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After Orwell: Totalitarian Fears and the English Political Novel, 1950-2010

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AFTER ORWELL: TOTALITARIAN FEARS AND THE ENGLISH POLITICAL NOVEL,
1950-2010

AFTER ORWELL: TOTALITARIAN FEARS AND THE ENGLISH POLITICAL NOVEL,
1950-2010

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

After Orwell: Totalitarian Fears and the English Political Novel, 1950-2010 gives a coherent account of the English political novel after World War II, a critical narrative absent from current scholarship. I contend that George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a touchstone for political fiction, is underwritten by Orwell's conflicted attitude toward politics: despite embracing politics as the necessary means to genuinely improve people's lives, he also remained suspicious of politics' apparently inherent potential to diminish or even eliminate autonomy. Orwell's simultaneous attraction and vigorous resistance to politics, I argue, is tied to broader contemporaneous anxieties over political and cultural totalization. Such fears reverberate throughout postwar English political fiction. To substantiate this claim, my project reads an assortment of political novels against the political convulsions and reorientations following the Second World War. Orwellian apprehensions over totalizing systems and theories serve as a common thread for otherwise wide-ranging novelistic engagements with politics in the postmodern, multicultural, and globalized contexts of postwar England.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Totalitarian Politics and the Novel	1
Chapter 1: Modernism's Wake: Politics and the Novel at Midcentury	60
Chapter 2: Politics of the Body and the Body Politic in Margaret Drabble's <i>The Millstone</i>	95
Chapter 3: A Confirmation of the New Orthodoxy: Martin Amis's <i>Money</i> and Thatcherism	132
Chapter 4: Irresistible Encounters: The Public and the Private on Either Side of 9/11	157
Conclusion: Orwell's Heirs	187
Works Cited	202

Introduction: Totalitarian Politics and the Novel

The term “political novel,” like other nebulous categories such “psychological novel” or “novel of ideas,” seems to repel neat classifications or firm definitions, serving instead as a pointer to a general emphasis or an opportunity for a certain type of analysis. This type of usage is endorsed by Irving Howe in his *Politics and the Novel* (1957), arguably the most influential study of the subject. Howe verges on glibness when he calls a political novel “any novel [he] wished to treat as if it were a political novel, though clearly one would not wish to treat most novels in that way” (17). Such an attitude is in many ways justified and has its merits, yet the fluidity of Howe’s elusive definition also has drawbacks—particularly for critics attempting to compose a study of the political novel. This approach to reading political fiction is akin to panning for gold: one may make an attempt in any stream, but some waters yield more returns than others. An especial problem of this method is that it tends to encourage critics to resist generalizing statements about, or comprehensive studies of, political fiction in favor of treating the politics addressed in or embedded within a novel on a case by case basis. Illuminating individual readings abound, while critical accounts of the political novel that articulate a bigger picture through commonalities, governing themes, and prevailing trends are all too rare.

This study moves against that critical tendency in an attempt to map out dominant themes and widespread concerns for political novelists in the decades following *Politics and the Novel*. Of course, Howe’s book looked at examples of political fiction over the course of more than one-hundred years and from writers of myriad national and cultural backgrounds, including Russian, French, American, and English. Unlike Howe, and with an eye toward focus and precision, I will limit this study to a slightly shorter temporal bracket and one national tradition. Specifically, *After Orwell* turns to the decades after World War II, marked here as 1950-2012, and to political novels from writers in the English context. Such constraints are justified for reasons beyond

practical matters of space. As others have argued, and I will subsequently elaborate, the postwar period ushered in intense structural, cultural, and political changes in England—from the end of Empire to the welfare state and the Windrush generation—that genuinely distinguish the political consciousnesses and concerns of postwar English political novelists from those before 1945.

Moreover, while nationality is easily confounded—Howe, for instance, treats both Henry James and Joseph Conrad as “English” political novelists—national histories and particularities do matter. Robert Boyers, in his study of political fiction after 1945, rationalizes his omission of American writers from his study by saying that he could not locate “a dominant American political novel produced in the last forty years, a novel that would stand in relation to American culture in the way that *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* stands to Czech culture” (*Atrocity* n.p.). While Boyers’s assessment of contemporary American political fiction is certainly debatable, his justification points to an important fact about the ways meaningful political fiction sits in relation to a fairly specific political history, context, and heritage. For Boyers’s purpose of surveying major political novels since the Second World War, local traditions, priorities, and histories can be addressed in individual chapters, depending on the novel and analysis at hand. However, for a study such as this one, which seeks common themes and persistent emphases, to neglect national boundaries risks incoherence. Along these lines, my chosen novels come from distinctly *English*, rather than British literary and political traditions, as recognition that novelists of this time from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland write within their own unique contexts.

My intention in *After Orwell* is to start giving shape to the otherwise diffuse body of critical literature on postwar political fiction that, despite providing innumerable perceptive and invaluable contributions, has foregone attempts at locating widespread trends and articulating an overarching narrative. Of course, not only can counter-narratives and contradictions be pursued,

and they should, but also political and literary narratives cannot be kept in isolation from transnational developments. Presently, however, the critical work on postwar political fiction lacks a basic structure from which complications can then be spun out. The effect is roughly comparable to designers embellishing a garment with detailing even though it lacks the boning that will give it the proper shape. *After Orwell*, then, aims to provide literary criticism of postwar political fiction some needed, if admittedly preliminary and far from complete, structure.

For postwar English novelists, political fiction has a relatively clear point of departure, lending this national tradition its particular cohesion: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a paradigmatic political novel from a writer taken—if at times too uncritically—to be quintessentially English. Orwell and his final novel, I argue, set the broad terms for the English political novelists who follow. Whether intentionally or not, postwar English political novelists operate on a terrain in large part mapped out by Orwell. The longtime political obsessions of Orwell's that culminate in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* recur, I argue, in various permutations and forms, in the postwar period. At bottom, Orwell's overriding political obsession is an intense anxiety over the concept of totalitarianism, which is to say a political system, movement, or practice that claims or aspires to total control (or in the case of totalitarian ideologies, presumes total mastery and explanatory power). *After Orwell* contends that fears over the threat of totalitarian political regimes, and related processes of totalization that accompany or are related to them, constitute the overriding and unifying theme for postwar English political novelists.

Orwell in fact staked the very survival of literature upon the defeat of totalitarianism. In a 1941 lecture, Orwell aligns literature with the autonomous individual, or, as he clarifies, the individual's "illusion of being autonomous" ("Totalitarianism" 134). According to Orwell, literature and the critical response to it hinge on sincerity: "Modern literature is essentially an

individual thing. It is either the truthful expression of what one man [sic] thinks and feels, or it is nothing” (135). The threat that the totalitarian state—Orwell cites as examples, unsurprisingly, Germany, Russia, and Italy, adding that “one must face the risk that this phenomenon is going to be world-wide” (135)—poses to literature is its abolishment of independent thought. Orwell admits that any dominant ideological system, from the Christianity of medieval Europe to the liberal capitalism of England in his own time, by definition circumscribes thought, but asserts that the “peculiarity of the totalitarian state is that though it controls thought, it does not fix it. It sets up unquestionable dogmas, and it alters them from day to day” (136). The writer living in a totalitarian regime experiences cognitive dissonance and thus no longer “*feels* the truth of what he is saying” (136), corroding and ultimately erasing the precondition of literature.

Famously, Orwell sought to give his opposition to political totalitarianism a literary form. In his essay “Why I Write” (1946), Orwell goes so far as to pronounce, “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it” (5). Later in that same essay, Orwell claims that his satiric novel *Animal Farm* (1945) was “the first book in which [he] tried, with full consciousness of what [he] was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole” (7). Much of Orwell’s political purpose in *Animal Farm*, of course, centers on critiquing the authoritarian totalitarianism of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. Orwell ends “Why I Write” by looking forward, musing, “I have not written a novel for seven years, but I hope to write another fairly soon. It is bound to be a failure, every book is a failure, but I know with some clarity what kind of book I want to write” (7). This forecast—echoing Orwell’s statement

that “[a]ll revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure” (“Koestler” 244)—refers to what would be Orwell’s final book, the momentous *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).¹

Nineteen Eighty-Four is set in London, now the capital city of Airstrip One, an outpost of Oceania, a transatlantic one-party superstate in perpetually changing alliances and wars with its two counterparts, Eastasia and Eurasia. Winston Smith is an Outer Party functionary in the Ministry of Truth who alters or destroys documents so that the recorded past is consistent with the present needs of The Party. Winston commits treason when he begins writing private thoughts critical of The Party and its messiah-like leader, Big Brother—who may not exist—in a diary. He also begins an illicit relationship with Julia, a compatriot from another department. Given the intensity with which The Party seeks to suppress sexual instincts, this affair is highly subversive. The pair hopes that an Inner Party member, O’Brien, might lead them to The Brotherhood, an underground group intent on overthrowing The Party and Big Brother, but in the end he turns out to be a member of the Gestapo-like Thought Police. Upon capture, Winston and Julia are separately detained at the Ministry of Love. The novel ends in the ominous Room 101, where occupants are subjected to their deepest fears—in the case of Winston, rats. Torture breaks Winston, and in the novel’s finale he expresses his newfound love and devotion to Big Brother.

To call *Nineteen Eighty-Four* influential is to dramatically understate the case. Malcolm Bradbury, in his magisterial survey, *The Modern British Novel: 1878-2001* (2001), gives Orwell a key spot in England’s modern literary history. Bradbury writes that Orwell’s final few books, with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as their capstone, amount to transitional texts in that they “may have

¹ When it comes to Orwell’s title, Bernard Crick recommends critics “write it out, as it was first published in London, as indeed a title, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four,’ and not as a date—1984—as it is too often rendered. For it is not a prophecy, it is plainly a satire and a satire of a particular, even a peculiar kind—a Swiftian satire” (146). I concur with Crick and accordingly will render *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a title; however, when citing others who render it otherwise, as a date, I will leave it unchanged.

been the last novels of the Thirties; but they also became in effect the first British post-war novels, a fundamental line of continuity between the fiction of the Thirties and the writing of a post-Holocaust future” (229). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Bradbury continues, “was not simply a warning against Stalin, but [is] about the corruptions of power, the weaponry of propaganda, the structure of terror, the nature of authoritarianism, the use of scapegoats and victims, and the defeat of language itself” (229). Of course, Michael Walzer notes that, when published in 1949,

many of [*Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s] major themes had been anticipated, both in conservative literature and in the internal debates of the democratic left (and in earlier anti-utopian novels, like Zamyatin's *We* and Huxley's *Brave New World*). Yet, in another sense, Orwell was a forerunner: the major theoretical works on totalitarianism as a political regime—on its origins, history, and internal character—all appeared in the early and middle fifties. It is as if *1984* released the flood ... (103)²

Orwell's novel indeed plays a central role in the midcentury groundswell of indictments of totalitarianism, notably Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind* (1953), which helped sketch the contours of totalitarianism as a political concept, a process that collapsed Communism and Fascism into a single category. John Rodden highlights the meaning of Orwell to this wave: “because *Nineteen Eighty-Four* antedated *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and similar political treatises, some critics saw it as inaugurating this emergent tradition and suggested that it had inspired Arendt and later theorists” (61). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is thus foundational to the postwar political order. As early as 1954, Isaac Deutscher declared, “Few novels written in this generation have obtained a popularity as great as

² Walzer includes a partial list of the theoretical texts on totalitarianism to appear in the immediate wake of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: “Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* appeared in 1951, Jacob Talmon's *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* in the same year; Czeslaw Milosz's *Captive Mind* came out in 1953; C.J. Friedrich's *Totalitarianism*, an important collection of essays, appeared in 1954 and marked the academic arrival of the new theory; Zbigniew Brzezinski published his *Permanent Purge* in 1956, and Friedrich and Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* came out in the same year” (103).

that of George Orwell's *1984*. Few, if any, have made a similar impact on politics" (119). Randall Stevenson writes that "Orwell's life and writing can be seen to provide a touchstone for the political consciousness which was such a feature of his age" (45) and Richard Rorty claims that "Orwell was successful because he wrote exactly the right books at exactly the right time" (170). Yet, Abbott Gleason and Martha Nussbaum correctly emphasize that despite being "the great dramatizer of Cold War values, as seen from an anti-Soviet viewpoint ... Orwell did not lose his power with the collapse of the Soviet system" (1). The novel continues to resonate.

Nineteen Eighty-Four's indisputable influence, however, is often deemed dubious. Deutscher finds *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to embody "the convulsive fear of communism, which has swept the West since the end of the Second World War" (119), and Raymond Williams criticized the novel on multiple occasions for what he considered "its projections of ugliness and hatred, often quite arbitrarily and inconsequentially, onto the difficulties of revolution or political change [which, for Williams,] seem to introduce a period of really decadent bourgeois writing in which the whole status of human beings is reduced" (*Politics* 392).³ Along these lines, one of the novel's more contentious legacies amounts to an alleged blockage in the political imaginations of

³*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is also criticized, directly or implicitly, in more general challenges to the concept of totalitarianism itself. For example, Slavoj Žižek, probably the most prominent contemporary skeptic of the category, claims that "the notion of 'totalitarianism', far from being an effective theoretical concept, is a kind of *stopgap*" and that "'totalitarianism' was an ideological notion that sustained the complex operation of 'taming free radicals', of guaranteeing the liberal-democratic hegemony, dismissing the Leftist critique of liberal democracy as the obverse, the 'twin', of the Rightist Fascist dictatorship" (3). According to Žižek, "the moment one accepts the notion of 'totalitarianism', one is firmly located within the liberal-democratic horizon" (3). In response, Michael Bérubé brands Žižek a member of the "Manichean Left," for "[u]nderneath Žižek's formidable theoretical sophistication there is a quite simple knee-jerk reflex at work: if the opposition between democracy and totalitarianism favors the liberal-democratic West, then it is the job of leftist radicals to deny it" (4). Bérubé contends that, irrespective the merits of or problems with Žižek's critique, it offers little in the way of practical political alternatives. In any event, this study deemphasizes the relative validity of totalitarianism as itself a theoretical concept, in favor of foregrounding the actual effects of Orwell's conception of totalitarianism on later political novelists.

later writers. Howe, in fact, makes this very argument in *Politics and the Novel*. *Politics and the Novel* fittingly ends with Howe's chapter on Orwell, for Howe claims that *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s denunciation of totalitarianism effectively ends the political novel, at least as he conceives it. Howe concludes *Politics and the Novel* by announcing that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "brings us to the end of the line. Beyond this—one feels or hopes—it is impossible to go. In Orwell's book the political themes of the novels that have been discussed in earlier chapters reach their final and terrible flowering ... in ways that establish a continuity of vision and value between the nineteenth and twentieth century political novelists" (251). Political fiction, in Howe's analysis, largely disappears after World War II, and the political novels that do appear "constitute a literature of blockage, a literature of impasse" (252). Orwell thus seems to give the final, and despairing, word on the political novel—his novel is an epitaph.

In England, however, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s condemnation of totalitarianism is not the final destination of the political novel, from where no place left to go remains. Accounts of postwar political fiction in, say, the United States or formerly colonized nations will vary, but for Orwell's native country,⁴ *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as opposed to a blockage, is better seen as a valve through which England's literary and political histories flow and are redirected. Bradbury is correct to say that Orwell's fiction amounts to "a fundamental line of continuity" (229) across interwar and postwar English fiction, for though *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may punctuate the

⁴ Christopher Hitchens rightly notes that the "phrase 'quintessentially English', so often attached to Orwell's name, would fairly certainly have aroused his scorn" (115). Orwell wrote often and passionately on the condition of England and even the importance of patriotism, but he remained fiercely opposed to nationalism and was critical of England's imperial pursuits. Hitchens also notes that "Orwell was something of a sceptic about Britishness and the Union" (118), generally ignoring Wales and Ireland but writing "at some length about the potential for a resurgence of Scottish nationalism" (118). With Orwell's interests in mind, and the progressive "assertion of Scottish and Welsh and Irish nationhood" throughout the twentieth century, leading to a "devolving" or "deliquescing" United Kingdom (Hitchens 116), this study will limit itself to English novelists.

political debates of the previous decades, in so doing it also sets the terms for future political novelists. To be sure, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a timely novel in which “[e]verything has hardened into politics, the leviathan has swallowed man” (Howe 238), but rather than foreclosing subsequent political novels, Orwell’s book maintains even as it transforms the tradition of political fiction. Orwell’s denunciation of totalitarianism overlaps with broader anxieties toward totalization pervasive in postwar England, initiating a line of political fiction in which uneasiness if not hostility toward totalization is its animating principle. The import of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not that it terminates the political novel, but that it coheres and crystallizes fears over totalization in myriad forms—political, cultural, and philosophical. Orwell’s book exemplifies and articulates such fears so potently that they reverberate across the political fiction in its wake.

While new ways of thinking about politics and the political expand and diversify postwar novelists’ engagements with politics, Orwellian anti-totalizing impulses serve as their connective tissue. This common thread, however, has gone unnoticed by critics of the post-1945 English novel. Indeed, scholarship on postwar fiction in England lacks a coherent account of the political novel. But, political fiction does not simply disappear in the postwar era: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a touchstone for the English political novel, not its gravestone. Orwell’s landmark book does not serve as a hard break from the political fiction of the century’s first half. On the contrary, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* bridges prewar and postwar political novels. Orwell’s anxieties over totalitarianism—which extend to cover other forms of totalization—constitute this continuity.

Yet, the assumption that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* culminates the political novel’s lineage has retained purchase among critics. Howe would himself reaffirm his widely accepted thesis in an epilogue added to *Politics and the Novel* in 1987:

Political fiction has not flourished in the relative stability of the Western countries during the decades after the Second World War.

Neither conservative stasis nor social democratic moderation ... are able to inspire first-rate novels dealing with political themes. ... Political fiction requires wrenching conflicts, a drama of words and often blood, roused states of being, or at least a memory of these. And in the decades after the Second World War, such excitements have been abundant only in Eastern Europe and parts of the third world. (254)

Needless to say, Howe's statement dramatically downplays the often violent political upheavals and unrest to occur in Western Europe and North America during the latter half of the twentieth century. Howe's interpretation of the standing of the political novel on either side of World War II, however, derives from his inability to comprehend political fiction that responds to the continually receding aftermath of those total wars, his critical eye limited to political fiction that engages with the ideological conflicts that built toward them.

