outright. In Chapter 1, a single educational institution, Winchester, was shown to be irrevocably against itself—oppositions grounded in the past were even shown to be at odds with their contemporary representatives. The ‘wholeness’ of formidable cultural institutions is challenged too. In Chapter 3, dissident left drama hijacked the best self of public-service broadcasting—quality, originality and appraisal of national life—to criticise prevailing values. The educational afterworld, we can say, is useful in removing the veneer of immovable ‘ideological state apparatuses’ to reveal more shaky, contradictory enterprises. While an increasingly cornered BBC habitually re-commits itself to the production of values inimical to ones upholding its funding base, the emergence of multi-authored production across public and private sectors supplies fresh (albeit marketised) opportunities for counterflowing work.

The last chapter showed the educational afterworld capable of approaching fundamental questions about how we have been organised across time and space. Establishing the link between education and the reproduction of general society, it is possible to bring together an urban educational afterworld of such seemingly disparate things as capital, theatre and sexuality.

The educational afterworld is then helpful for anyone wanting to unearth the educational constants that have been buried under heavy social, cultural and political change. Fragments of this thesis will be constructive as models for exploring the educational afterworlds of individuals (F.R. Leavis, for example), cultural and political movements (Left-Leavisism; the Conservative Party), ideas (beauty; life), genres (the 'English' novel; the social problem play), disciplines and professions (*Kulturkritik*; the civil service; Law), institutions (Winchester; the BBC), media (television), sectors (Redbricks) and subcultures (the gay scene; the Royal Court). One of the motifs running through this thesis, 'life', led a trail back in time through New Labour, gay living and various Leavisisms to Matthew Arnold. The 70s preceded the 80s, and work focusing on that decade would no doubt steer a different course through history to better illuminate its conflicts.

The educational afterworld opens up, of course, a range of educational profiles and their relations to scrutiny. The presence of a thin yet dominant private sector in British education was always going to skew the subject matter of this thesis towards the mechanisms of selection. The forty or so years before neoliberalism characterised by the Butler Act focused much attention on the public school and the State grammar (because it was products of these institutions who were coming 'on stream' into powerful positions within the world of work and consumption during the 80s and 90s). In this, the educational afterworld has much to say about narrative. Many texts are structured by the relationship between two privileged tiers, the public and grammar, to forge a systematic opposition between financial and academic rationalisations of educational inequality. In others, competing afterworlds are viewed generationally: we saw young Redbrick trajectories making their way into highly 'selective' professional afterworlds by rejecting their roots. The conflicts at the top of the social hierarchy are so intense that we can find insight there into all the relationships found throughout society. Not approaching the texts from the 'bottom-up' perspective of the comprehensive did not make its products disappear, but it did alter the view from which their conditions of existence were seen, represented and managed.

This raises an important question: what would a study about twenty-first-century educational afterworlds look like? 91 of the most socially selective State schools are now comprehensives rather than grammars, a situation caused by the chicanery of parents listing first- and second-choice schools in a highly divisive housing market.<sup>4</sup> So while the ‘independent’, ‘grammar’ and ‘local comp’ still hold symbolic significance, it is pertinent to ask how those meanings have been altered by the emergence of the ‘good State school’ over the ‘bog-standard comprehensive’. Future work will have to confront the blurrings of a State sector increasingly subjected to diversification and (in academies) selection. One reason for this is the increased importance of non-direct means of financial selection—paradoxically, in pursuit of academic selection. In 2002, sociologists Diane Reay and Helen Lucey found that 65 per cent of pupils at one London State primary school received up to 18 months of private tuition in preparation for the Eleven Plus; the parents of some white children spent more each week on tutors than the families of some of the black children in the same class lived on.<sup>5</sup> A generation of parents attached to the grammar-school ideal has had its desire for educational mobility driven into the comprehensive system to reconfigure it along market lines. Recent years demand careful deliberation of the hell of educational afterworld: unemployment.

This study was sharpened by its interest in sexuality. For one, it demonstrated that the aspects of human life that are not exclusive to capitalist societies are nevertheless still shaped and understood in ‘capitalist’ and ‘educational’ ways. In this regard, race or age might have been chosen in sexuality’s stead. Discussions have frequently returned to the ‘raced ways’ education, class and sexuality are conceived. A study perusing race might want to consider the reproduction and appropriation of Arnoldian racialisms from non-white perspectives. Another thread, less explicit, has been the importance of the early-to-mid-twenty-something as a figure steering a course in a post-educational landscape after an advanced course of study (even in *Beautiful Thing*, 27-year-old Tony is crucial). Other ages and their social circumstances would no doubt support different stresses. A genre study of biography would have to challenge material forced to acknowledge educational debts in some form. Remembering the short reading of Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* from the Introduction, fictionalised autobiography is a genre committed to a there-yet-not-there

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<sup>4</sup> Smithers and Robinson, *Worlds Apart*, p. i.

<sup>5</sup> Jenni Russell, ‘The secret lessons’, *New Statesman*, 8 April 2002.

authority, an operation homologous to the there-yet-not-there presence of formal schooling in the educational afterworld. The emergence of mainstream commercial gay subculture was uniquely pertinent to this study because, in it, Britain saw an image of its future self: a society ceded to the market. To interrogate other educational afterworlds, scholars could do worse than to search out the non-class-specific constituencies that, as synecdoches of a time, are best placed to articulate systemic tensions and their general direction.