Still, for Howe to say that the political novel disappears after Orwell seems on the face of it absurd, since critics have certainly not stopped theorizing and commenting upon the relationships between politics and literature. But Howe's judgment, if mistaken, is at least somewhat more understandable when the specific ways that he conceives of politics and the political novel are taken into account. For Howe, the term "political novel" is in effect shorthand for a novel in which the relation between politics and literature "is interesting enough to warrant investigation" (17). To be slightly more precise, Howe calls a political novel a book "in which *we take to be dominant* political ideas or the political milieu, a novel which permits this assumption without thereby suffering any radical distortion and, it follows, with the possibility of some analytical profit" (17). Such rewards derive from a productive tension between, on one hand, political impulses toward collective action and the public good and, on the other hand, humanistic ideals of individual agency and an private inner life. The political novel, writes David Bromwich, "must be written by an artist who feels divided by the claim of justice and the claim

of other values” (3). This mandate entails “imagin[ing] the life of ideology without oneself being reduced to ideology” (Bromwich 5), an endeavor that results in “a novel [that] keeps alive an awareness of the conflict—an awareness that inhibits action even as it informs the consciousness of action” (Bromwich 3). Now, why does Howe believe that such novels cease to exist after Orwell? Howe’s overarching narrative in *Politics and the Novel* describes “the way in which politics increasingly controls a certain kind of novel” (Howe 17), culminating with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which “politics has achieved an almost total dominion” (Howe 17), reducing the political novel’s defining dynamic to “a dim underground motif” (Howe 239). In Howe’s view, Orwell overwhelmed the novel with politics, tilting the balance so that a productive tension disappears and the purely destructive power of politics is placed in relief.⁵

This nightmare vision is so powerful that, after Orwell, novelists simply could not treat politics and ideology as they did before. In his introduction to *Politics and the Novel*’s second edition, Bromwich explains that in the late twentieth century “ideology is portrayed more and more as a temptation, a giddy magnetism of ideas which only the greatest strength of will and conscience can resist. Ideology has now become the mass culture of political life—a distorting and narrowing discipline that absorbs the mind of the political actor, just as theology absorbs the mind of the religious fanatic” (5). In the postwar era, Bromwich continues, ideology “blots out the particular knowledge of human things that is the birthright of every man and woman” (5),

⁵ Jesse Matz similarly notes Orwell’s own search for balance, averring that “Orwell had always been something of a critic of the aesthetic bias of the modern novel. To him, extreme experiments had always seemed precious: detachment from reality, radical skepticism, and playing around with language looked to him fairly self-indulgent . . . And yet in the 1930s Orwell also disliked the way things had gone too far in the other direction. He noted that the highly politicized atmosphere of the decade had made good fiction impossible” (91). Matz argues that “[w]hat Orwell thought necessary was some kind of middle ground, between political responsibility and imaginative freedom” (92). Matz does not suggest, however, that Orwell went too far to one extreme in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

and that—“as any reader of *1984* will know”—the novel “has as its central task the care and memory of those particulars” (5). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for Howe, is a key text in the changed dynamic between politics and the novel: their relation, after Orwell, seems to become zero-sum. While Howe and Bromwich are not incorrect that the committed embrace of political ideologies is increasingly taken as the root cause of total war and oppressive totalitarian regimes, their assessment of postwar political fiction simplifies and misreads the complex ways that politics figures into the literary imagination during this time.

For the stalwartly socialist Howe, politics is the admirable and necessary mechanism for positive social change, but, tragically, the utopian goal of politics is ultimately unattainable and thus remains an impossible ideal. Though ideological thinking is in many cases the source of liberation, it also runs the risk of hardening into dogma and subsuming individual autonomy. Therefore, for Howe, “the authentic political novel is constituted by its account of heroic action on behalf of ideals that are forever out of reach. ... However, the heroic, while necessary, is for Howe insufficient if not combined with the *political*—human beings taking charge of their own destiny” (Scheingold 110). Howe, in the end, “puts his faith in politics and honors novelists who believe that in the long run political action will somehow be successful” (Scheingold 11). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* challenges this vision, accelerating the growing cynicism toward politics found not just among artists and intellectuals, but also in wider civic and political discourses.

This rising skepticism toward politics is at bottom an evolving response to the Russian Revolution. Howe insists that the revolution is the “central event of [the twentieth] century” (Howe 203), and that it “had a lasting effect on the contemporary novel” (204). This impact includes writers’ realization that the revolution had failed. According to Howe, “The contrast between early political hope and later disillusionment becomes the major theme of the twentieth

century political novel: Malraux, Silone, Koestler—all are obsessed by the failure, or betrayal, of the revolution” (205). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the apotheosis of this disenchantment. The political, cultural, and literary contexts of postwar England change so dramatically after—and in part because of—Orwell that later novelists find grappling with the failures of revolutionary politics a purposeless, even incomprehensible, exercise. Howe writes, “The emotions of the ex-Communist can no longer animate a serious work of fiction: who can imagine a novel like *Darkness at Noon* being written in the 1980s? ... The debates which excite the characters of Dostoevsky and Turgenev, the creeds that move and destroy the characters of Malraux and Koestler: these hardly figure in the political fiction of recent years, except perhaps as the debris of an earlier time. And not only does ideology fade, even the play of serious ideas declines” (253). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the ultimate expression of this dissatisfaction, and political fiction has presumably been diminished, if not practically eliminated, in the decades to follow the novel.

Since *Politics and the Novel* sketches an apparently discrete phase of political fiction—running roughly from Stendhal to Orwell—those critics who retain Howe’s basic formulation for political fiction during the postwar era, such as Boyers and Stuart Scheingold,⁶ are compelled to accommodate *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s position as the end of the line. Along these lines, Boyers’s *Atrocity and Amnesia: The Political Novel Since 1945* (1985) chimes with Howe’s notion that political fiction disappears from the postwar West. Boyers’s study includes only one English

⁶ Boyers’s preface to his study begins with the sentence, “Ever since I read Irving Howe’s *Politics and the Novel* twenty years ago, I have wanted to write a book of my own on the subject.” For Scheingold’s part, in the early pages of his study, he telegraphs for the reader Howe’s primacy to his argument: “When subsequently we turn to the modern *political* novel our guide will be Irving Howe who, writing primarily about novels of the inter-war period, was the foremost modernist literary critic to take the political novel seriously” (7).

political novelist, Graham Greene,⁷ turning instead to Latin American novelists such as Gabriel García Márquez and Alejo Carpentier, and writers from continental Europe—chiefly Eastern Europe—such as Milan Kundera, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Günter Grass.

Boyers also allows that Howe's model cannot be applied to those novelists wholesale, specifically contrasting his chosen authors to Orwell, who he takes to represent a bygone era. Boyers asserts that "the intentions at issue are so much more various in these writers than in the early twentieth-century novelists studied by Howe that one must find new ways of discussing them. No theory of the political novel that installs Orwell ... as a representative figure is likely to know what to make of *The Tin Drum* or *Autumn of the Patriarch* (6). Nevertheless, Boyers's definition of the political novel—which concludes that at its core "the political novel is always in some unmistakable way an engagement with the common world" (18)—proposes "accept[ing], provisionally, the main terms of Howe's description of the political novel" (8). These terms are Howe's claims that, in political novels, political ideas have "a kind of independent motion," that "their main characters 'regard their personal fates as intimately bound up with social and political arrangements'" and that "there will be some attempt to project a common world that is more than a series of isolated tableaux, images, or emblems" (9). With respect to the meaning of politics in Boyers's book, moreover, Scheingold writes that "Boyers' conception of the political novel is much more open and eclectic with respect to the political, but he [too] is unwilling to acknowledge alienation and cynicism as legitimate standpoints for the political novelist" (8). Despite his more capacious sense of the political, Boyers is faithful to Howe by maintaining that

⁷ In a chapter on Holocaust fiction, Boyers also includes a reading of George Steiner's *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.* (1981), though Steiner's relative "Englishness" is disputable. Moreover, Boyers reads only one English novelist (out of eighteen) in his subsequent study, *The Dictator's Dictation*, namely Pat Barker, though he also devotes a chapter to the German-born W.G. Sebald, who eventually settled in the United Kingdom.

“the search for a resolution to the vexing and seemingly intractable problems of political life becomes the *raison d’être*” (Scheingold 8) of the political novelist and that, after Orwell, writers who pursue this aim are largely found outside the United States, Western Europe, and England.

Atrocity and Amnesia certainly demonstrates the remarkable political and aesthetic range of postwar political fiction, and how the genre manifests in myriad politico-cultural contexts, but Boyers clearly accepts Howe’s questionable view that political fiction in England largely disappears after 1945. Moreover, *Atrocity and Amnesia* does not attempt to unify its selected novels with any through-line running across postwar political fiction, a gap *After Orwell* seeks to help fill. On the other hand, another of Howe’s inheritors, Scheingold, does offer a coherent interpretation of postwar political fiction.

In *The Political Novel* (2010), Scheingold posits that the dominant species of political fiction during the late twentieth century is what he dubs the novel of political estrangement. Scheingold argues that novels of political estrangement “constitute a new genre that resonates with the mournful legacy of the twentieth century—that is, with the futility of political struggle. [They] shift attention from political actors and institutions to the general public—ordinary people whose agency has been appropriated by autocratic regimes, by bureaucratic institutions and by professionals with the expertise to colonize consciousness” (2). By presenting politics and political actors as an “absent presence,” such novels direct attention to “consumers and casualties” (19) of the political. He asserts that this genre emerges first in the ashes of World War I, though its development “accelerated in the postwar period” (13). As Scheingold explains it, whereas for Howe “the dual mission of a political novel is to illuminate the shortcomings of the prevailing political order and to identify how best to transcend them” novels of political estrangement “express a distrust of the political derived from and in tune with World War I, the

subsequent global economic turmoil and totalitarianism of the left and the right in the 1930s” (8). Novels of political estrangement, Scheingold clarifies, “do not supplant Howe’s understanding of politics and the novel, but are especially consonant with the convulsions of the twentieth century” (9). Postwar England’s political fiction is invisible to Howe and Boyers, Scheingold maintains, since they do not accept politics and ideology as at root destructive forces, which is the defining perspective of novels of political estrangement.

While Scheingold locates the source for novels of political estrangement in the traumatic aftermath of World War I and identifies Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925) as its prototype, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* remains pivotal. Scheingold asserts that, despite Howe’s appreciation of Orwell’s rendering of totalitarian politics in their “pure” form, Howe “is unwilling to share Orwell’s cynicism about politics—a cynicism based solely on totalitarian politics: politics at its very worst. In contrast, Howe believes that politics provides the only opportunity for beneficent collective action—human agency working on behalf of human welfare” (10). But, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems “to do no more than invite us to somehow adapt, indeed capitulate, to the disastrous consequences that inevitably accompany the consolidation of ‘successful’ revolutions” (Scheingold 10)—reflecting an anti-political cynicism that, Scheingold contends, permeates the culture. Scheingold asserts that Howe’s disappointment and disagreement with Orwell’s despair over politics is both the reason Howe understands *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to be “the end of the line” for political fiction and the explanation for Howe’s inability (or refusal) to register the postwar ascendance of novels of political estrangement. Scheingold’s divergence from Howe, then, is his inclusion of novels that ultimately reject politics under the rubric of political fiction.

Despite the significance of Scheingold’s novel of political estrangement, *The Political Novel* does not necessarily provide an accurate picture of political fiction in postwar England.

After all, most of the novels of political estrangement read by Scheingold emerge from and directly confront intensely traumatic political schisms, such as the experience of total war, the height and aftermath of Nazism in Germany, and the Holocaust. The novels of political estrangement from the United States and United Kingdom, which tend to grapple with the contradictions and inadequacies of democracy, often inflected with ethnic or racial tensions, quite frankly pale in comparison to novels addressing the devastations and disillusionments of genocide. And, English novels of political estrangement in particular retain some measure of conviction and faith in the validity and necessity of political action. Indeed, Scheingold points to this fact when he qualifies that “novelists in the UK tend to express a sense of promises partially redeemed by the welfare state and sustained by a political culture of social welfare biased toward inclusion” (201). Not only does the novel of political estrangement not wholly replace Howe’s notion of political fiction, but in England even novels of political estrangement are tempered by latent optimism in the redemptive potential of politics.

Moreover, Scheingold overstates Howe’s principled rejection of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In fact, in his analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Howe is sure to note, “When Winston Smith learns to think of Oceania as a *problem*—which is itself to commit a ‘crimethink’—he turns to the forbidden work of Emmanuel Goldstein, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, clearly a replica of Trotsky’s *The Revolution Betrayed*” (239). Politics may have destroyed the individual and freedom in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but political thinking, represented by Goldstein’s book, yet remains the source of potential liberation. This tension—“the need for politics in the modern world” abutting “a profound distaste for the ways of political life” (Howe

239)—is cited by Howe as constituting the “power and intelligence” (239) of Orwell’s novel.⁸ While Scheingold’s identification of novels of political estrangement is helpful, his study wrongly asserts that Orwell’s final novel is continuous with subsequent political novels by way of a rejection of politics *qua* politics, overlooking the fact that, in the English context at least, the stronger link is Orwell’s preoccupation with the destructive effects of totalization.⁹ In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, totalitarianism is condemned for pushing political ideology into every sphere of the individual’s life, but this condition is challenged by the political consciousness that Winston intuitively and Goldstein articulates. Totalizing politics, not politics per se, is Orwell’s target.

Still, Boyers and Scheingold together demonstrate that Howe’s basic formulation remains a viable way to read postwar political novels, while also offering necessary ways to expand the category of political fiction and rethink the sphere of the political. This accomplishment bears noting, for it goes against the grain of criticism on political fiction to appear throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Indeed, literary critics and theorists have in several cases contended that “political novel” as a term is so imprecise that it is effectively meaningless and should therefore be scrapped altogether or, alternately, that all novels are inherently and inescapably political, a point that renders the term redundant. At the same time, other critics possessed of, in Howe’s words, “a certain kind of mind, called, perhaps a little too

⁸ Erika Gottlieb’s *The Orwell Conundrum* (1992) explores these competing impulses, which she characterizes as despair and faith, as they operate in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

⁹ Ian Williams observes that “Orwell’s memorable final books ensured that he is remembered more for what he was against, totalitarianism, than what he was for, which as he often asserted, was democratic socialism” (109). In other words, too many interpretations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* obscure the fact Orwell is neither for nor against politics as an abstraction. Indeed, in an oft-cited letter to the United Automobile Workers, Orwell promises, “My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralised economy is liable and which have already been partly realised in Communism and Fascism” (“Henson” 502). Orwell opposes certain forms, practices, and temptations of politics, but by his own declaration he is *for* specific political values and goals. Howe remains aware of this qualification.

easily, the academic mind, [continue to insist] upon exhaustive rites of classification” (16). While Howe certainly believes that not all novels should be read as political novels, he is “concerned with perspectives of observation, not categories of classification” (16). Critical treatments of the subject in the decades after *Politics and the Novel*, in contrast to Howe’s approach, tend to be either too constrictive or expansive.

According to Howe’s sense of it, the political novel need not necessarily feature political actors or directly probe the workings of political bodies. By contrast, Christopher Harvie describes a strand of English political fiction that takes just such a focus. These novels feature “a realistic treatment of parties, Parliament, the work of government—and the relationship of this to less overtly political things like religious and economic conflicts, public opinion and the media, industry, war and foreign policy” (2). This form of political fiction’s “central figure is Benjamin Disraeli” (Harvie 3), and its exemplars range from “George Eliot’s *Felix Holt* and Trollope’s Palliser novels to Meredith’s *Beauchamp’s Career* and H.G. Wells’s *The New Machiavelli*” (Harvie 4). Though Harvie cites *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an instance of when, for his definition of political fiction, “the occasional abstract idea, conveyed by treatise or non-naturalistic fiction ... might have to be admitted” (2), in the main “the importance of the genre lies in its *praxis*” (2). This variety of political fiction’s production of “a useful political discourse for a traditional society intent on social and economic change” (Harvie 2) differs from Howe’s sense. Scheingold explains that “precisely because [the novels of political life that Harvie catalogs] immerse themselves in the political process, in *how* power is exercised, they are neither well positioned, nor do they ordinarily aspire, to inquire into the legitimacy of the political order and/or its social, cultural and economic foundations and consequences” (19). Literary engagements with the abstractions of ideology, however, are precisely Howe’s interest.

Howe's conception of the political novel is also distinct from fiction with an explicitly political point of view or agenda, commonly referred to as *littérature engagée*, committed literature, or didactic fiction. In *Ars Americana, Ars Politica* (2010), Peter Swirski distinguishes what he calls "partisan" literature from Howe's "disjunction of political action and political setting" (9). Swirski writes, "Unlike Howe, I take political setting *and* activist attitude to be necessary ingredients of political art" (9).¹⁰ Partisan or committed fiction is in effect political advocacy, but Howe's political fiction purposefully exerts pressure on its own political values. Howe writes, "No matter how much the writer intends to celebrate or discredit a political ideology, no matter how didactic or polemical his [or her] purpose may be, his [or her] novel cannot finally rest on the idea 'in itself.' ... [The political novelist's] task is always to show the relation between theory and experience, between the ideology that has been preconceived and the tangle of feelings and relationships he [or she] is trying to present" (22). Contra fiction that takes partisanship as its *raison d'être*, Howe warns against excessive or uncritical politicking, lest it degenerate into coarse propaganda. Political fiction, for Howe, creates a polarity between the political ideology that is represented and presumably apolitical literary objectives and impulses.

Lastly, Howe's conception should also be differentiated from what can be called the politics of literature. Jacques Rancière asserts that the "expression 'politics of literature' implies that literature does politics simply by being literature" (3). Political activity, in Rancière's view,

¹⁰ While Swirski looks at American political fiction, he recognizes that "political literature on the other side of the Atlantic can be as blistering as anything published in the USA today. For proof, look no further than John Le Carré's *Absolute Friends* or Alistair Beaton's *A Planet for the President*" (18). Swirski's emphasis on popular culture also puts him at odds with Howe, who valorized modernist standards of literary excellence, but Swirski justifies his focus by noting that "[p]opular art has a way of changing the way we see the world, if not the world itself" (15). In fact, Swirski cites Orwell as an example of popular fiction's power: "*1984* armed successive generations with a lexicon with which to take government to task" (15). This citation testifies both to the permeability of definitions and to the deep significance of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which is also made an exception for Harvie's vision of political fiction.

“introduces new objects and subjects onto the common stage. It makes visible what was invisible, it makes audible as speaking beings those who were previously heard only as noisy animals. The expression ‘politics of literature’ thereby implies that literature intervenes as literature in [politics’] carving up of space and time, the visible and the invisible, speech and noise” (4). Yet, as Rancière acknowledges, the relationship between literature and politics is far from unidirectional. To this point, in *Literary Theory* (1996), Terry Eagleton contends that the value judgments determining what does or does not qualify as literature “refer in the end not simply to private taste, but to the assumptions by which certain social groups exercise and maintain power over others” (14). In other words, the idea of literature is itself a political idea.

The logical extension of this view holds that all literature is necessarily political. Lennard Davis makes this case in *Resisting Novels* (1987), arguing that “all novels are inherently ideological and in that sense are about the political and social world. That is, even overtly apolitical novels have embedded in their structure political statements about the world and our organization of our perceptions about that world” (224). This view is concisely put by Fredric Jameson, who pronounces in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) that not just literature but in fact “everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political” (20).¹¹ Davis calls the types of novels that interest Howe “novels of political content,” which, for Davis, is “a highly focused sub-example of the way that politics can be in a novel—just as the detective novel is a sub-example of the hermeneutic requirement of the novel as such” (231). While Davis allows that Howe’s political

¹¹ Orwell himself recognized the inextricability of literature and politics. In “Why I Write,” Orwell admits that “no book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude” (4). Furthermore, Orwell’s seminal essay “Politics and the English Language” (1946) puts forward the argument that due “to the interactive relationship between politics and language, the decline of one indicates and simultaneously exacerbates that of the other” (Marks 158). As Jeffrey Myers puts it, “The assumption that the act of writing is in itself a political act runs through all of Orwell’s work” (180).

novels, or novels of political content, can participate crucially in wider political discourses and endeavors, “the collective enterprise of the novel, with its in-built ideological defenses, can and does alter our behavior *en masse*—and can do so cumulatively over the years as individual readers and as a society with a novelistic tradition” (230). Politics and the novel, then, matter far less than the politics of the novel. Yet, the premise of the politics of literature—that “the literary is by definition political and the political is by definition literary” (Scheingold 13)—is not necessarily incompatible with Howe’s sense of political fiction, though the two do stand apart.

Boyers concedes that to accept literature’s ideological underpinnings calls the very idea of the political novel into question, for doing so reveals the artificiality of genre boundaries and renders the adjective in “political novel” redundant; nonetheless, undeterred, he works to reconcile the idea of a distinct category called “political fiction” with the view that all fiction is political. Paradoxically, when all novels are held to be political, the political novel as a distinctive category ceases to exist. But, this critical pressure is welcome, argues Boyers, for a “deconstructionist insistence on the diversity of codes inscribed within a single text and on the structural discontinuities even of works that labor to conceal the competition among the several narrative paradigms they contain will usefully remind us to beware of seductive unitary schemas” (Boyers 4). However, Boyers maintains that Howe’s idea of political fiction is “an acceptable, if fluid, definition” (5) that can be affirmed even in the face of theoretical skepticism, since Howe incorporates narrative disjunctions into his framework. Still, as Boyers indicates, Howe cites as the political novel’s defining characteristic a perceptible “conflict between ideology and emotion, as at times their fusion and mutual reinforcement” (Howe 239). Political fiction derives its power from this tension between political ideas and activities, taken as

determinate forces in society, and countervailing humanistic values such as individual autonomy and feeling, which Howe aligns with literature.

This dynamic between political motivation and individual agency is the basis for Boyers's argument to retain political fiction as a distinct category. Howe, argues Boyers, insists that characters in a political novel face an "apolitical temptation" in the sense that "their attraction to politics and to political ideas is contaminated by their desire for gratifications that have in the end little to do with political objectives" (5). Thus, writes Boyers, critics must seek

discontinuities in the work, and attend to various elements that seem not to contribute to the political perspective. In the end we demand that the novel at least attempt to reunify the various elements. Separate issues—psychological, political, ethical—must be seen to work together in the service of a determinate goal. That goal may not be fully realized or acknowledged in the work itself, but it will inevitably be seen to underlie the competing narrative codes and issues. And if the work is in fact properly designated a political novel, the determinate goal toward which the various elements tend will have something to do with ideas about community, collective action, and the distribution of power. (16)

Boyers does not deny Jameson's postulation that a "political unconscious" runs beneath and informs individual texts as well as collective notions of "humanistic values" and literature itself, nor does he dispute the idea that genre distinctions are critical constructions, not essential categories. But, Boyers claims, Howe's flexible formulation, which admits the critic's role in determining a novel to be a political novel, retains its meaningfulness because it requires the critic to convincingly argue that, cumulatively, the text's contradictions can be read as constituting a statement concerning the public realm.¹² Any novel that can be reasonably understood as inviting such a reading is one that can be appropriately labeled a political novel.

¹² Boyers has vacillated of late on the validity of political fiction as a category. In the introduction to *The Dictator's Dictation* (2005), his sequel to *Atrocity and Amnesia*, Boyers claims that he "no longer think it useful to speak of 'political novels'" (4). Seven years later,

Despite their important contributions toward retaining, recuperating, and revising Howe's vision of the political novel, neither critic provides an exhaustive account nor provides much insight on the postwar political novel in the English literary tradition. Indeed, Boyers almost fully ignores political fiction from England, and Scheingold's novel of political estrangement provides an incomplete picture. Scheingold is right to identify *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the decisive transitional text; however, the central concern of English political novelists after Orwell, rather than estrangement from politics, is the lurking totalitarian impulse in all political activity and thought, as well as the wider dangers that derive from various forms of totalization—all of which are pronounced in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Orwell's final novel has long been understood as a repudiation of totalitarianism. Rodden writes that, thanks largely to Howe's reading, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is widely accepted as an abstract theorization of totalitarianism in its "essential" state. According to Rodden, "Following Howe's declaration that 'no other book has succeeded so completely in rendering the essential quality of totalitarianism' and his detailed examination of Orwell's 'view of the dynamics of power in a totalitarian state,' critics treated *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the fictional counterpart to theoretical studies on totalitarianism by Arendt, Richard Lowenthal, Carl Friedrich, and Zbigniew Brzezinski" (61). Yet, Orwell's abstract model, like its non-fiction counterparts, drew its inspiration from the actual totalitarian regimes of his age. Hermann Lübbe writes, "Some features of Orwell's narrative remind one more of National Socialism or Fascism—the black uniforms, for example; others are more characteristic of phases of the cultural construction of socialism—the public pariahization of the erotic for example, with its privatizing, de-Communizing influence in the case of fulfilment" (249). Such inspirations and resonances do not

however, he would again affirm "political novel" "as a shorthand for 'a novel invested in politics as a way of thinking about the fate of society at a particular place and time'" ("Between").

conflict with the idea that Orwell offers an abstracted totalitarian state: Lübbe concludes that Orwell likely “profited as a novelist more from Hitler than from Stalin” but, ultimately, “the oppressive character of the Orwellian ‘Ingsoc’ world is based entirely on the fact that it is impossible to locate it as extreme left or extreme right according to left-right preferences.” (249).¹³ While *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be read as critiquing specific practices of Nazism and Stalinism, the novel is too general to be read as a direct engagement with either, or any other, regime. Readings of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that stress the novel’s attacks on features or activities of actual totalitarian regimes thus sit easily with readings of it as a theoretical model of totalitarianism—the resemblances are present, but they are extrapolated into an abstraction.

A more controversial reading claims that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* makes a prediction for the future. Jeffrey Myers observes, “The most common cliché of Orwell criticism is that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a “nightmare vision” of future totalitarianism” (126), but he rebuts this cliché as misguided: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s “great originality results more from a realistic synthesis and rearrangement of familiar materials than from any prophetic or imaginary speculations” (126). Indeed, continues Myers, the “‘nightmare’ of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—which he saw in films like *Escape*—realistically portrayed the political terrorism of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, transposed into the austere landscape of wartime London” (99). Morris

¹³ Lübbe identifies eight specific characteristics of totalitarian rule drawn from the narrative of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, none of which, he claims, can be limited to either end of the political spectrum: 1. “the infringement upon daily life of the deficit caused by planning”; 2. “the politicization of all areas of life”; 3. “the complementarity of leader-cult and legitimation by populist, plebiscitary rule”; 4. “the privileged status granted to ordinary criminals in the totalitarian prisons compared to political criminals”; 5. “the public duty to demonstrate enthusiasm, confidence and strength of conviction”; 6. “the propagandistic omnipresence of the enemy and the role of hate as the collectivizing glue of the polity”; 7. “the institutionalized efforts to gain maximum political control of a past that is held present”; and 8. “the liquidation of opposition in the form of assigning subjects the status of non-persons” (248). Lübbe intimates that this list is not necessarily comprehensive.

Dickstein likewise asserts, “*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a novel and not a political prediction. It was an extrapolation of the world around him at a very interesting moment” (qtd in Rodden, 129), and Dominic Head argues that the “immediate resonance” of Orwell’s novel “was dependent upon the post-war experience of austerity, where shortages, rationing, and government control and bureaucracy made (in particular) the confinement of ‘Airstrip One’, Orwell’s depiction of London in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, seem a faintly plausible extension of reality” (13). Orwell is thinking about the then-present moment in England, not predicting a probable political future.¹⁴

These two interpretations of Orwell’s book—*Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a political treatise and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a satiric “state of England” novel—coexist by way of a sort of Gestalt principle. The novel, on the one hand, evokes actually existing totalitarianisms without directly referencing a specific regime by distilling their shared characteristics to their essences. On the other hand, Orwell projects these essential features onto English society and describes a beleaguered nation—bombed out and rationed¹⁵—in order to caricature England’s actual present

¹⁴ John Rossi and John Rodden argue that, contra widespread assumptions that Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the midst of dejection and a deteriorated mental state due to his physical illness, the “evidence that Orwell was depressed about the future is weak. . . . The book had clear connections to events in the Soviet Union under Stalin, but Orwell meant to generalise about what will happen to the free individual if the trend of concentrating power in the hands of the state wasn’t reversed” (9). Moreover, Jonathan Rose suggests that Orwell’s nightmare vision is a response to the socio-political changes in the wake of World War I: “The First World War called into existence a profoundly new and disturbing England. Although *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is often described as a portrait of Britain in 1944, in many ways Orwell found his model for totalitarianism of Britain in the previous conflict” (30).

¹⁵ Early in the novel, Orwell describes Winston’s attempt to “squeeze out some childhood memory that should tell him whether London had always been quite like this. Were there always these vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with balks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy garden walls sagging in all directions? And the bombed sites where the plaster dust swirled in the air and the willow herb straggled over the heaps of rubble; and the places where the bombs had cleared a larger path and there had sprung up sordid colonies of wooden dwellings like chicken houses” (7)? This passage could believably be meant to reflect the thoughts of a typical Londoner surveying the damage of the Blitz.

state in the early postwar years. The sum of these coexisting images is a sort of double-vision that reveals both the nature of totalitarianism as an abstract political concept and the ways that England is currently guarded against, already implementing, and vulnerable to totalitarianism.

This dual effect chimes with a major theme of the only other book on the subject arguably more influential than Orwell's: Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt's massive study outlines the phenomenon, and, in so doing, "made it impossible for anyone to assume that Nazism and Stalinism were dark emanations of the German soil or Russian soul, geographic accidents that could be ascribed to one country's unfortunate traditions. Totalitarianism was, as the title of the book's British edition put it, 'the burden of our times'" (Robin 98). Describing his intentions with the novel, Orwell wrote that the "scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasise that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, *if not fought against*, could triumph anywhere" ("Henson" 502). Orwell, then, casts totalitarianism as an existential threat in modernity. Political novelists after Orwell are not compelled to outright and altogether reject politics, as Scheingold suggests, but they must contend with the framework of totalitarianism that Orwell helps sketch, and proceed with the conscious awareness of the totalizing dangers inherent to any political ideology.

Nineteen Eighty-Four's resonances with postwar political fiction extend past its vision of and warning against totalitarian politics, abutting and bleeding into anxieties over other forms of totalization—even the very idea of totalization itself. Orwell's totalitarian fears unite, crystallize, and propel broader contemporary intellectual trends that position totalization itself as inherently dangerous. *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* attack on totalitarianism is part of a much bigger dialogue challenging manifold, but interconnected forms of political and cultural totalization. For Orwell, totalitarianism and its destructive effects are not isolated to specific political traditions or cultural

tendencies, but are instead located in various figurations of totalization. Forms of totalization range from deterministic, teleological, and routinizing schemas that subsume agency into inevitable laws, historical processes, or fixed patterns to essentialist thinking that bars difference, homogenizes, and mitigates plurality.

Totalitarianism is the form, while totalization is the process—the process, or rather processes. That is to say, totalizing processes lead to totalitarian politics and regimes, the totalizing processes occur, and must perpetually recur, when totalitarian ideologies are put into effect. Arendt argues that it is chiefly

for the sake of [a] supersense, for the sake of complete consistency, that it is necessary for totalitarianism to destroy every trace of what we commonly call human dignity. For respect for human dignity implies the recognition of my fellow-men or our fellow-nations as subjects, as builders of worlds or cobuilders of a common world. No ideology which aims at the explanation of all historical events of the past and at mapping out the course of all events of the future can bear the unpredictability which springs from the fact that men are creative, that they can bring forward something so new that nobody ever foresaw it. (n.p)

Moreover, Arendt continues, the terroristic tactics that typically accompany totalitarian regimes “leaves no space for such private life and that the self-coercion of totalitarian logic destroys man's capacity for experience and thought just as certainly as his capacity for action” (n.p.). The totalizing prerequisites and practices of totalitarianism, for Arendt, include a complete

understanding of the movements of history, past and present, as well as the enforced elimination of autonomous thought and action.

Heterogeneity, difference, pluralism, privacy, and individuality are thus taken as the anti-totalizing mechanisms that destabilize and prevent totalitarianism. Indeed, theorists after Arendt would take such rationale further. In *Empire* (2000), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri claim that any notion of community—for example, “the nation”—that threatens or manages to subsume an individual from the multitude into a collective body—transforming singular persons into “a people”—constitutes totalitarian logic. According to Hardt and Negri,

In its most coherent form the concept of totalitarianism was used to denounce the destruction of the democratic public sphere, the continuation of Jacobinist ideologies, the extreme form of racist nationalism, and the negation of market forces. ... In fact, totalitarianism consists not simply in totalizing the effects of social life and subordinating them to a global disciplinary norm, but also in the negation of social life itself, the erosion of its foundation, and the theoretical and practical stripping away of the very possibility of the existence of the multitude. What is totalitarian is the organic foundation and the unified source of society and the state. The community is not a dynamic collective creation but a primordial founding myth. An originary notion of the people poses an identity that homogenizes and purifies the image of the population while blocking the constructive interactions of differences within the multitude. (112-3)

Read in this light, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a foundational expression of the late twentieth century’s paradigmatic apprehension and resistance toward totalization that still reverberates in the postwar political novel. Narrowed to the context of midcentury England, Orwell’s totalitarian fears align him with the influential anti-totalizing thrusts found in the thought of such towering contemporaries as the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin and the literary critic F.R. Leavis.¹⁶

¹⁶ As Kurt Koenigsberger’s *The Novel and the Menagerie: Totality, Englishness, and Empire* (2007) illustrates, decolonization also contributes to this rejection of and retreat from totalization in postwar English intellectual life. Koenigsberger argues that “while English thinkers [typically]

Concerns over totalization, first of all, are prominent in midcentury England's mainstream political thought, the greatest exponent of which is a Russian-Jewish émigré, Isaiah Berlin. Stefan Collini indicates the magnitude of Berlin to England's political and intellectual histories: "Above all, among those who did attempt to explore the intellectual roots of totalitarianism (the names of Hannah Arendt and Jacob Talmon come to mind), there were none, it would seem, who could offer the combination of the cultural range, the intellectual power, the moral passion, the institutional authority, and the personal charm that cultivated readers on both sides of the Atlantic found in [Berlin's thought]" (206). Patrick Gardner similarly recognizes that Berlin's essays "were originally written in the 1950s, and the various allusions they contain to speculative social theories and blueprints may therefore partly be viewed as reflecting the preoccupations of a period acutely conscious of the totalitarian ideologies that continued to hold sway over much of the political landscape" (xviii). Perhaps Berlin's most lasting contribution to the political thought of the period, especially pertaining to totalitarianism, is his distinction between positive and negative liberties. This line of thought firmly connects Berlin and Orwell.

avoided theorizing totality in the abstract idioms of their Continental counterparts" (5), *prewar* novelists gave life to totalization in their fiction: the novel "aspired to totality both in its form (a complete aesthetic object) and in its reach (a comprehensive treatment of its world)" (5). However, Koenigsberger cites Orwell's 1947 nonfiction meditation, *English People*, as a turning point: "Since the publication of Orwell's book, England has not been able to take for granted such a makeup; the second half of the twentieth century was a period in which the British empire, the United Kingdom, Great Britain, and English identity itself appeared at times to be falling into diminished and disoriented forms" (20). This shift was presaged in the novel by modernist writers, for whom "excess, rupture, and incongruity" (24) became prominent thematic and aesthetic concerns; "[a]fter the dissolution of empire, the signs of discontinuity and imperial crisis encoded in modernist forms find a rich afterlife in the overt thematics of postcolonial writing by Carter, Rushdie, and Barnes" (24). Orwell is indeed an important figure in English anti-colonialism, but given the extent to which critics of postcolonial fiction, Koenigsberger included, have already picked up this line of argument, this study will by and large isolate England's imperial decline from political, philosophical, and cultural forms of anti-totalization.

In “Two Concepts of Liberty,” a lecture originally delivered in 1958, Berlin describes negative liberty as “freedom *from*” (127) coercion and obstruction. Berlin admits that “[i]f the liberty of myself or my class or nation depends on the misery of a number of other human beings, the system which promotes this is unjust and immoral” (125), yet avers that “some portion of human existence must remain independent of the sphere of social control” (126). This need in turn demands that “a frontier must be drawn between the area of private life and that of public authority” (124). Positive liberty, by contrast, is “freedom *to*” (131), by which Berlin refers to “the wish on the part of the individual to be his [or her] own master” (131). This form of liberty emphasizes self-mastery—as opposed to the self-determination of negative liberty—and is frequently expressed in the individual’s desire for citizenship, thereby granting her or him a hand in choosing who runs a society and how to best govern that society. The danger of positive liberty, for Berlin, comes from the recognition that “it is possible, and at times justifiable, to coerce men [sic] in the name of some goal (let us say, justice or public health) which they would, if they were more enlightened, themselves pursue, but do not, because they are blind or ignorant or corrupt” (132). This rationalized pursuit of self-realization can have positive results, but it also

renders it easy for me to conceive of myself as coercing others for their own sake, in their, not my, interest. I am then claiming that I know what they truly need better than they know it themselves. ... Once I take this view, I am in a position to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their “real” selves, in the secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of man ... must be identical with his freedom—the free choice of his “true”, albeit often submerged and inarticulate, self. (Berlin 133)

Berlin does not establish positive liberty as simplistically wrong or inferior to negative liberty: the two are meant to operate dialectically. Michael Ignatieff argues that “Berlin made human dividedness, both inner and outer, the very rationale for a liberal polity. A free society was a

good society because it accepted the conflict among human goods and maintained, through its democratic institutions, the forum in which this conflict could be managed peacefully” (203). The competing impulses of positive and negative liberty, Berlin suggests, must be constantly negotiated, and the closest approximation to genuine freedom emerges from equilibrium.

Even though it presages Berlin’s lecture by a decade, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be read as a rendering of Berlin’s dialectical relationship between negative and positive liberties in novel form. Big Brother and the Party maintain control through positive liberty: their totalitarian regime is imposed and preserved through coercion, terrorism, and repression. This mastery of other selves, done in the name of Oceania and for the overall good of society, requires eliminating negative liberty. The attainment of negative liberty, or the freedom from obstructionist forces preventing self-determination, is Winston’s pursuit. But, Winston comes to realize that lasting and real negative liberty will only be attained through an oppositional positive liberty, an irony that highlights the dialectical nature of the positive and negative liberty schema.

Positive liberty, the freedom of self-mastery that takes the form of coercion of others in the pursuit of some (presumably enlightened or worthwhile) goal, is the *sine qua non* of Oceania and its prevailing ideology, Ingsoc. O’Brien, the sinister Inner Party member who tortures Winston, spells out the cruel circularity of pure positive liberty when negative liberty is no longer a countervailing force. Oceania’s fundamental command, O’Brien boasts, is not “Thou shalt not” or “Thou shalt,” but rather “Thou *art*” (211). The intent of the total state and its corresponding ideology is the determination of others’ selves for them; as Berlin puts it, positive liberty can take the form of coercion of others by any means necessary toward the realization “of their ‘real’ selves, in the secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of man ... must be identical with his freedom—the free choice of his “true”, albeit often submerged and inarticulate,

self” (133). Perversely, though, the goal toward which the Party enacts its positive liberty is not, as Berlin offers, “justice or public health,” but instead naked power—and that power turns out to be positive liberty itself. O’Brien explains to Winston, “Power is not a means; it is an end” (217), and, O’Brien continues, the “first thing you must realize is that power is collective. ... The second thing for you to realize is that power is power over human beings. Over the body—but, above all, over the mind” (218). In Orwell’s novel, positive liberty amounts to power over others, and power over others is always sought, at least on some level, for its own sake.

Power over the body under totalitarianism, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* at least, takes the forms of state terror and torture, as well as methods for repression and routinization. The extreme torture and intensive indoctrination that Winston experiences at novel’s end is an explicit demonstration of the most violent manifestations of coercion in the name of positive liberty. The Party’s brute physical force against the bodies of others is so severe that they not only have the power to compel allegiance—even convincing them that this allegiance is of their own volition—but they also have the power to determine existence. Nearly “thirty people personally known to Winston, not counting his parents, had disappeared at one time or another” (40) because, as Winston muses, “purges and vaporizations were a necessary part of the mechanics of government” (41). Even more disturbing than the mass executions, show trials, and purges is the revising of records to wipe out any trace history of an undesirable individual’s existence, an activity that Winston himself performs at the Ministry of Truth. When Winston is given the order “refs unpersons” for a Party member—on the basis of corruption or incompetence, or perhaps “Big Brother was merely getting rid of a too-popular subordinate [or someone] suspected of heretical tendencies” (41)—then he or she becomes “an *unperson*” (41) who not only ceases to exist but, according to official records, never existed in the first place.