Ultimately, it will be the nature of non-British contexts themselves that will determine how far the theory of the educational afterworld can legitimately 'travel'. The theorisation as it is conceived here appeals to Britain, a bourgeois-liberal society where education has been instrumental in the manufacture of consensual social relations. Notwithstanding that, the educational afterworld may be said to be of general historical significance for all those times and places where organised education can be seen upholding the pretenses of unequal societies. This is not to say that dissent does not exist, but that there has to be a dominant 'educational' order to dissent against for the effacement conveyed by 'afterworld' to make sense. So, not wishing to limit any applications or pre-empt any conclusions, here are some thoughts as they appear to me now.

Something has already been said about 'universal' French education during the course of the chapters. Crossing the channel, the theory of the educational afterworld would have to acknowledge the mechanisms of upward academic acceleration that have extended across Metropolitan and Overseas France and, during its time, French Algeria (where the disparity in educational provision between Muslims and *Pieds-Noirs* was stark). Rejoinders to Althusser's exemption of Art from the imputation of Ideology were voiced by Balibar and Macherey, and I see no reason why their rendering of literary form as 'ideological' could not be developed to engage a French State that, unlike the British, has undergone a number of far-reaching ruptures. A French study, analysing the spiritual home of Revolution rather than Tradition, would contrast the 'peculiarity' of the British. How differently do educational afterworlds look and work when history hands down broader social horizons with more heartening precedents?

It may be feasible to explore nations that were incepted as educational afterworlds. 'We have made Italy', Massimo d'Azeglio famously declared, 'now we have to make Italians'. Remarks by Eric Hobsbawm are suggestive. 'If French had at least a state whose "national language" it could be', he writes, 'the only basis for Italian

unification was the Italian language, which united the educated elite of the peninsula as readers and writers, even though it has been calculated that at the moment of unification (1860) only 2½% of the population used the language for everyday purposes. For this tiny group was, in a real sense *a* and potentially *the* Italian people. Nobody else was'.<sup>6</sup> Equally, what about national projects—one thinks of the United States, Greek independence and Zionism—conceived as extensions, returns and restorations? Liberia, a 'travelling', cross-Continental afterworld of slavery and education, would be an immensely difficult but rewarding subject.

Farther afield, modernity demands more of the afterworld theory. *Hikkomori* refers to a significant proportion of Japanese youth withdrawn from face-to-face social interaction. The *hikkomori* confine themselves to a house, or even a single room, for up to six months at a time. The hyperescalation of meritocracy in 'pass-or-fail' Japan poses the challenge of finding places to hide from the stigma of educational underachievement, fora to disseminate stories and connections to foster solidarity. What does the structure of the educational afterworld look like from 'inside' and 'outside' extreme atomisation?<sup>7</sup> A study of China's turbulent twentieth century would enhance an understanding of how educational afterworlds contemplate past and present versions of themselves, not least in respect to the 're-education' of the Cultural Revolution. Such a study would have to judge the determinations of a massive educational apparatus (bound up, of course, with the one-child policy) within that epochal collision of Confucian philosophy, the Communist Party and 'Western' neoliberalism.

Recent history invites us to take seriously the notion that inegalitarian states educate their future critics, if not their gravediggers. The evidence can be found in educational afterworlds as diverse as those of international terror, a police kettle in London and the defiant Arab street. This thesis, too, a PhD conducted within and certified by a Redbrick, owes to what it criticises. What is more, the author has not fully revealed his educational debts. Indeed, the theory of the educational afterworld looks suspiciously similar to what it claims to expose: it began, after all, with a general account of the 'real world', it stressed the importance of culture and

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<sup>6</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 60-61.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Zielenziger, *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan created its own lost generation* (London: Nan A. Talese, 2006).

proceeded to contest dominant cultural forms. Detractors might claim that the argument is self-defeatingly hypocritical. The obvious charge would be this: the argument—interventions evince *proper educations* by plunging the education system into its natural imperfection before, at the last moment, saving a charmed position within it *in spite of*, or rather *by* the heavy curse of its blemishes<sup>8</sup>—is redoubled. The real question, though, is the nature of the offence. For Marx and Engels, the offence is the necessity of politics: ‘And your education!’ they cried: ‘Is not that also social, and determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools, etc.? The Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class’.<sup>9</sup> The intention was never to throw the baby, education, out with the bathwater, the present education system. We can insist that the educational afterworld yields no non-human ‘outside’ or irrepressibly human ‘inside’ from where a superordinate or natural *proper education* can redeem the existence of an education system it rejects. A tenaciously politicising education can bring to account those who take refuge in educational inequality for profit. Whether this thesis is a good offender or not will be judged by the very debate it provokes. Talents are always already decided, but practice, not talent, makes perfect.

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<sup>8</sup> A paraphrase from Roland Barthes’s ‘Operation Margarine’, in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), pp. 41-43 (p. 41).

<sup>9</sup> Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 56.



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