However, true mastery over others' selves, as O'Brien indicates, comes from power over their minds. The Party has two great problems that its scientists and technicians work diligently to solve: "One is how to discover, against his will, what another human being is thinking, and the other is how to kill several million people in a few seconds without giving warning beforehand" (159). Invasion of private thoughts, notably, is prioritized above efficient and undetectable mass extermination. As part of their initiative to monitor and control the thoughts of others, the Party has made thinking contrary to the official Party line illegal; Orwell memorably designated such an offense "thoughtcrime." Since no method of mindreading yet exists for the Party, however, the maintenance of proper thoughts is done by constant and pervasive monitoring the body. Any bodily cue that might suggest a deviant thought is sufficient. Winston laments, "To dissemble your feelings, to control your face, to do what everyone else was doing, was an instinctive reaction" (18). Winston reflects that "[n]othing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull" (26), but your worst enemy "was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate itself into some visible symptom" (54); indeed, "to wear an improper expression on your face (to look incredulous when a victory was announced, for example) was itself a punishable offense. There was even a word for it in Newspeak: *facecrime*, it was called" (54). For the time being at least, in Oceania, power over the minds of others is gradually and imperfectly achieved through power over the bodies of others.

Still, O'Brien's deception underscores the ultimate unreliability of *facecrime*. Winston is drawn to O'Brien because of a perceived flash of recognition in O'Brien's expression, tying the two together in common contempt for Big Brother and the Party: "That [look] was all, and he was already uncertain whether it had happened. Such incidents never had any sequel. All that they did was to keep alive in him the belief, or hope, that others besides himself were the

enemies of the Party” (18). As it turns out, O’Brien is a member of the Thought Police, and Winston misrecognizes or only imagines an expression indicating O’Brien’s treasonous leanings. Given facecrime’s fallibility, Big Brother employs other and generally more effective methods to colonize consciousnesses. Public rituals like the Two Minutes Hate—during which all of Oceania joins for a collective expression of vitriol and anger directed at the treasonous enemy of the state, Goldstein—exploit the solidarity found in ceremony: “The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in. Within thirty seconds any pretense was always unnecessary” (16). The Party also seeks to internalize its dogma in others through its programs to “to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it” (57). Sexual “[d]esire was thoughtcrime” (59) because to find pleasure in an activity that served no utilitarian purpose in the interest of the Party is to subvert the totalitarian nature of Oceania. The programs work to fully penetrate the individual’s mind because true orthodoxy “means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (47). But, until Ingsoc orthodoxy becomes universal unconsciousness,¹⁷ the Party must exert and enforce its power over the mind through power over the body.

This merciless drive to punish and control the body until the mind is fundamentally altered anticipates Berlin’s warnings against unrestrained positive liberty. Berlin contends that historical “conceptions of freedom directly derive from views of what constitutes a self, a person, a man. Enough manipulation with the definition of man, and freedom can be made to mean

¹⁷ Orwell suggests that total ideological control over the mind is a gradual process that triumphs largely through attrition. Throughout the course of Winston and Julia’s relationship, Winston begins to realize that while the younger Julia is intent on breaking the law she is fairly uninterested in critiquing, challenging, and replacing those laws: “He wondered vaguely how many others like her there might be in the younger generation—people who had grown up in the world of the Revolution, knowing nothing else, accepting the Party as something unalterable, like the sky, not rebelling against its authority but simply evading it, as a rabbit dodges a dog” (109).

whatever the manipulator wants” (“Concepts” 134). Likewise, O’Brien triumphantly tells Winston, “But we create human nature. Men are infinitely malleable” (222). As Berlin puts it, “This monstrous impersonation, which consists in equating what X would choose if he were something he is not, or at least not yet, with what X actually seeks and chooses, is at the heart of all political theories of self-realization” (“Concepts” 133)—that is to say, positive liberty. The Party mantra, “SLAVERY IS FREEDOM” (Orwell 7) resonates with Berlin’s assertion that unchecked positive freedom can be described as “self-abnegation in order to attain independence” (Berlin, “Concepts” 134). Unconscious internalization of Ingsoc’s assumptions—true orthodoxy—is, to again turn to Berlin’s explication of positive liberty, “total self-identification with a specific principle or ideal in order to attain the selfsame end” (“Concepts” 134). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, despite predating Berlin’s lecture, can be read as a vivid illustration of Berlin’s concerns over the suffering and distortions caused by positive liberty.

The impulse for negative liberty—or “freedom from”—is, however, difficult to stifle, and indeed Winston’s persistent and defiant yearnings for negative liberty constitute the dramatic conflict in Orwell’s narrative. Berlin describes the deformation of positive liberty into oppression as the split between “the transcendent, dominant controller, and the empirical bundle of desires and passions to be disciplined and brought to heel” (“Concepts” 134). Winston is this bundle. At its core, Winston’s rebellion is visceral not intellectual: it is “the mute protest in your own bones, the instinctive feeling that the conditions you lived in were intolerable and that at some other time they must have been different” (63). Winston claims that “freedom” is to “die hating [The Party]” (231); put another way, freedom is not submission to the self-realization Ingsoc imposes, but rather the rejection of that self-mastery. The means to achieve this goal is ingrained desire for self-determination that, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, finds expression as sexual desire: “the animal

instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces. ... [Winston and Julia's] embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act" (105). Winston and Julia's desires for sexual pleasure, then, are desires for negative liberty—freedom from the precepts, rules, and repression of Ingsoc.

Orwell is not, however, opposing a virtuous negative liberty to an insidious positive liberty. Neither, for that matter, is Berlin, who acknowledges that negative liberty can be put to destructive ends and that at times one may need to be "coerced for [his or her] own good ... [for] it may enlarge the scope" (134) of liberty. Similarly, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell manages to suggest that, even as The Party's uncompromising positive liberty eliminates negative liberty, an alternative positive liberty is necessary to reassert that negative liberty as a vital force. Stephen Ingle argues that though Winston "is recognized as a champion" of full moral autonomy—that is to say, negative liberty—"what limits Winston's power to act autonomously is the very absoluteness of his autonomy. He is truly alone" (123). Ingle continues, "Winston's cry was not, after all, the cry of the 'I' who wants to remain 'I', the champion of individual moral autonomy, but the cry of the 'I' who craves to be 'We'. Not the 'We' of the state, but the 'We' of some collective agency for which he would be willing to sacrifice his autonomy" (136). The paradox of genuine autonomy is that, to attain it, one must submit in part to collective institutions that help establish, enrich, and sustain that autonomy.

Winston seems to intuitively sense that such collective action is needed. More than once, Winston realizes that "[i]f there was hope, it lay in the proles" (181). The proles comprise the vast majority of the population. Unlike official members of the Party, who take bureaucratic positions, the proles are divorced from politics and perform manual or unskilled labor in factories and shops. The proles are ignored by the Party and are "granted intellectual liberty

because they [are supposed to] have no intellect. In a Party member, on the other hand, not even the smallest deviation of opinion on the most unimportant subject can be tolerated” (173). When it comes to the proles’ relative freedom, Winston’s condescendingly surmises that “the world-view of the Party imposed itself most successfully on people incapable of understanding it” (129). The proles have been broken by The Party, and pose no threat since they do not grasp their own enslavement. Though Winston sees salvation in the proles, he also sees the conundrum that ““[u]ntil they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious” (61, Orwell’s emphasis). In other words, the proles must be coerced into rebellion as a means to begin working towards self-mastery. They need positive liberty.

Negative liberty requires positive liberty to bring it into existence, but positive liberty runs the risk of eliminating the negative liberty it creates. This tension between the two concepts unites Orwell with Berlin, and forms the basis of their shared philosophical opposition to totalitarian political ideas. Ignatieff writes, “A free society was a good society because it accepted the conflict among human goods and maintained, through its democratic institutions, the forum in which this conflict could be managed peacefully” (203). Berlin himself points to the influence of Orwell when he describes the “intellectual outlook which attends the rise of totalitarian ideologies—the substance of the hair-raising satires of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley—[as] the state of mind in which troublesome questions appear as a form of mental perturbation, noxious to the mental health of individuals and, when too widely discussed, to the health of societies. This is an attitude, far removed from Marx or Freud, which looks on all inner conflict as an evil, or at best as a form of futile self-frustration” (“Political Ideas” 24). The innate value of inner conflict is the reason that Winston exclaims, “I hate purity, I hate goodness” (104). For Berlin and Orwell, the comprehensiveness of totalitarian states and the purity of totalitarian

ideologies that seek to fundamentally transform the human self are in fact negations. A free polity, ironically, is not totally or purely free, for actual freedom emerges from the attempted negotiations of conflicts, the incomplete reconciliation of divisions, and the cautious embrace of contamination. Totalitarianism, on the other hand, is the presumed elimination of conflict, the erasure of any and all difference, and the insistence upon absolute purity.

Along with its resonances with mainstream political discourses, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* also betrays midcentury England's dominant assumptions about culture. Orwell's novel appears in the midst of what Andreas Huyssen has termed "the Great Divide," which he defines as "the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture" (viii). This discourse, "with its aesthetic, moral, and political implications" (viii), employs constructs such as "mass culture" and "kitsch" almost always "as negative, as the homogenously sinister background on which the achievements of modernism [and other forms of high art] can shine in their glory" (ix). Huyssen goes on to "suggest that the primary place of what [he is] calling the great divide was the age of Stalin and Hitler when the threat of totalitarian control over all culture forged a variety of defensive strategies meant to protect high culture in general, not just modernism" (197). Importantly, Huyssen stresses that he is "not reducing the great modernist works, by way of a simple ideology critique of their function, to a ploy in the cultural strategies of the Cold War. What [he is] suggesting, however, is that the age of Hitler, Stalin, and the Cold War produced specific accounts of modernism, such as those of Clement Greenberg and [Theodor] Adorno, whose aesthetic categories cannot be totally divorced from the pressures of that era" (197). The key figure of Great Divide discourse in the English context is F.R. Leavis.

Orwell was not necessarily a devotee to the aims and values of *Scrutiny*, Leavis's literary journal, and by the time Orwell published *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949 *Scrutiny* was winding

down—it would cease publication shortly thereafter, in 1953—yet the great divide discourse established and promoted in Leavis’s influential criticism looms large over Orwell’s depiction of totalitarianism. Leavis’s contribution to the resistance against, in Huyssen’s words, “totalitarian control over all culture” is made most explicit in his treatise *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930). Although Leavis insisted upon a holistic and responsive approach to culture and its products—he despised utilitarianism and instrumentalism¹⁸—he nonetheless felt strongly in the necessity of a particular type of cultural stratification. According to Leavis, “In any period it is often a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is ... only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment. ... Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition” (13-4). Paradoxically, in Leavis’s thought the integrity of an entire civilization and the autonomy of its individual members depend upon an isolated small minority of gatekeepers who are able to recognize and sustain the exemplary traditions of culture. If this minority were unable to fulfill its preserve independently—that is, as an entity separate from the totality or “mass” of civilization—then it and the finest and “most perishable parts of tradition” would in effect dissolve into an undifferentiated blob of the whole.

Opposing and antagonistic to the refined minority’s protection of tradition is its homogenizing totalitarian other: mass civilization. This threat, for Leavis, is not an alternative culture or even a corrupted culture, but rather the antithesis of culture. While this conflict is not

¹⁸ Leavis’s critical method is inflected with anti-totalizing attitudes as well. Francis Mulhern writes that Leavis and his *Scrutiny* group fought tirelessly against “the imposition of aprioristic ‘systems’ of analysis and judgment whereby ‘first-hand response’ was stifled by ‘abstraction’” (251). In the 1930s, Leavis’s antagonists who took such a position were largely Marxist critics; their postwar successors were the American New Critics and the “doctrinally-minded criticism of Christian Discrimination” (251). Leavis’s opposition to any abstract theoretical system that could be mechanically applied to any text mirrors the liberal-humanist objection to totalitarian politics.

new in English literary criticism—Leavis admits his indebtedness to Matthew Arnold's opposition of culture and anarchy—in Leavis's (and Orwell's time) mass civilization mounts its assault upon minority culture by way of new technology, mass-production, and standardization. The pernicious effects of these developments can be located, according to Leavis, in phenomena ranging from advertising to middlebrow tastes exemplified by the Book of the Month Club.

Cinema, a relatively new medium at the time, is Leavis's biggest target. Leavis laments that films "provide now the main form of recreation in the civilised world; and they involve surrender, under conditions of hypnotic receptivity, to the cheapest emotional appeals, appeals the more insidious because they are associated with a compelling vivid illusion of actual life" (15). Leavis concludes his polemic by warning that there is little reason to doubt that "a standardised civilisation is rapidly enveloping the whole world" (18). The organic wholeness and continuity of culture—which, when maintained, provides the pretext for individuality—requires divisions and hierarchical standards: the value of culture derives from its rarified status. The encroachments of mass civilization, by contrast, dangerously collapse standards. In this view, the loss of a cultural minority does not empower the majority; instead, it reduces the totality to the lowest denominator and absorbs individuality and distinctiveness into its homogenized mass.

Indeed, the language and imagery Leavis uses to describe mass civilization's effects—standardizing, homogenizing, leveling, mechanizing, enveloping, mesmerizing—chime with the terminology used in the midcentury critique of totalitarian politics that Orwell helps inaugurate. Indeed, Dennis Wrong describes "consumer totalitarianism" as "a metaphorical way of talking" about phenomenon such as "mass advertising [and] mass culture", and that "Orwell wrote that those things portend some kind of political oppression or repression" (qtd. In Rodden, 135). Along similar lines, Arendt argues that "the measures taken by Stalin with the introduction of the

First Five Year Plan in 1928, when his control of the party was almost complete, prove that transformation of classes into masses and the concomitant elimination of all group solidarity are the condition sine qua non of total domination” (n.p.).¹⁹ Arendt and Orwell alike recognize that the “paradox of totalitarianism is that it intensifies individual loneliness and at the same time binds all the isolated figures into one overpowering system” (Meyers 134), a process mightily similar to the alienating consequences of mass civilization’s standardization. Reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in light of great divide critics such as Leavis clarifies the ways that Orwell suggests that the degradations of culture can produce, even in otherwise free and open societies, the simultaneous distancing from all and absorption into all that occur in the totalitarian state.

Leavis’s notion of a necessary division between mass and minority for the preservation of culture and its ennobling effects has long exerted itself upon English intellectual life. While his endorsements of a disproportionately hierarchical society have obvious appeal to conservative critics of culture, Leavis’s thought finds expression on the Left as well. For example, from 1947-1948, roughly the same time that Orwell was composing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Marxist and cultural materialist literary critics Raymond Williams, Wolf Mankowitz, and Clifford Collins, edited and published a New Left journal, *Politics and Letters*, that drew heavily from Leavis for its own radical perspective. According to Williams, the trio’s “intention was to produce a review that would, approximately, unite radical left politics with Leavisite literary criticism. ... [Their] affiliation to *Scrutiny* was guarded, but it was nevertheless quite a strong one” (65). In addition to Leavis’s method of practical criticism and his emphasis on education, Williams and the

¹⁹ Arendt is not here defending a rigid class structure, for in fact she argues that “the masses grew out of the fragments of a highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had been held in check only through membership in a class” (n.p.), meaning that a class system is a precondition for totalitarianism. Pointing out the collapse into masses is in fact a criticism of the inevitable consequences of a hierarchical society. “Massification,” nonetheless, remains a crucial step, and can be accomplished via culture.

midcentury New Left were attracted to what Williams calls Leavis's "cultural radicalism," which Williams characterizes as comprising "attacks on academicism, on Bloomsbury, on metropolitan literary culture, on the commercial press, [and] on advertising" (66). Leavis's incorporation into the founding principles of a postwar journal of the radical left suggests the extent—both in terms of duration and range—of Leavis's impact on English culture.

While Orwell is not perfectly in tune with either Leavis or Williams, he shares many of the assumptions found in *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*, and he wrote of the possibly pernicious effects of standardization, technology, and mass culture. James B. Rule summarizes,

During the 1940s and 1950s Western intellectuals came increasingly to view the future in terms of 'mass society.' In this view, the world's most 'advanced' societies were increasingly characterized by highly influential, impersonal directives from autocratic elites to atomized, disorganized, and manipulable populations. ... Such ideas gained momentum, of course, from the examples of Nazi Germany and Stalinist U.S.S.R. By the 1940s, many feared that all modern societies were on the way to domination through the bombardment of docile populations with carefully orchestrated mass propaganda; the result, it was felt, would be manufacture of popular consent, a parody of authentic democracy. Orwell shared this fear at least in part. (175-6)

For example, Peter Marks stresses that Orwell's "Boys' Weeklies" (1940), a study of the pulp adventure magazines aimed at adolescent males, assesses "the social impact of supposedly marginal literature" (92). In addition to identifying the ways English pulp magazines reinforce a rigid class structure and an uncritical patriotism, Orwell turns to the creeping influence of such weeklies' American counterparts: "The American ideal, the 'he-man', the 'tough guy', the gorilla who puts everything right by socking everybody else on the jaw, now figures in a majority of boys' papers. In one serial now running in the *Skipper* he is always portrayed, ominously enough, swinging a rubber truncheon" (478). As Marks puts it, "In Orwell's iconography, the rubber truncheon always symbolizes totalitarianism" (93). Orwell's perception

of mass culture's utility for totalitarian states as a propaganda tool, as well as a vaguely totalitarian character to mass culture itself, also find expression in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.²⁰

Leavis's fears over the new technology of mass culture are concentrated upon cinema. Orwell, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, adapts Leavis's anxieties over film to a more current medium, television, which in 1949 is still fairly new technology. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* prefigures the widespread concerns over television's negative effects that erupt in the 1950s and beyond. Perhaps most ominously, omnipresent telescreen sets serve as surveillance on Airstrip One's population.²¹ Winston's apartment has a permanent glow, for the "instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely" (Orwell 6). The typical apartment layout in Airstrip One, moreover, is organized around the telescreen. For whatever reason, "[i]nstead of being placed, as was normal, in the end wall, where it could command the whole room, [Winston's telescreen] was in the longer wall, opposite the window" (9). Winston is only able to pen his private thoughts into a diary because "the unusual geography of the room" allows him to fit into a shallow alcove and "remain outside the range of the telescreen, so far as sight went" (9). Winston's initial rebellion, keeping a journal, is thus only conceivable due to a design flaw. The intention, though, of mass culture technology is ubiquity.²²

²⁰ At one point Winston muses that the Party has an ideal for "a nation of warriors and fanatics, marching forward in perfect unity, all thinking the same thoughts and shouting the same slogans, perpetually working, fighting, triumphing, persecuting—three hundred million people all with the same face" (64). In other words, the Party is explicitly striving to construct a homogenized mass, subsuming three million individuals into one singularity.

²¹ While televisions have not become surveillance equipment, London's vast closed-circuit security camera system, which gives it the dubious distinction of the most monitored city (the United Kingdom has approximately 32 cameras for each citizen), certainly has eerie parallels with Airstrip One's telescreens.

²² Richard Wolin singles out the German political theorist, notorious for his enthusiastic support of the Nazi Party, for his recognition of technology's importance to totalitarianism: "In his writings of the early 1930s, Schmitt discerns a trend at work that presages a return of the political: the reemergence of a new *Kampfgebiete* or "areas of struggle" in the modern world.

Telescreens also reflect another concern over the new technology of mass culture: its extreme efficacy and efficiency as a means of propaganda. Cinema, after all, is the technology at the heart of Oceania's communal indoctrination session, the Two Minutes Hate. This ceremony parodies the otherwise banal experience of a day at the movies. At the designated hour, Winston and his colleagues drag "the chairs out of the cubicles and [group] them in the center of the hall, opposite the big telescreen" (12) and find their places in the rows of seats. Once lights dim, "a hideous, grinding screech, as of some monstrous machine running without oil, burst from the big telescreen at the end of the room. ... As usual, the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People, had flashed onto the screen. There were hisses here and there among the audience. ... The program of the Two Minutes Hate varied from day to day, but there was none in which Goldstein was not the principal figure" (13). As the Hate reaches its climax, the

voice of Goldstein had become an actual sheep's bleat, and for an instant the face changed into that of a sheep. Then the sheep-face melted into the figure of a Eurasian soldier who seemed to be advancing, huge and terrible, his submachine gun roaring and seeming to spring out of the surface of the screen, so that some of the people in the front row actually flinched backwards in their seats. But in the same moment, drawing a deep sigh of relief from everybody, the hostile figure melted into the face of Big Brother, black-haired, black-mustachio'd, full of power and mysterious calm, and so vast that it almost filled up the screen. (17)

Orwell shows basic filmmaking techniques such as dissolves, montage editing (of the sort theorized by Sergei Eisenstein), and voiceovers and other sound effects to be frighteningly efficient at forming associations and manipulating emotions. The momentary morphing of

The key variable in this newly emergent equation is technology, which, in the twentieth century, seems to have surpassed economics as the singular determinant of cultural life." ... Rather than representing one more stage in a four-hundred-year process of political neutralization, technology embodies prospects for a momentous return of the political on an unprecedentedly grandiose scale. For the historically unique concentration and accumulation of technology in the twentieth century opens up concrete prospects for the realization of the 'total state.'"

Goldstein into a sheep also evokes the subliminal messaging techniques later used by advertisers, arguably the paradigmatic figures of mass culture. Cinema's communal experience, moreover, proves ideal for totalitarianism's solidification through rituals of solidarity and public spectacle. Leavis, writing before the propagandistic uses to which Nazi Germany put film became well known, asserts that "broadcasting, like the films, is in practice mainly a means of passive diversion, and that it tends to make active recreation, especially active use of the mind, more difficult" (15). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* adopts the Leavisite assumption that mass culture is, by definition, propagandistic, and suggests that the technology that delivers mass culture, such as television and cinema, is suited to the indoctrinating needs of totalitarian states.

The telescreens' dual function—to propagandize and monitor the population of Oceania—suggests that Orwell saw mass culture serving two purposes in a totalitarian state. Rule argues that these two roles, mass communication and mass surveillance, are similar in that "both involve direct relations between central powers and large numbers of individual citizens" (176) and that both can be understood as part of a broader development: "the 'mobilization' of populations within the modern state (177). They are "diametrically opposed," however, in that where "mass communications entail bombarding individuals with identical and undifferentiated stimuli, mass surveillance involves attending to the peculiarities of the individual with tailor-made organizational action" (176). Orwell perceived both of these functions, and gives them expression in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but Rule notes that not only does Orwell miss mass communications' potential for undermining the state, but, more importantly, that what "he did not consider was the possibility that the development of the intrusive [mass] technologies would occur *on its own, without the spur of totalitarian intent*" (179, Rule's emphasis). While Rule is correct that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does not seriously consider this possibility, Orwell's novel

does suggest that the products of mass culture, if not the technologies or media used to transmit them, have an intrinsically totalitarian nature even when they are not intentionally and specifically put to service on the behalf of a totalitarian regime.

Mass culture's inherent totalitarian quality is its lack of sincerity. In "Literature and Totalitarianism," Orwell claims that the "worst thing we can say about a work of art is that it is insincere" (134). By contrast, "as far as possible [totalitarianism] isolates you from the outside world, it shuts you up in an artificial universe in which you have no standards of comparison" (135). Whereas true literature (and art generally) opens expresses and makes comprehensible the honest and sincere perspective of another, totalitarianism has the opposite effects of pacification, mystification, and seclusion. Mass culture—by its nature—engenders the isolation of totalitarianism. The degraded status of literature, such as it were, in *Airstrip One*, is evidenced by Julia's position in the Fiction Department at the Ministry of Truth. Novels are prepared by a Planning Committee, composed by way of electric "novel-writing machines" (108), and then sent to the Rewrite Squad. Under this set-up, "[b]ooks were just a commodity that had to be produced, like jam or bootlaces" (108). Like the products from the culture industry later condemned by Adorno in his formulation of a "culture industry," such novels "are no longer *also* commodities, they are commodities through and through" ("Culture Industry" 100). These novels "only have six plots, but [Julia and her coworkers] swap them round a bit" (109) in the electric kaleidoscope machines. Though the Party manufactures these books specifically for the proletarians, they are nonetheless distributed furtively in order to maintain the impression that the readers "were buying something illegal" (109). Mass culture therefore provides the illusion of subversion even as it in truth pacifies its audience and manages, in its role as a pressure release valve, to serve the interests of those presently in power and preserve the status quo.

Orwell counterpoises the Fiction Department's propaganda with submerged literary values based on spontaneity, sincerity, and uselessness. For example, at one point Winston secretly watches a proletarian woman washing laundry, observing that she—despite being unaware that she is watched—sings as she works. Winston reflects that it “struck him as a curious fact that he had never heard a member of the Party singing alone and spontaneously” (118). To express oneself spontaneously, and for purpose other expression itself, is cast by Orwell as a natural behavior, a point driven home when Winston hears a bird singing: For whom, for what, was that bird singing? No mate, no rival was watching it. What made it sit at the edge of the lonely wood and pour its music into nothingness” (103)? Orwell suggests that art, and therefore literature, is created out of an instinctual drive to create for its own sake. Once creation is premised on some utilitarian purpose—whether it be mobilizing a population, purveying a political ideology, or selling a product—then it has crossed the frontier from art to propaganda. The utter loss of spontaneous art and genuine literature in Airstrip One, replaced as it is by pure propaganda, creates an association between totalitarianism and mass culture and indicates Orwell's Leavisite concerns over the inherently destructive capabilities of mass civilization.

While English critics and novelists after Leavis and Orwell become, in the main, more generous to mass or popular culture, fears over the totalizing effects of a mass society, especially its mass media, persist. Williams and, later, Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School's pioneering work developing the field of cultural studies, certainly challenge the prewar binary division between producers and consumers, thinking instead in terms of interacting, stratified layers of cultures and subcultures, but these critics still strove to distinguish authentic or organic forms of folk and popular culture from the mystifications of dominant hegemonic discourses. Postwar English novelists, furthermore, in general stay in tune with such critical trends, and authors from

Graham Greene to Angus Wilson, Martin Amis, and Ian McEwan produce fiction that reflects anxiety over the real or potential deleterious effects of mass communication, media, and culture.

To a degree, the resonances Orwell's totalitarian fears have with prominent intellectuals in the Anglo tradition such as Berlin and Leavis, who foreground division and discontinuity in their thought, reflect longstanding preferences for empiricism among English intellectuals. In fact, Perry Anderson's seminal essay "Components of the National Culture" (1968) alleges that the lack of a strong intellectual tradition focused on comprehending the social totality, defined by Anderson as "an entity whose structures are bound together in such a way that any one of them considered separately is an abstraction—it is not aggregated sum of parts" (Anderson 58) amounts to an "absent centre" in English intellectual life.²³ Dennis Dworkin summarizes,

Anderson's article was a sweeping panoramic survey of the achievement—or, perhaps more accurately, lack of achievement—of the human sciences in twentieth-century Britain, including economics, sociology, literary criticism, political science, art history, history, and anthropology. But more important, it was an attempt to explain why Britain alone among other major European countries had failed to produce a major totalizing social theory ...

²³ Anderson scathingly denounces Berlin's "two concepts of liberty" formulation, claiming that Berlin's political theory "extrapolates ideas from history and transforms them into weightless counters that can be manipulated at will in the space of ideology. The end-product is typically a mythical genealogy in which ideas generate themselves to form a manichean morality tale, whose teleological outcome is the present: struggle of the free world against totalitarian communism" (71). Ironically, then, Anderson's critique of Berlin's theory as ideological and teleological thus draws on similar anti-totalizing terms as Berlin's own. Anderson is less critical of Leavis, and in fact he sites English literary criticism, from Leavis to Williams, as a sort of placeholder for an English thought that is capable of conceiving the totality of society and culture rather than its fragmented units. But, Anderson argues that Leavis "was unable to explain the decline [of British culture that] he denounced. The fate of humane culture was attributed to the drive of 'mass' civilization and the corruption of modern literati. ... Leavis correctly sensed a cultural landscape of much mediocrity and conformity. This was not, however, an inevitable product of either industrial civilization or capitalism, but had its origins in a much more specific local history" (102). In the end, argues Anderson, "Leavis was ultimately trapped in the cultural nexus he hated" and his "empiricism became banally reactionary in old age" (102), creating an impasse in his thought that preventing him from truly considering the totality of English culture.

[a failure] he described as the “absent centre” of British society and culture. (135)

Orwell’s totalitarian fears cannot be attributed, however, to an alleged peculiarity of the English. Totalization in fact serves as the bugbear for late twentieth-century political and cultural theory: similar resistances to totalization inform late twentieth-century transatlantic, Continental, and postcolonial theory as well.

In America, the prominent “New York Intellectuals” preoccupied with the dangers of totalitarianism—including Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, Mary McCarthy, Sidney Hook, Irving Kristol, Ralph Ellison, Philip Rahv, Richard Wright, and Daniel Bell—“had all been associated with Marxism in the 1930s and were all moving away from Marxism, not only because they rejected Stalinism but also because they had come to question some aspects of New Deal ‘collectivism’” (Zaretsky 210). Major thinkers in French theory such as Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault proposed, respectively, the end of all-encompassing or totalizing “meta-narratives” and the historical supersession of the “universal” intellectual “who, prompted by conscience alone, and without a political mandate, advocated for universal values in the public, political domain and drew attention to social inequality in the name of such values ... [for] intellectuals could no longer speak for such a common domain” (Auer 241). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s shadow can also be perceived in two postwar intellectuals whose political and cultural theory sprung from direct contact with Nazi totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno, both German refugees during the war. Arendt is certainly mentioned in the same breath as Orwell, given that her *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is cited, along with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as one of the foundational explications of totalitarianism. Adorno’s thought, too, resonates with Orwell. John Carey writes, in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992),

Although Orwell had apparently not read, or at least never mentions, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and their colleagues in the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, the impasse at which Winston [in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*] arrives was essentially the same as theirs. ... Only the individual can appreciate ‘high’ culture—and mass civilization threatens to obliterate the individual. ‘The picture of freedom against society,’ Adorno proclaims, ‘lives in the crushed, abused individual’s features alone.’ This is not so very different from O’Brien’s warning to Winston: ‘If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever.’” (43-4)

The thought of Arendt and Adorno intersects with Orwell and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in broader ways that go well past a particular book or phrase. These connections, moreover, hinge on the central position totalitarianism plays in the experiences and theoretical works of all three writers.

The experiences and aftermath of totalitarianism are indeed formative for both Arendt and Adorno as thinkers. Lars Rensmann and Samir Gandesha write that “the central experiences of the twentieth century, namely: totalitarianism, the Holocaust, and crimes against humanity” are overarching themes to “to both Arendt’s and Adorno’s most important writings and their conceptions of modernity, politics, and society” (22). The response of these two intellectuals to the horrors of totalitarianism is to insist that “private life—individual existence, the “particular”—must be protected from steam-rolling subsumption by the public or universal (*das Allgemeine*) if critique itself is to remain viable” (Villa 87). Arendt and Adorno take aim at various manifestations of all-encompassing and overpowering totalization—from the determinism of historical teleology to the homogenization of mass culture and the dangers of essentialism and effaced differences in identity politics—for these totalizing impulses are understood to be consonant with, complementary to, or prophetic of totalitarian politics.

Importantly, though, Rensmann and Gandesha argue that while “both thinkers illuminate the ‘dark side’ of modernity in intriguing ways” Arendt and Adorno “also staunchly defend the

possibility of human action, subjectivity, and political transformation. Arendt and Adorno aim at understanding the complexities of modern society with its ever-present potential for, on the one hand, genuine forms of democratic ‘non-domination’ and the transformative exercise of freedom that may enable human plurality and universalism; and on the other hand, the drive toward forced homogeneity, objectification, exclusion, and identity politics” (10). The shared goal of Arendt and Adorno, then, “is to preserve the tension between the identical and the nonidentical, while imagining a social state—a “totality”—that is nothing more than the ‘togetherness of diversity.’ In other words, the point is to reimagine society as a collection of differences whose “reconciliation” does not in any way demand their erasure” (Villa 94). Arendt and Adorno together are therefore particularly instructive for reading the postwar English political novel, not only because their far-ranging conceptions of totalization as a malignant force are indicative of postwar thought in general, but also because their attempt to imagine a cohesive totality without recourse to totalizing logics is also the project of postwar English political novelists who assume this task in the absence of a strong English intellectual tradition to do so.

To begin investigating the varied ways postwar novelists attempt to rethink politics under the pressures of the post-totalitarian age, *After Orwell* turns to novels that reflect and engage, directly or obliquely, key politico-literary flashpoints of postwar England. These moments, starting with the emergence and establishment of the postwar settlement, signify important ideological realignments. Political novels, the following chapters contend, participate in such shifts, in various cases anticipating, facilitating, or resisting these political movements. Accordingly, this study is less concerned with chronological comprehensiveness as it is with identifying touchstones of postwar England’s political history, and then attending to examples of novels and literary trends germane to those moments. Stretching across these political events and

their relevant novels, serving as their connective tissue and common theme, is the postwar period's pervasive anxiety over totalization in its myriad forms. This fear is linked to Orwell's and others construction of the totalitarian paradigm. English political novelists after Orwell, explicitly or otherwise, extend *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* warning against political totalitarianism into other manifestations of totalization, from cultural homogenization to gender or racial essentialisms and religious or political fundamentalisms. *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* nightmare scenario of totalization seems to permeate the political consciousnesses of later novelists, for rejections of totalization can be traced as a common theme throughout postwar political fiction.

The first chapter situates political fiction amid England's midcentury "crisis of the novel," considering two novels that confound, and help break down, the period's commonly accepted schism between modernist experimentation and a resurgent realism: Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955) and Angus Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956). These two novels help advance the breakdown of the longstanding dichotomy between realist and experimental literary schools, transforming, in David Lodge's famous metaphor, the novelist's "crossroads," in which one of two aesthetic paths must be chosen, into an "aesthetic supermarket" in which the novelist is empowered to select and mix forms and techniques previously considered incompatible. According to Andrzej Gasiorek, Greene's, Wilson's, and other writers of the time "suggest that distinctions between 'realist' and 'experimental' or between 'traditional' and 'innovative', which were of such significance to the modernists and avant-garde in the earlier part of the century, are so irrelevant to the post-war period that they should be dropped altogether" (v). This deterioration of prior distinctions itself has a political dimension related to postwar anti-totalizing tendencies, for earlier and remaining advocates of one particular aesthetic category tended to align literary forms with a specific politics. Greene's

and Wilson's challenges to two monolithic formal choices and their respective political valences represent a wider postwar turn away from total or pure forms toward hybridization and mixture.

Such anti-totalizing impulses also appear thematically in *The Quiet American* and *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*. While Greene renders "politics" as a total system, making political disengagement impossible, he is influenced by modernist notions of totalities that are both determined and disrupted by chance. *The Quiet American* suggests that individual actions cannot be apolitical, but new forms of consciousness can produce actions that destabilize and transform the political totality. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, by contrast, draws lines across literary modernism and English political liberalism. Wilson validates the traditions' shared emphasis on openness, pairing them to critique contemporary obsessions over a singularly "authentic" English cultural identity. In these two novels, Greene and Wilson inject modernist ethos and techniques into their novels' realist frameworks, maneuvers that contribute to and dovetail with their narratives' anti-totalizing purposes. Even though both *The Quiet American* and *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* project a totality of some kind—in Greene's case, a political totality, and in Wilson's book, a social one—these two novelists also dismantle totalizing gestures toward determinism and authenticity that frequently accompany political and social totalities.

Along with its debates on politics and literary form in which Greene and Wilson participate, the late 1950s also witness the origins of the political and social movements known collectively as the New Left. The transformative effects of New Left intellectuals' revisions to progressive political theory and New Left activists' protests and practical politics extend and reverberate well into the next two decades. I tie the widespread social and political changes wrought by the New Left to fiction in the second chapter's reading of *The Millstone* (1965), by Margaret Drabble. *The Millstone* arrives at a pivotal moment in the New Left's development. By

the mid-1960s, the New Left as an intellectual and political force had been firmly established, as evidenced by the relative influence of journals such as *New Left Review* and organizations such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. At this same moment, however, marginalized groups within the New Left—including women, ethnic minorities, and gay rights advocates—began to form splinter groups, a process that gradually fractured the New Left. *The Millstone, After Orwell* argues, anticipates the split of the New Left and what would eventually come to be known as second-wave feminism.

To make this case, the chapter locates Drabble's use of the feeling body, a common New Left trope that expresses the movement's various and often contradictory political desires. Drabble—who calls Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1948) a formative text—adopts this trope, but refutes the androcentrism of the New Left by gendering her novel's feeling body female. Nevertheless, *The Millstone's* feeling female body manages to bridge the New Left of the early 1960s with incipient second-wave feminism, not to flourish until the 1970s, by underlining the movements' similar anti-determinism and anti-essentialism, both of which are at bottom anti-totalizing orientations. Drabble's novel, in a sense, simultaneously critiques the New Left's absence of a sustained assault on patriarchy and its values, while at the same time adopts and adapts New Left tropes and arguments, which are retrofitted in order to be used as intellectual justification for feminism. *The Millstone* helps illustrate how second-wave feminism both emerged from and broke away from the New Left politico-intellectual milieu, and how imperative to the New Left and feminism alike is a principled rejection of determinism—whether historical or biological—and essentialism, totalizing fallacies that tend to flatten out or outright foreclose political possibilities.

After Orwell turns, in its third chapter, to the politico-cultural phenomenon called “Thatcherism.” Hall argues, influentially, that the successful and monumental rightward political reorientation attributed to Thatcherism is itself part of epochal “social, economic, political and cultural changes of a deeper kind now taking place in western capitalist societies” (223). Thatcherism therefore signifies profound structural changes to postwar England that novelists cannot ignore. An early novel to give voice to Thatcherism’s shifts and significances is Martin Amis’s *Money* (1984). Though *Money* is typically taken as a satire of Thatcherite values, I argue that the dynamic between Thatcherism and *Money* is reciprocal, not plainly oppositional.

I read *Money* through Timothy Brennan’s notion of “the turn,” a philosophical shift toward identity in the intellectual and artistic work of the 1980s. During the turn, the preservation of autonomous being displaces political belief and mitigates collective action. *Money* attacks several values that cluster under the rubric Thatcherism, but as a novel of the turn it assumes a totalizing nature for all political action and thus foregoes prescribing political remedies. The turn, in several ways, represents anti-totalizing impulses in practical and cultural politics taken to their furthest extent. *Money* reflects the turn’s fear that representation, in both the organizational and semiotic senses of that term, not just risk but inevitably entail a subsumption of one’s autonomous being into a colonizing and totalizing entity. Consequently, Amis’s *Money* refuses to articulate alternative values for fear of coercion, a move that helps cede ideological ground needed for Thatcherism to solidify as hegemonic common sense even as the novel criticizes the values and assumptions underwriting Thatcherism.

The fourth chapter addresses two novels that confront the political dilemmas of the new millennium, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005). However, these two books, although published only five years apart, sit on either side of the terrorist

attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent “War on Terror” and disastrous United States-led invasion of Iraq, in which the United Kingdom served as a chief ally. *White Teeth*’s and *Saturday*’s chronological placement in relation to 9/11 in part accounts for the dramatically different tones of the novels. Whereas *White Teeth* is one of the last expressions of post-Cold War optimism, *Saturday* reflects the melancholia of the seemingly intractable problems of global inequality and terror.

Stretching across these two novels, only superficially impacted by 9/11, is the identification of totalization as the political novelist’s object of critique. In *White Teeth*, Smith’s rejection of totalization emerges amid the internal disjunctions and unstable identities that have arisen from waves of immigration to England and the effects of globalization. Smith conflates scientism and religious fundamentalism as totalizing modes of thinking that equally—and equally harmfully—erase chance, agency, and freely formed identities. However, Smith positions the mixing and hybridization that characterize multiculturalism, as both a political project and a lived experience, as the remedy for the deleterious effects of fundamentalist discourses. McEwan also denounces religious extremism, but unlike *White Teeth*’s celebration of cultural gaps and differences in identity, *Saturday* reflects post-9/11 apprehensions over the new conflicts and dilemmas wrought, in part, by globalization and seemingly imperiling multicultural societies. Although McEwan turns away from Smith’s optimistic, even borderline utopian, portrait of multiculturalism, like Smith, McEwan locates fundamentalist totalization as the root problem. In *Saturday*, McEwan suggests literature and its ethical potentialities as an anti-totalizing force that can help close the distance between self and other without degenerating into cultural colonization.

Ending *After Orwell* is a coda that reads Amis's *The Second Plane* (2008) and *The Pregnant Widow* (2010) in light of the politico-literary legacy of the late critic and public intellectual Christopher Hitchens, who also happened to be an intimately close friend of Amis. Hitchens was a legendarily deep admirer of Orwell, who in 2002 wrote a polemical defense of his idol—entitled *Why Orwell Matters* in the United States and *Orwell's Victory* in the United Kingdom—and explicitly modeled his own contrarian and iconoclastic persona on Orwell. The postscript argues that up until *The Second Plane*, Amis—a writer whose politics is particularly nebulous—largely endorses and adopts Hitchens's political vision, which itself is an extension of the totalitarian framework that Orwell helped establish at midcentury. However, *After Orwell's* coda reads *The Pregnant Widow*, a novel ostensibly about the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, as not only Amis's way of distancing himself from Hitchens's late turn to militarism and unremitting criticism of religion, but also as a reflection upon the political and cultural convulsions of postwar England. *The Pregnant Widow's* mournful rebuke to Orwell's heir therefore suggests emergent ways that contemporary English novelists are conceiving and writing about politics that circumnavigate Orwell's persistent and powerful, but also arguably limiting and outmoded, totalitarian paradigm.

Together, these chapters make visible the contours of the postwar English political novel. At the heart of Orwell's landmark *Nineteen Eight-Four* is his hope for political change tempered by his fear of politics' totalizing, and thus dehumanizing, potential. This principled rejection of totalization, which takes manifold guises, is representative of the postwar era and constitutes the foundation for political fiction after Orwell. *After Orwell* intends to show that versions of Orwell's apprehensions toward totalization, and outright hatred of totalitarianisms, form a thematic substratum for English political novelists of the late twentieth century and after. This

grounding importantly allows for postwar English political fiction to be viewed in a wider lens than heretofore available. Ironically, a thesis that presumes to comprehend all political novels written within a given period from a particular literary tradition, free of any contradictions or discontinuities, would itself be totalizing and in that way go against the values and arguments of Orwell and the political novelists who follow in his footsteps. Thankfully, however, such a totalizing vision is not what I achieve, let alone intend or attempt. Instead, my goal in *After Orwell* is to provide the main route and landmarks of a politico-literary tradition's circuitous and irregular sixty-year journey. Alternative routes, back-trackers, and stragglers are certainly welcome. The narrative this account articulates instead means to mirror Orwell's own political thought: consistent, but incomplete and open to revision.

1. Modernism's Wake: Politics and the Novel at Midcentury

In the years after World War II, authors and critics debated both the state of England and the novel's place in it. Andrzej Gasiorek writes that many commentators "thought the novel was under pressure from the events of recent history, which seemed not only to be unrepresentable but also to have shattered pre-war illusions" (1). Such claims were frequently supported, directly or implicitly, on political grounds, so "what passed for purely aesthetic judgement was frequently underpinned by covert political assumptions" (Gasiorek 4). For the participants in these discussions, modernism tended to be the common point of reference. Modernism's critics contended that it "was inward-looking, obsessed with subjectivity and the personal vision, and that its attention to form and style reduced the novel to a linguistic construct that made little or no reference to an external world. Modernism was thus incapable of dealing with social questions" (Gasiorek 3). Others, however, argued that "modernism was necessarily the point of departure for post-war fiction. The contemporary novel should investigate language, reveal its own provisional and fictional status, and refuse what they perceived as realism's univocal perspective" (Gasiorek 3). Disagreements ostensibly over aesthetics are in fact—or at least also—disagreements over politics and fiction's relation to a public realm, and these debates in part turn on whether modernism's legacy is one to be rejected or extended.

Of course, modernism's centrality to this midcentury crisis of fiction is inextricable from the back-formation of modernism in full swing at the time. While Tim Armstrong explains that, broadly, "modernism can be defined as a series of international artistic movements in the period 1900-1940, characterized by their sense of engagement with ideas of the 'new'" (24), he adds that "the question [of modernism] is bound up with the hagiography of the subject. Though the period had its own notion of modernity ... 'modernism' was not a term much used. The object of

literary study called ‘modernism’ is a retrospective construction” (24) linked to transatlantic trends in academic literary studies. Raymond Williams argues that modernism’s canonization—perpetrated “by the post-war settlement and accompanying, complicit academic endorsements” (34)—is complete shortly after war’s end: “‘Modernism’ as a title for a whole cultural movement and moment has then been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s, thereby stranding the dominant version of ‘modern’ or even ‘absolute modern’ between, say, 1890 and 1940” (32). Modernism’s concretization as an episode and a catalog of canonical texts and elite artists, as Williams notes, has political dimensions that postwar writers reject, defend, or reinterpret.

Since the postwar crisis of the novel is as much about politics as it is about literature, political fiction can serve as a productive locus. After all, Irving Howe claims the term “political novel” does not “mark any fundamental distinctions of literary form” and that it is best understood as a shorthand term for “the relation between politics and the novel” (17). Moreover, Robert Caserio asks, since all theory is in a sense speculative, “what is a fiction but a theory, a speculation about the fiction’s own nature, as well as a theory about the themes comprehended by the particular novel or story? ... The theoretical nature of fiction provides an overlap between novels and other reflections of the world” (41). Political fiction posits theories of politics, the novel form, and the relation between them, all issues animating the postwar crisis of the novel.

Two acclaimed political novels published a decade after war’s end, Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* (1955) and Angus Wilson’s *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956),²⁴ expressly resonate with this particular politico-literary crisis. *The Quiet American* centers on the adversarial relationship between Thomas Fowler, a world-weary English journalist covering the French war

²⁴ Both novels are among both authors’ most accomplished. Bernard Bergonzi declares *The Quiet American* “in its way a faultless work” (149). *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, which Marina MacKay calls “Wilson’s most influential novel” (158), is identified by Rubin Rabinovitz as “one of the best British novels of the 1950s” (913).

in Vietnam, and Alden Pyle, a naïve and ambitious American counter-insurgency expert recently arrived in Southeast Asia. Fowler and Pyle spar over geopolitics and the devotion of Fowler's young Vietnamese mistress Phuong, but when Fowler learns that Pyle's activities are killing civilians he collaborates in a successful plot to assassinate Pyle. By contrast to Greene's thriller, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* is a sprawling social comedy rarely recognized as a political novel. Wilson's central character, Gerald Middleton, is a middle-aged historian with personal and professional connections to a decades-old archeological hoax involving a pagan idol found at an Anglo-Saxon bishop's burial site. Numerous characters and subplots converge via Middleton's reassessment of the scandal. Marina MacKay writes, "The investigation seems narrowly academic—to discover whether or not this seventh-century bishop reverted to paganism—but the reader comes to see that more is at stake [given that Middleton's deceived mentor] was one of the 'Men of Munich'—that is, one of those people whose very high-mindedness led to appeasement in the 1930s" (158). *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* is a referendum on the English liberal humanist political tradition in the wake of war's atrocities and ruin.

The authors use realist methods, but neither finds realism incompatible with modernist ethos and experiment.²⁵ Caserio calls Greene—whose career began in the 1930s, shortly after modernism's interwar apogee—as modernism's "second edition," for Greene is so submerged in modernist literary culture that "whenever [he] is reprinted, a cohort of modernists ... gets published again alongside" (396). Wilson began writing after the war, but his ties to modernism are likewise complex. Rubin Rabinovitz identifies Wilson as part of "the new generation of

²⁵ Both Greene and Wilson at times explicitly attacked modernism. For instance, Wilson wrote several essays critical of the inaccessibility and elitism of several modernist writers, especially Virginia Woolf, and when Maurice Bendrix, the novelist protagonist in Greene's 1951 novel *The End of the Affair*, is asked why he gave up stream of consciousness, he responds, "Oh, I don't know. Why does one change a flat?" (124). Their own novels, however, betray an indebtedness to modernism not suggested by such criticisms.

writers [who] ... rejected experimental writing and made a conscious effort to return to an earlier style” (893), but he qualifies that “Wilson was open to trying new techniques and willing to reconsider his earlier rejection of experimental writing” (915). Wilson pushes against rather than dismisses modernism, and Greene shows internalized, if modulated, modernist assumptions.

Greene and Wilson’s realist notions of plot and character reinvest their novels with senses of public responsibility and social cohesion in the face of modernist subjectivism and fracture, but their texts also bear the mark of modernism. Greene and Wilson confound the narrow formalist division between anti-modernist “realist” and pro-modernist “experimentalist” schools that, as Lyndsey Stonebridge and Marina MacKay put it, “has dominated accounts of this period” (3). Their novels instead are part of the “heterogeneous phenomenon” of postwar realism constituted by texts that “deliberately fall somewhere between what Barthes calls the *scriptible* and the *lisible*, and which tend to try to reconceptualize realism rather than to reject it outright in the wake of modernist and postmodernist critique” (Gasiorek v). Greene and Wilson are part of a cadre of postwar writers who did not position themselves diametrically against modernism, but who “were modernism’s first readers, and whose respect for the modernist enterprise is apparent throughout their complex and sometimes introspective fiction” (Stonebridge and MacKay 5). *The Quiet American* and *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, moreover, suggest the widely unrecognized degree to which anxieties over totalization inform postwar engagements with modernism. Greene’s and Wilson’s negotiations of realist and modernist forms are motivated by and inflected with the authors’ anti-totalizing and anti-totalitarian preoccupations.

In *The Quiet American*, Greene adapts modernist paradigms of language and literature in his rendering of “politics” as a total system from which one is unable to disengage. Yet, still inspired by modernist thought, Greene’s political totality is shaped by the vagaries of human

agency, making its form unfixed and its movement non-deterministic. Paradoxically, for Greene, recognition of the absence of a position outside the political totality becomes the first step toward undermining political totalization. Greene's engagement with modernist totalities ultimately anticipates later postmodernist denials of apolitical perspectives or actions. In contrast to Greene's suggestion that all is political, Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* interrogates liberalism, a political tradition that defines itself in opposition to totalization. Paul Seabright writes, "Liberal political theories famously require society to offer individuals a space in which to live out their own fulfillment according to their own conceptions of the good ... Not anything intrinsically and necessarily political [can fill this space], or else politics has invaded the space it was supposed to respect" (145). Wilson positively aligns the modernist ethos of innovation and experimentation with liberalism's prizing of openness and tolerance, though he also implies that liberal anti-totalization in fact allows for, even encourages, the totalizing forces that subvert and possibly destroy liberalism. Wilson's ambivalence toward liberalism is in fact a specific response to resurgent senses of a distinctly English cultural integrity. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* emphasizes the political substratum beneath postwar England's unprecedented reconfiguration of the social structure, consequently challenging notions of a perennial and authentic, and thereby totalizing, English identity. *The Quiet American* and *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* suggest the complex ways that modernism lingers in midcentury fiction, which in turn bridge it to later literary developments.

Perhaps the most significant such development is the emergence of postmodernism. A danger, however, of situating midcentury novels like Greene's and Wilson's between modernism to postmodernism is to reinforce a persistent tripartite timeline for the twentieth-century novel. In this interpretation of literary history, the century's first and final thirds—respectively understood by way of modernist and postmodernist paradigms—are privileged, reducing the middle third,

with its presumed rejection of experiment in favor of realism, to a regressive interregnum.²⁶ Exponents of this narrative use the real hostility several prominent postwar writers²⁷ had toward modernist experiment to declaim a total, if brief, devolution to Victorian realism at midcentury.

This critical narrative is misguided. Richard Bradford rightly counters that unlike their realist forebears, midcentury writers used “a new, unprecedented form of realism in which the author no longer felt beholden to any fixed or determining set of social or ethical mores” (9). Peter Brooks points out that realism “tends to deal in ‘first impressions’ of all sorts” (3), and postwar realist fiction reflects the sense that after the war “social change was so rapid and varied that the logical response, for the novelist, seemed to be to attempt to record it, to incorporate its particulars and incidentals as guilelessly as possible” (Bradford 11). In short, writers strove not to make it new but to make it now, and Greene and Wilson too are compelled to capture and comprehend the drastically changed postwar world. The realist impulse toward documentary, despite common assumptions otherwise, is in several ways mostly continuous with the modernist enterprise to represent a rapidly changing world.

Greene and Wilson are novelists who seem, at least intuitively, to grasp this overlap. Their re-articulations, reformulations, and rebuttals to a modernism only recently constructed as a locatable entity or phenomenon participate in the complex transition from modernist to postmodernist paradigms, which of course would only retrospectively be recognized as a process taking place, but this fact need not be critically employed to imply that “proleptic postmodernism

²⁶ This vision of midcentury fiction can be found in Rubin Rabinovitz’s influential *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-60* (1967), as well as Malcolm Bradbury’s *The Modern British Novel: 1878-2001* (2001), Blake Morrison’s *The Movement* (1980), James Gordin’s *Postwar British Fiction: New Accents and Attitudes* (1962), and Bernard Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel* (1970).

²⁷ Kingsley Amis, C.P. Snow, and William Cooper were perhaps the most insistent and strident critics of modernism.

is the rationale with which mid-century writing is to be salvaged” (Stonebridge and MacKay 4). These resonances will not here be a means with which to champion early and late twentieth-century formal experimentation at the expense of midcentury realism but will instead be taken to demonstrate the fundamental continuity across English literary history that is too often compartmentalized by way of divisions that, though not arbitrary or useless, can be limiting.

Contemporary anxieties over totalitarianism and the cultural, political, and social dangers of totalization, ubiquitous in the period’s political and literary discourses, play a key role in the novel’s development at midcentury. Andreas Huyssen argues that it “is surely no coincidence that the Western codification of modernism as canon of the 20th century took place during the 1940s and 1950s, preceding and during the Cold War ... [suggesting] that the age of Hitler, Stalin, and the Cold War produced specific accounts of modernism, such as those of Clement Greenberg and Adorno, whose aesthetic categories cannot be totally divorced from the pressures of that era” (197). Huyssen’s argument is specifically concerned with the “great divide” separating modernist “high art” from commercial “mass culture,” a distinction Huyssen claims would in large part remain in place until the 1970s, in “an age of *détente*,” when “artists increasingly drew on popular or mass cultural forms and genres, overlaying them with modernist and/or avantgardist strategies” (197). Though related to the “great divide” discourse that Huyssen addresses, Greene’s and Wilson’s politico-literary sensibilities are profoundly shaped by the anxieties of an age living in threat of totalitarianism.

But, unlike the influential formulators of modernism, Greene and Wilson wrote at a time when modernism—articulated in retrospect specifically as a way to resist totalization—had itself been totalized. As Williams points out, Greene and Wilson encounter a modernism that had been “confined to this highly selective field and denied to everything else in an act of pure ideology,

whose first, unconscious irony is that, absurdly, it stops history dead” (Williams 34). As Huyssen argues, disrupting totalizing schemas is in many ways the imperative of modernist thought, but such a mission is made problematic when modernism itself is turned into a single pattern of its own. Greene and Wilson’s ambivalence toward totalization is complicated by their recognition that modernist anti-totalization is itself susceptible to the types of forces it resists. The two novelists confront this dilemma from different angles with different results, but both can be understood as ethical interventions into politics. Robert Eaglestone argues that postmodernism, “implicitly or explicitly, is about ethics before it is anything else. ... It is an ethical response to exactly the idea of a ‘single pattern’ that characterizes western thought and the activity that stems from that ‘single pattern’” (183). The ethical gesture of postmodernism, Eaglestone continues, emerges from encounters with otherness, and Greene and Wilson locate such a gesture in realist fiction’s representations of a recognizable public world and emphasis on social relations. Gasiorek argues that “[d]iscussion of British fiction needs to acknowledge the numerous fictional trajectories and aesthetic/political allegiances in play in the postwar period. To classify [postwar novels] as ‘postmodernist’ serves a useful heuristic purpose; but their range and complexity ensures that they will always exceed such categorizations” (“Postmodernisms” 208). Along such lines, Greene and Wilson’s embrace of the ethical impulse of realism serves to advance modernism’s anti-totalizing project by destabilizing a recently totalized modernism and to help initiate the postmodernist paradigm that is self-consciously conceptualized in such a way, as Gasiorek stresses, to anticipate and in advance foreclose attempts to totalize itself.

Of the two novels, *The Quiet American* is more commonly read by critics as political fiction. Bernard Bergonzi cites a letter Greene wrote to Evelyn Waugh after finishing *The End of the Affair*, his last “Catholic novel,” in which Greene alludes to *The Quiet American*: “It will be

fun to write about politics for a change, and not always about God” (qtd in Bergonzi 141). Maria Couto gives the familiar account that *The Quiet American* initiates for Greene a series of novels that “often contain overtly political themes and the religious sense is given a universal significance” (85). Yet, despite its prescience toward America’s grievous military actions in Vietnam, *The Quiet American* is less politically precise than often acknowledged. Greene’s political “target is only incidentally American involvement in third world affairs” (Boyers 67), and his novel’s anti-Americanism is chiefly cultural, not political: after Pyle’s death, Fowler says snidely, “I’d have liked to see him reading the Sunday supplements at home and following the baseball. I’d have liked to see him safe with a standardized American girl who subscribed to the Book Club” (24). *The Quiet American* indeed indicts American global politics, but it is about the nature of politics itself and its relation to fiction, not just America’s geopolitical hegemony.²⁸

Given that *The Quiet American* is an extended contest between two willful adversaries set in an “exotic” locale, it is a thriller, a genre that Greene embraced early in his career. Brian Diemert notes that *The Quiet American* “shares a great deal with [Greene’s] thrillers of the 1930s” (6), books in which, Allan Hepburn asserts, “Greene shows that individuals cannot be separated from their agonistic relations with lovers, religion, politics, race, and nationalism ... [and he] dramatizes antagonisms that constitute political identity” (218). Moreover, Diemert concludes that Greene’s thrillers “can be profitably read as investigations of reading, of writing, of the power of fictions, and of the boundaries of high culture and popular culture” (178). Caserio corroborates Diemert by noting that Greene famously refers to his thrillers as

²⁸ Graham MacPhee’s postcolonial reading of *The Quiet American* persuasively argues that the novel suggests that Britain’s diminished international presence signaled not retrenchment and departure from the world stage, but in truth amounted to “the integration of British military action into overall US strategic policy” (25)

“entertainments,” separating them from his novels proper.²⁹ The distinction’s crux is that, by virtue of their intentional unreality, “the entertainments are formal inventions, exercises in the lies [of fiction]. Therefore, Greene can actually explore his sense of the nature of fiction, and of its place in the world, more in his entertainments than in his novels. The entertainments are Greene’s critical theory” (Caserio 396). And, in *The Quiet American*, Greene’s “entertaining” theorizations into politics and fiction resonate with the debates over modernism and the novel.

Caserio’s account of modernism can help unpack the ways Greene’s engagements with modernism and his political themes animate each other. Caserio contends that “modernism” inclines against totalization, so to “treat modernism itself as a coherent entity, from the point of view of a totalizing desire for comprehensiveness, goes against the grain of what modernism ‘stands for’” (3); thus, one can only ironically “speak of modernism as a cultural phenomenon whose unified characteristics are identifiable” (3). That said, modernism paradoxically

takes the side of chance against certainties and totalities whose foundations are perhaps accidental and arbitrary, hence untrustworthy. ... If [modernist instances of chance] have anything in common, [it is] that their communion results from their sensing, in a profoundly shaping way ... the impact of chance on human affairs. Essential to the shaping impact is the opportunity and obstacle presented by chance to totalizing impulses. (Caserio 6)

Caserio adopts C.S. Peirce’s term “tychism” to refer to the modernist sense of the agency of “arbitrary and accidental randomness” (6). *The Quiet American* reenacts modernism’s drive to totalize that is irreconcilable with yet inseparable from the primacy it grants tychism. Greene performs, in *The Quiet American*, the modernist drive to at once conceive and undermine a total form—in this case, a political totality—at a time when modernism itself has been totalized.

²⁹ Diemert notes that Greene did consider *The Quiet American* to be an entertainment during its composition (6).

Bound up in *The Quiet American*'s politico-aesthetic theorizing is Greene's negotiation with modernism's complex relation to the public sphere. Since modernism's anti-totalizing impulses bear out in destabilizing expressions of tychism, the ideal public effects of modernist literature—the promotion of “justice, liberty from domination, repair, renewal” (Caserio 390)—are often made problematic by its means, that is to say, modernism's “destructive rage, absolute magical autonomy, a *questioning* and redefining of the very significance of *responsibility* and of other noble nouns and norms” (Caserio 391). Caserio claims that Greene reproduces and probes this tension between ends and means, for his books “are about the discomfort and difficulty, the very impossibility, of maintaining one's responsibilities to the public realm” (391). These anxieties derive from Greene's awareness that for modernism to “fulfill its public responsibility, liberating and renovating the world ... it must have its alternative and separate sphere” (399). Greene, says Caserio, agonizes over “what relevance to the public realm, what responsible value, can fiction have” (393) when to be publicly committed fiction must in its autonomy stand apart from the public realm it strives to impact. *The Quiet American* explores this dilemma in a context when modernism is besieged by allegations of being “arcane, highbrow, [and] anti-democratic” (Rabinovitz 898) as well as “incapable of dealing with social questions” (Gasiorek 3)—that is to say, so detached from social experience as to have no public value at all.

To pursue these questions over the public responsibility of writing in *The Quiet American*, Greene turns to politics; and yet, ironically, his narrator Fowler considers himself to possess a thoroughly apolitical disposition and lifestyle, though this presumption is gradually revealed to him to be a delusion. At first glance, Fowler is indeed consistent with Gasiorek's description of the typical Greene protagonist “bereft of any sustaining belief system or ideology” (“Justice” 22). Throughout the novel, Fowler inveighs against ideologies, stressing his preference

for objective, unbiased “facts” over “Isms and ocracies” (87). Recollecting his introduction to the ideologically indoctrinated and dogmatic Pyle, Fowler thinks, “Perhaps I should have seen that fanatic gleam, the quick response to a phrase, the magic sound of figures: Fifth Column, Third Force, Seventh Day” (17). This musing indicates Fowler’s view that all ideologies are alluring reductions, clung to by idealists and the deluded to deal with the messiness of reality. Fowler sees himself as an ex-colonial pragmatist who has learned to distrust all grand schemes, from colonialism to communism to Pyle’s “Third Way” program that supports a thuggish faction in Vietnam as a way to clear the way for “apolitical” American-style democracy and liberty. Fowler dislikes Pyle for several reasons, but perhaps chief among them is Fowler’s frustration at Pyle’s inability to see the rigidity of his thought and the ideological nature of American intervention in Vietnam. Given Fowler’s own perception of himself as detached and apolitical, he resents Pyle for the American’s professions of neutrality, the same stance that Fowler claims for himself.

Values recently enshrined as “modernist” bear on Fowler’s hostility toward Pyle. Unlike the sophisticated Fowler and the Pascal-reading French colonial officer, Inspector Vigot, Pyle is not just naïve but uncultured—he has no appreciation for the arts, and only reads non-fiction that confirms his ideological perspective. For Pyle, the term “serious writers” “excluded novelists, poets and dramatists unless they had what he called a contemporary theme” (Greene 16). Pyle’s blinkered perspective forecloses the critical imagination fostered by art, especially literature. Fowler constantly criticizes Pyle’s inability to think past his present circumstances, selfish wants, and of course his ideology: Pyle’s adolescent mixture of confidence and self-absorption make him “incapable of conceiving the pain he might cause others” (Greene 53). Pyle’s deficiencies reflect modernist assumptions in which complexity and ambiguity are held as means to penetrate consciousness and expand the realm of the thinkable, exercises of which Pyle is incapable.

Since *The Quiet American* is an “entertainment,” not a “novel,” Fowler’s modernist-inflected distaste for Pyle’s ideological mind dovetails into a theory of the novel’s nature, with an eye toward fiction’s public relevance. Greene betrays his interest in the meaning of fiction by making Fowler a reporter, a figure Greene takes to be both heroic and suitably analogous to the novelist. According to Greene, who had himself written as a reporter, “In a reportage, events have to be described as vividly and accurately as possible ... A reporter mustn’t on any account set out with preconceived ideas” (Allain 79). On the other hand, “the novelist’s station is on the ambiguous borderline between the just and unjust, between doubt and clarity” (Allain 79). In simplest terms, the reporter takes no side and the novelist takes all sides. For Greene, while the missions of the journalist and of the novelist appear diametrically opposed, on the contrary they are essentially identical: neither privilege one exclusive point of view over others and both write to express the truth of the matter. The successful novelist and reporter move beyond a limited subjectivity in order to render a comprehensive and truthful portrait. Given these parallels, in making *The Quiet American*’s protagonist a reporter Greene telegraphs his interests in representation and the relation between writing, fiction and reportage alike, and the public realm.

In Greene’s view, neither novelist nor reporter directly affects concrete circumstances. As a novelist, Greene “[doesn’t] fight injustice: [he] express[es] a sense of injustice, for [his] aim is not to change things but to give them expression” (Allain 78). Likewise, a reporter who stakes out a position on the side of justice paradoxically mitigates the neutrality that drives her work’s ability to convey injustice (Allain 81). Rather than directly impacting material conditions or ushering in dramatic transfigurations of consciousness, the novelist’s and the reporter’s successful negotiations of subjectivities—achieved either by multiplying or shunning them altogether—open a shared imaginary space where a sense of justice is communally available to

readers. The promiscuous novelist's openness to plural, competing perspectives and the chaste reporter's refusal to privilege any point of view likewise release writing from the constraints of exclusive and overpowering subjectivities, even if results are expressive and not transformative. But, *The Quiet American* suggests that this expression of injustice is not in any way apolitical.

Greene's alignment of reporter and novelist, and their shared mission to express not fight injustice, point the way to a politics of fiction that reverberates with anxieties over the dangers of totalitarianism. In his gloss on the politico-ethical philosophy of Jacques Derrida, Simon Critchley maintains that "the greatest danger in politics is the threat of totalitarianism" (101). Totalitarianism, Critchley elaborates, is premised upon the identification of the political and social and would claim that a particular political form and hence a particular state, community or territory embodies justice, that justice is immanent to the body politic" (101). Dana Villa, moreover, argues that Derrida's anti-totalizing political thought is in many ways similar to that of Theodor Adorno's attempts to "preserve the tension between the identical and the nonidentical, while imagining a social state—a 'totality'—that is nothing more than the 'togetherness of diversity.' In other words, the point is to reimagine society as a collection of differences whose "reconciliation" does not in any way demand their erasure" (94). Greene's novel shares with these thinkers a refusal to allow political justice to become associated, or presumed to inhere within, any one particular ideology (or literary form). *The Quiet American* demonstrates that a writer and the act of writing—like all actions or lack of action—cannot be disentangled from politics. However, if the writer is to be politically responsible and just, then he or she must perpetually disturb and destabilize the way the individual is entangled with the political totality, lest that totality—which cannot cease to exist—be overwritten by a totalizing

politics that flattens out differences, feigns complete comprehension in a denial of alterity, and seeks to eliminate spontaneity, chance, and unpredictability.

Greene works toward this idea in *The Quiet American* by turning inward, producing a novel that features a reporter in action. In this case, Greene's own fidelity to the "unscrupulous" duty of the novelist—which he identifies as his commitment "to violate his [own] faith or political opinions" (80) in his writing—requires that he put pressure on his own view that the reporter is a disinterested chronicler capable of moving past subjectivity. The end of Greene's obligatory challenging of his own convictions—which here amounts to questioning the reporter's (and thus also the novelist's) ability to transcend subjectivity and create autonomous texts—is that over the course of Greene's narrative Fowler realizes that his presumed disengagement is in fact a delusion and that he too is "involved." As the book goes on, Pyle catches Fowler referring to station guards as being "on [their] side" (91), and, in a talk about Pyle, the colonial police inspector Vigot tells Fowler, "You're *engagé*, like the rest of us" (130). Heng—a co-conspirator in Pyle's assassination—tells Fowler, "Sooner or later ... one has to take sides. If one is to remain human" (166). And, at novel's end, Fowler admits that he's "been blind to a lot of things" and then ponders to himself, "Was I so different from Pyle?" (177). More important than Pyle's misguided exploits compelling Fowler into "direct" action is Fowler's realization that his cherished lack of involvement—which he refers to as "an article of [his] *creed*" (20, my emphasis)—was never the absence of politics but an alternate negotiation of politics.

The Quiet American contests Pyle's rigid and mechanical totalizing political vision not with a simpleminded rejection of politics but with a modernist totalizing political vision, one that revolves around encounters with others and spontaneous instances of chance. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), addresses the way totalizing political visions attempt, but

fail, to eliminate chance. Arendt writes, “The chief disability of totalitarian propaganda is that it cannot fulfill this longing of the masses for a completely consistent, comprehensible, and predictable world without seriously conflicting with common sense” (n.p.). After all, Arendt continues, “No ideology which aims at the explanation of all historical events of the past and at mapping out the course of all events of the future can bear the unpredictability which springs from the fact that men are creative, that they can bring forward something so new that nobody ever foresaw it” (n.p.). Fowler criticizes Pyle on these very grounds. Reveling in Pyle’s “pain and disappointment ... when reality didn’t match the romantic ideas he cherished” (66), Fowler denounces Pyle’s academic guru, York Harding, for “[getting] hold of an idea and then [altering] every situation to fit the idea” (160). Over the course of the novel, Fowler comes to a realization similar to another of Arendt’s insights. Arendt rebukes the notion that the opposite, alternative, or solution to totalitarian regimes is simply the liberal division of private and public spheres, arguing that “the bourgeoisie’s political philosophy was always ‘totalitarian’; it always assumed an identity of politics, economics and society, in which political institutions served only as the façade for private interests. The bourgeoisie’s double standard, its differentiation between public and private life, were a concession to the nation-state which had desperately tried to keep the two spheres apart” (n.p.). Likewise, Fowler eventually understands that his conviction that his perspective as a reporter is apolitical is not just façade but also an ideological maneuver.

Fowler’s confrontations with Pyle force him to recognize that true withdrawal from the reach of politics is illusory. This epiphany leads him to admit “that no decision would ever be simple again” (175). Less self-centeredly, but crucially, Fowler is able to perceive the ways that he and Pyle alike have mapped their interests and desires upon Phuong. As he argues over Phuong with Pyle, Fowler presumes to defend her interests, all the while thinking to himself,

“But even as I made my speech ... I knew I was inventing a character just as much as Pyle was” (124). Fowler grounds his superiority to Pyle in his confidence that he, unlike Pyle, intimately and truly “knows” *Phuong* and by extension Vietnam. But, as his conflict with Pyle wears on, he reflects, “I remembered that first tormenting year when I had tried so hard to understand [*Phuong*], when I had begged her to tell me what she thought and had scared her with my unreasoning anger at her silences” (125). Robert Boyers observes “that Pyle continues to speak about an imaginary neutralist ‘Third Force’ in Vietnam as if there were available in the faction-ridden country any political or military entity not utterly compromised by previous corruptions and commitments” (68). Fowler’s political epiphany is that the absence of any “entity not utterly compromised” applies to him as well. Slowly abandoning his faith in a non-ideological position, Fowler’s eroded sense of detachment allows him to notice the ways his false critical distance lead him to “invent” and thus dominate *Phuong*, and his confidence in both his insider knowledge of Vietnam and his detachment from politics crumbles.

The objective and experiential knowledge of Vietnam that Fowler believes himself to possess is thus compromised, and his heretofore lack of action—in fact, his lack of even an opinion, for “an opinion is a kind of action” (20)—does not mean he exists autonomously outside or above politics. His perspective is in its own ways as constrained as Pyle’s. Fowler righteously excoriates Pyle over “what is at issue” for the Vietnamese, declaring, ““They want enough rice ... They don’t want to be shot at. They want one day to be much the same as another. They don’t want our white skins around telling them what they want”” (86). The unreliability of Fowler’s narration, highlighted during his admission of his own “invention” of *Phuong*, casts suspicion over Fowler’s account of the Vietnamese, even if it is less distasteful than Pyle’s imposed vision. Nevertheless, Graham MacPhee stresses, “As Fowler’s epistemological claim to know Vietnam

collapses, so does his vision of an existential retreat” (29). Fowler’s belief in his own hard-bitten political disengagement turns out to be as naïve and wrongheaded as Pyle’s ideological fidelity. Critchley argues that “the ‘experience’ of justice is that of an absolute alterity or transcendence that guides politics without being fully present in the public realm” (101). Fowler’s experience of alterity—his realization of his own incomprehension of Phuong in particular and Vietnamese people in general—is a moment of justice that is inseparable from Fowler’s realization that he too is politically involved. Paradoxically, Fowler’s acceptance that he is as connected to the politics in Vietnam as Pyle is signified by his distance from Phuong and Vietnam.

Greene’s tearing down of Fowler’s (and journalism’s and fiction’s) ability to transcend ideology and exist outside politics is vital to his understanding of modernism. Without Fowler’s loss of assurance in his own detachment, *The Quiet American* would in effect theorize the novel’s social function merely by favorably comparing fiction’s ambiguities and openness to ideology’s simplifications and rigidity. Ironically, such a move would align Greene with the very Cold War logic—“in which the coercive dimension of interstate relationships is refracted through a ‘quasi-existential’ conflict between freedom and totalitarianism” (MacPhee 26)—that Pyle serves to denigrate. Unlike the cynical Cold War logic that contrasted an “anti-ideological” modernism with a “politicized” social realism, Greene posits that fiction itself is inescapably political, for it emerges from within and contributes to a political totality. Greene does not defend the novel as “another instance of an almost metaphysical conflict between freedom and totalitarianism” (MacPhee 27), in which fiction triumphantly resists ideology; fiction’s political power is in its potential transformation of an always already fundamentally political totality.

That tychisms at once govern and destabilize the political totality in *The Quiet American* places it within the legacy of modernism. Caserio refers to the structuralist linguistics of

Ferdinand de Saussure and the Russian Formalist school of literary theory, two major paradigms of modernist thought that both “claim that a totalizing grasp of language or literature must come to fresh terms with chance” (7). In Saussure’s linguistics, “meaning itself is arbitrary and actively constructive” (7) while, similarly, the Russian Formalists contend that literature “does not represent anything outside it; it reflects only the history of literary forms. The history results from the artistic development of linguistic structures whose relation to meaning is purely coincidental” (7). Language itself and that which is called literature, according to these modernist paradigms, are ruled by arbitrary assignations, associations, and connections. Tychisms may be the roots of Saussure’s and the Formalists’ theories, but “[w]hat grows from the roots, however, are ‘all-forms’: a totalizing theory of language, a totalizing theory of literature” (Caserio 9). The modernist paradox is that the totalizing all-form is able to continually expand in order to encompass all instances, since by virtue of being founded in tychisms “the laws of the totality can change because of arbitrary and chance rearrangements of the elements out of which their habitlike rule grows” (Caserio 8). As David Holdcroft writes of Saussurean linguistics, “the sign is arbitrary *a priori*, but non-arbitrary *a posteriori*” (53). While the genesis of a language or political structure at its furthest regress may be arbitrary, the accrual of conventions and precedents produce lasting significances. The political totality in *The Quiet American* is too a modernist paradigm founded by, grounded in, and disrupted by tychism.

Greene’s narrative is “rooted” in tychism: Fowler and Pyle’s meeting is an entirely chance encounter. As Fowler recalls in a flashback, he and Pyle meet simply because a street café is crowded and they happen to share a table (9). More importantly, the political totality constituted in *The Quiet American* sprouts from the tychisms of human agency, autonomy, and

unpredictability. The primacy of tychism to the political totality is contrasted with Pyle's own comprehensive political theory, which utterly absorbs the agency of others. As Boyers points out,

What more suitable manifestation of Pyle's delusional propensities have we than his conviction that it is his mission to protect [Phuong], to give her a respectable life by introducing her to the virtues of bourgeois meritocracy? What better expresses his unwittingly cruel and destructive innocence than his insistent assumption that Fowler must somehow approve the justness of his mission and remain his friend, even as his mistress is carried off by the more dashing and youthful figure? (69)

Pyle's vision is utterly stripped of tychism, of even the possibility of unpredictability. According to Leland Monk, in *Standard Deviations: Chance the Modern British Novel* (1993), "Chance and its cognates have been systematically suppressed in Western science and philosophy in the service of order, certainty, and necessity in order to assure metaphysics a cognitive and conceptual mastery over reality" (4). Pyle's politics likewise suppress and deny any element of spontaneous chance for reasons of political domination and control.

Thus, Pyle's program of liberation in fact resembles the totalitarian ideologies he would presume to combat. Indeed, Arendt describes totalitarian ideology as an "-ism which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise" (n.p.). This omnivorous logic is the terrifying epitome of what Eagleton calls the metaphysics of comprehension, the defining characteristic of Western thought. *The Quiet American* disturbs metaphysics of comprehension when Fowler is confronted with Phuong's alterity, and he senses his own projections upon her and Vietnam. Eagleton argues that "the ethical interruption [like the one Fowler experiences] must become, cannot but be, codified in a politics, a morality, a position, an identity. But this must also be always ready to interrupt itself again in the name of the obligations to which it responds" (193). Such ethical interruptions derive from encounters with otherness. But, as Eagleton notes, "to disrupt a meeting, you have

to attend it” (184). *The Quiet American* attempts to come to terms with this seemingly contradictory dual imperative to at once participate and interfere. Fowler’s moment of transcendent political justice comes only after his acceptance of his own political culpability.

Angus Wilson’s *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* can be read alongside *The Quiet American* as another political novel in which the political themes dovetail with the novel after modernism. Rather than travelling outward to the colonized world as a way to interrogate politics *qua* politics, however, Wilson turns inward to Englishness and a specific political tradition: England’s humanist liberalism.³⁰ Wilson’s inward turn is part and parcel of much broader trends in English culture generally, and fiction in particular. Jed Esty traces the postwar period’s marked Anglocentrism to the late modernists of the 1930s and 1940s, notably Woolf and T.S. Eliot, who “translated the end of empire into a resurgent concept of national culture—one whose insular integrity seemed to mitigate some of modernism’s characteristic social agonies while rendering obsolete some of modernism’s defining aesthetic techniques” (2). Modernism “established key tropes and concepts for the postwar reclamation of England’s cultural integrity and authenticity” (Esty 2). This overarching retrenchment narrative can even be squared with examples of postwar English fiction that at first glance seem to contradict it. Steven Connor points out “the marked expansion and internationalisation of theme” (85) in much postwar fiction, but he notes that within many such novels “there is an opening of the inside to the outside, an imaginative (and also sometimes imaginary) travelling, the purpose of which at least in part is to focus attention back to the point of departure” (85). Thus, Connor concludes, “many

³⁰ Their seeming differences in focus find an overlap in the role of neutrality or objectivity, which Greene of course locates in the writer—reporter or novelist—but then proceeds to explode. Wilson, on the other hand, inevitably arrives at issues of neutrality in his consideration of liberalism, for “both critics and defenders of liberalism as a political ideology have focused on neutrality and cognate notions” such as “impartiality, even-handedness, absence of bias, equality of treatment, and indifference” (Goodin and Reeve 1).

of the most striking and significant explorations of the conditions of national identity in the postwar British novel have been the product not of inside-out excursion but of an outside-in recursion” (85). Retrenchment and English introspection, in other words, need not only occur in novels, like Wilson’s, that are set in England and explicitly telegraph an interest in Englishness.

What is more, Graham MacPhee reconciles Esty’s “shrinking island” thesis with John Marx’s ostensibly contrary claim that, instead of prefiguring insularity, “modernism laid the ground for the most utopian accounts of globalization as free intellectual and commercial exchange” (Marx 4) underwriting the neocolonialism of the late twentieth century. MacPhee argues that interest in English identity counterintuitively complements the “reformulation of Western global hegemony ... [from] the often direct control exercised by European empires to a system of formally sovereign states supervised by a series of international bodies directed by the United States” (22). Postwar fiction particularizes England’s place within this global matrix, showing how national integrity coexists with American hegemony and accelerated globalization.

Indeed, *The Quiet American* and *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* exemplify, respectively, the retrenchment narrative’s “global position” and “national condition” variants. MacPhee argues that *The Quiet American* questions England’s supposed “post-imperial ‘good conscience’” derived from the former imperial center’s new role “as a bounded nation-state motivated only by strategic national interest and the ‘denationalised’ universalism of freedom and democracy” (29), while, says Head, in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, “Wilson makes the dilemmas of [an] English liberal speak to the larger problems of nationhood” (21). Wilson’s anxieties over the viability of English liberal humanism are, like Greene’s entertainments and consonant with Esty’s and Marx’s analyses of retrenchment, yoked to modernist literary culture.

Wilson's novel, however, goes against the common end of retrenchment: the pursuit of cultural wholeness. Esty's account of this new insularity describes England's earlier "culture of imperial modernism [that] represented itself as an expanding and synthesizing universalism *at the periphery* (where it encountered the putatively whole cultures of tribal premodernity), [but] registered an attenuated or absent totality *at the core*" (7). However, Esty says, "If the metaphor of lost totality is one of the central deep structures of imperialism and modernism, it follows that the end of empire might be taken to augur a basic repair or reintegration of English culture itself" (7). Indeed, "the second half of the twentieth century was a period in which the British empire, the United Kingdom, Great Britain, and English identity itself appeared at times to be falling into diminished and disoriented forms" (Koenigsberger 20). Late modernist trends continue postwar, contributing "to two key transformations in midcentury British culture: (1) the reconception of the imperial state in specifically national terms ... and (2) the migration of available models of social totality from the colonial periphery to an increasingly compact territory at home" (Esty 175). *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* no doubt strives to capture a social totality, but its handling of its political themes evokes modernist anti-totalizing totalization and undermines any postulated integral and authentic national identity to emerge from England's postwar self-colonization.

Since Wilson's novelistic deracination of a restored authentic Englishness bears the mark of modernism, it should be considered by way of his critical appraisals of modernism. Along these lines, Wilson's concern that modernism plunged too deep into subjectivism, losing sight of fiction's social function, curiously resembles his resistance of the documentary realism of the "reaction against experiment" crowd. Shortly before *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, Wilson wrote, "In the years between the wars, an absorption with psychology, bred of the effluence of Freud, led to an increasing use of indirect presentations of the external world ... By a healthy reaction, in

these post-war years presentation has become increasingly direct ... In both phases, however, the essential elements of narrative and description have been ignored” (“Future” 126). These neglected “essential elements” add up to what Wilson calls the lost, but imperative, “entertainment element of serious fiction” (126). Declaring that “serious novelists should remember that though they have every right to be difficult, they have no right to be boring” (126), Wilson says the “remedy for this deficiency [of entertainment value] is largely a formal one” (126). Wilson’s language instantly brings Greene’s terminology to mind, but unlike Greene Wilson does not differentiate entertainments from novels: entertainment is instead an essential “formal property” of the novel. If, as with Greene’s usage, “entertainment” is taken to indicate a self-conscious artificiality, then Wilson’s novels are also preoccupied with the novel form itself. Wilson’s famous self-declared twin pillars of writing are diversity and depth, by which “diversity” has “to do with traditional narrative skills and the powers of storytelling, ‘depth’ to do with a realisation of psychological intensity, a power required of great modern writing” (Bradbury; *Bloomsbury* 225). Consequently, like Greene’s entertainments, Wilson’s novels are formal experiments, “theorizing” fiction that balances the psychological profundity of modernism with the breadth of vision of nineteenth century realism.

Like Greene, Wilson deeply cares about the public responsibility of fiction—he considers the relationship of novelist and society to be critical. Wilson thus feels obliged to grapple with the emergent postwar social structure ruled by “that strange mixture of business experts, bureaucrats, social scientists, and the rest of the Welfare set-up” (“Future” 127). Yet, when adult novelists watching this nascent society develop in real time “attempt to use [the new social structure itself] for creative inspiration [they] shall inevitably be too conscious of its outlines; [they] shall fall into documentary” (“Future” 127). Wilson foresees future writers, born into the

emergent order, who will be attuned to its norms and assumptions but unaware of their own perceptiveness. According to Wilson, “It was from such a background that Jane Austen came, less consciously concerned with the wider social issues of her time than any other novelist, yet so deeply imbued with an unconscious sense of social structure” (127). This anticipation of a future Austen gestures to the surprising degree to which politics drives Wilson’s own fiction.

After all, Jane Austen is the exemplar of the social novel that Irving Howe identifies as political fiction’s precursor. Howe calls Austen “a great artist who enjoyed the luxury of being able to take society for granted” (19). In Howe’s chronology, novelists after Austen necessarily turned their attentions “from the gradations within society to the fate of society itself. [The political novel is one] in which the *idea* of society, as distinct from the mere unquestioned workings of society, has penetrated the consciousnesses of the characters” (19). If, as Howe avers, Austen wrote at the end of an unproblematic internalization of society and on the eve of both the modernist movement and political fiction, then Wilson writes at that era’s twilight: after modernist energies have been exhausted, but too soon to intuitively comprehend the burgeoning social structure in the way Austen did hers. Wilson, then, is not a social novelist in the vein of Austen. Instead, he is a political novelist writing after one society has been questioned out of existence, but before a new one can be installed so fully as to have its workings go unquestioned.

Wilson’s primary political target here is England’s institutionalized liberal humanism, to which he held conflicted allegiance throughout his lifetime. An interest in the reevaluation of liberalism registers in Wilson’s 1955 essay, “Lawrence and Leavis.” Wilson writes that, after the horrors of World War II, “the rosy glow which once hung over the liberal decades can never now be restored; there will always be about them a flush of self-satisfaction, falseness, and highminded evasion.” (128). Gasiorek claims that Wilson’s very conception of realist fiction

associates it “with a liberal humanism that is increasingly uneasy about its political impotence” (5). Head asserts that while Wilson belongs to “a peculiarly English” tradition of fiction as liberal self-discovery, “he also embodies the dismantling and transforming of that tradition” (21), and that in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* Wilson is “indicating that the novel makes a partial break with the liberal tradition, presenting a central character who must reinvent himself, as best he can, whilst seeking a path through the muddle of English identity” (22). Wilson’s novel illustrates the ambivalence of a liberal society reconstituting itself and its identity after the trauma of war.

Anglo-Saxon Attitudes revolves around the dual crises—one personal and private, the other professional and public—of its protagonist, Gerald Middleton. David Leon Higdon notes, “The public crisis both mirrors and is intrinsically connected with the private crisis since similar things have gone wrong with [Middleton’s] family and his profession” (143). Middleton’s private crisis amounts to his strained relationships with his adult children and their domineering mother, his estranged wife, Ingeborg. The public crisis involves renewed interest in the decades-old discovery of a pagan idol found with the remains of Eorpwald, an Anglo-Saxon bishop, at an archeological site called Melpham. Middleton participated in the dig as a student, and the public esteem of his mentor, Lionel Stokesay, rests on the find. But, Middleton rightly suspects that Stokesay’s son, Gilbert, an avant-garde writer modeled on Wyndham Lewis and T.E. Hulme, planted the statue in order to later embarrass his father. Gilbert, however, is killed in World War I and the Melpham hoax goes unexposed. Uniting the private and the public is Gerald’s tumultuous and tragically doomed affair with Gilbert’s wife, Dollie. The novel chronicles a confluence of events compelling Middleton, who feels as if the “past seemed insatiable in its encroachments upon his life” (63), to face these dilemmas by making an attempt to reconcile his familial relationships and finally resolve his suspicions about Gilbert and the Melpham find.

A political current runs beneath both crises. Steven Connor mentions, with respect to Middleton's professional crisis, the "distorted and partial acknowledgement of the relations between academic history and politics, as instanced in the simmering suspicions about Professor Stokesay's pro-German feeling in the years before the Second World War" (51). Moreover, much of Gerald's familial strife revolves around the fractious relationship of his sons, John and Robin. The younger son, John, resigned from Parliament over the excessive red tape and now considers himself an "independent radical" (4), writing "reformist, socially-conscious journalism, attacking government blunders and defending the weak individual" (Higdon 150) and hosting a television program devoted to political exposés. Robin, the elder son, is "the practical man of the family" (Wilson 103), an industrialist who runs the family company, England's "greatest steel construction business" and is "the champion of 'more free-enterprise houses for all'" (Wilson 119). Their confrontation comes to a head over Robin's decision to use company resources, aggressively and underhandedly, to force a much smaller competitor, Mr. Grimstone, out of business. While neither of Gerald's crises is exclusively political, both have political aspects that all too often critics wrongly overlook.

The political themes of the intertwining public and private crises speak to the retrenchment and cultural insularity that is so deeply felt in midcentury literary culture. While Bradbury is correct that "the force of the book lies in the 'large number of people' in the story, which is a portrait of many layers of British society" (*Novel* 329), the twin crises of Gerald unite virtually all the characters, making him the undisputed focal figure. Indeed, Gerald's surname telegraphs not just his middling professional and personal histories, but also "the fact that he mediates between so many different forms and levels of social life ... The novel [thus] asks us to accept the equivalence of Middleton's personal turmoil with the deceits and conflicts within his

family and widely distributed circle of friends and, beyond that, with the much deeper and more systematic conflicts with modern social life” (Connor 50). While *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* emphasizes social connectedness, the fact that every key character in the novel is tied to one of Gerald’s crises makes him a hub, and the equivalence of his life with social life means that Gerald is not simply one figure among many in the social web. Gerald is a synecdoche for English national identity: his crises and their political dimensions belong to England as well. This reading aligns *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* with the postwar social upheavals Wilson intimates in his critical essays. Along these lines, Head observes that several of Gerald’s unpalatable qualities reflect England in transition, making him “an anachronism: the man of independent means, not fully responsive to his context” (Head 22). Gerald’s listless responses to new circumstances constitute Wilson’s commentary on England’s difficulties as it struggles to come to terms with its burdensome past and its bewildering present.

Gerald, like the artifacts searched for at Melpham, is a relic of a bygone time. Wilson takes care to remind his readers that Gerald’s apparent obsolescence and displacement has a definite political layer. Hanging over the novel are the clouds of past political failure on the parts of Gerald and other characters whose adult lives unfolded chiefly during the interwar years. Lionel Stokesay is a locus for the uneasiness with which Wilson views England’s prewar liberal politics. The characters who knew Stokesay offer a range of responses to his failure to recognize evil. Sir Edgar Iffley, coordinator of the Stokesay Lecture, first tells his guest speaker “that Stokesay was a bit of a national figure” (26), then hopes that out of decorum the speaker will not mention “the old chap’s unfortunate last years ... [propagating] ‘pro-German nonsense’” (26). Arguably more disturbing than Iffley’s polite restraint is the otherwise charmingly eccentric historian Rose Lorimar’s rationalization of Stokesay’s appeasement. Lorimar boldly proclaims,

“Nobody, of course, likes the Nazis ... But Lionel Stokesay felt above everything that he must do all in his power to preserve peace ... and his sadness when all his efforts proved unavailing was tragic to see” (42). Gilbert’s widow and Gerald’s lover, Dollie, retains affection for her deceased father-in-law, but admits that Stokesay “*was* the most awful old fraud himself, you know. Oh, not as a historian ... But as a man. He just liked listening to his own voice and he was the biggest coward [she’d] ever known” (369). Importantly, Stokesay’s suspect and cowardly liberal “humanism survives through Middleton” (MacKay 158), a decent man without a firm moral compass who finds “repugnant the activities of public life” (Wilson 62) and who “acquies[ces] in his family’s habit of isolating him” (87). Gerald, then, is not a repulsive figure, but a feeble one. He and other prewar figures suggest a liberalism that is neither able to resist those forces that would destroy it nor cope with the consequences of its failures. Gerald is on a search for self-discovery, but his difficulties adjusting to drastically changed circumstances and admitting the errors of his past hamper the process.

Anglo-Saxon Attitudes also features several characters outside the mainstream of liberalism who are not only unable to resist the intrusions of brutish and totalitarian impulses, but who in fact embrace such tendencies. Dollie remembers her husband, the avant-garde artist Gilbert, as “beastly,” a “sadist,” and “a filthy-minded schoolboy and a bully” (369). Elvira Portway, Robin’s mistress and John’s former secretary, condemns Gilbert for his “alignment to the Wyndham Lewis anti-Bloomsbury group” and approvingly cites John’s labeling of the younger Stokesay as a “crypto-fascist” (267). Ironically, Elvira’s grandmother, Lillian, in her day a famous actress and suffragist—and an old acquaintance of Gerald’s, for her brother was a church antiquarian who aided the Melpham excavation—also acted on fascist sympathies. In her youth Lillian “had brought crowds to see her play Shaw’s heroines in Sloane Square, she had

brought crowds to hear her speak of women's rights in Norwich, [and] she had brought crowds, more select, to hear her praise Mussolini's Italy in Knightsbridge and Mayfair drawing-rooms" (73). Thus, not only did England's prewar liberal political culture fail to comprehend the fascist threat abroad, it tolerated—perhaps nurtured or even cultivated—the same dangers within its borders. When Gerald is read as representative of the nation his association with Lillian and close friendship with Gilbert imply that fascism was far from prewar England's political fringe.

Such anxieties about liberal humanism bridge Wilson to Virginia Woolf, a writer Wilson took to task early in his career for her supposed elitism, though he later retracted the criticisms. MacKay writes that, "[l]ike many English intellectuals of her class and generation, Woolf was a liberal humanist, believing in the coherence and rationality of the individual, the integrity of personal relationships, and the dignity of human accomplishments" (147). However, her late work shows that the devastations of war profoundly shake her confidence in liberal humanism. *Between the Acts* (1941), Woolf's last novel, "is as much concerned with the Nazi within as the Nazi without" (MacKay 146). For instance, "[d]uring the interval of the pageant play that takes up most of the novel, Giles is startled by a symbolic atrocity right in the English heartland, literally a snake in the grass" (MacKay 147). Creating a key intersection, the pageant play scene in *Between the Acts* is also cited by Esty as evidence that Woolf, with other late modernists, lays the ground for postwar retrenchment and the reclamation of integral English identity.

Esty argues that Woolf and other late modernists drawn to the pageant play were in part responding to ominous events in Nazi Germany. Indeed, the connection between modernist interest in the pageant play, a public spectacle meant to illustrate or rehearse the history of England and its people, and Nazi propaganda is perhaps discomfiting. According to Esty,

The success of Nazi theater and spectacle no doubt turned the attention of English writers to matters of national community and

public art. ... The pageant-play experiments in question aimed not just to rehearse the tropes of Merrie Englande but to gauge the vitality of native rituals. ... At a time when the masses began to assert themselves on both the literary and political stages of Europe, the English pageant-play was refitted to perform insular and interclass harmony. (55)

Taken together, MacKay's and Esty's readings of *Between the Acts* suggest that writers' midcentury apprehensions over the political survival and ethical viability of liberal humanism intersect with the movement "to reattach English sympathies to a properly bounded national culture" in order to recover "its national culture as a significant totality" (Esty 161). Wilson's novel, by contrast, is a confrontation with late modernism's disillusionment with liberalism and an outright rebuke of the reformulated integral English identity that late modernism initiates.

Anglo-Saxon Attitudes, strangely enough, can be read as an attempt to recuperate Woolf's prewar liberalism, acknowledging its blind spots but also assuring its survival. On the relationship between liberalism and totalitarianism, Herbert Marcuse writes, "The turn from the liberalist to the total-authoritarian state occurs within the framework of a single social order. With regard to the unity of this economic base, we can say it is liberalism that 'produces' the total-authoritarian state out of itself, as its own consummation at a more advanced stage of development" (19). This transformation, according to Marcuse, is predicated chiefly on desires for unity within a divided liberal society: "The whole is understood not only as a sum or abstract totality, but as the unity that unifies the parts, a unity which is the precondition for the fulfillment and completion of each part. The demand for the realization of such a totality occupied the first place in the programmatic proclamations of the total-authoritarian state" (20). In the face of such danger, Wilson embraces England's imperial-modernist skepticism of cultural integrity and attempts to not only reconfigure it for a post-imperial age, but also attempts to preserve a sense of social totality that, while total, is decidedly not completely unified and completely whole.

Wilson's tempered defense of liberal humanism plays out in the relationship between Gerald's sons Robin and John. Gerald's sorting of his past provides him, and the lurching old England he represents, with some consolation and growth, but Robin and John serve as Wilson's vision of the England to come. Much of the distance between the siblings and their father derives from Gerald's incomprehension at their enthusiasm for their respective vocations: in Robin's case, the family's steel business, and in John's case, social crusading on behalf of individuals wronged by impersonal and oppressive authorities. Because these two passionately conducted endeavors are underwritten by political ideologies, the sibling rivalry between John and Robin takes on a strongly political character. However, despite the heatedness with which the two brothers argue, Wilson shows how, at bottom, the gap separating them is remarkably shallow. In so doing, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* affirms the longevity and resilience of English political liberalism. Rather than embracing an organic and distinct Englishness—as MacKay's and Esty's readings of Woolf together suggest late modernism prescribed and many midcentury novels allege—Wilson's novel advances the idea England at midcentury is replacing an etiolated prewar liberalism with a bureaucratic and managerial postwar, post-imperial liberalism.

The seemingly intractable inter-family conflict—Robin's anti-union, anti-planning conservatism in contrast with John's anti-authoritarianism and Keynesian economics—is in fact a relatively minor dispute between two liberals. Comparing Robin's and John's views on government reveals their fundamental liberal concordance. On the one hand, Robin grumbles, “It's typical of politicians and journalists, they want a state-run country and they're ready to employ thousands of bureaucrats at our expense to do it, but when one of their employees really *can* administer they turn on him” (70). On the other hand, John isn't “against the civil service. [He] just want[s] a good one” (163), so what he objects to “is the tyrannical, uncontrolled use of

these laws by unimaginative bureaucrats” (110). But, in both outbursts, the Middleton sons prioritize the efficiency of autonomous individuals in personal relationships over the cumbersome anonymity of bureaucracies; in other words, liberal humanist values. Louis Menand summation of liberalism’s flexibility applies here: “There are, as a matter of political theory, radically different types of liberals. There is, in Isaiah Berlin’s famous distinction, the liberal who believes in negative liberty, ‘freedom from,’ and the liberal who believes in positive liberty, ‘freedom for.’ There is the liberalism of markets and individualism, and there is the liberalism of planning and the collective” (viii). John and Robin’s conflict connects postwar liberalism, through Robin, to a growing managerial class and, through John, to the explosion of mass media, chiefly television, in both cases anticipating late twentieth-century neoliberalism. Liberalism thus endures and its postwar mutations are the driving force behind “the modern topsy-turvy social order” (Wilson 24). *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, however, does not refrain from giving reason to continue subjecting England’s liberal political tradition to critical scrutiny. The liberalisms of Gerald, John, and Robin all must account for their various ethical failures.

The perseverance of liberalism in its manifold expressions and its continued triumph over alternative systems of thought is made apparent when the humorless intellectual Donald, John and Robin’s brother-in-law, makes an incendiary speech on “industry and ethics” at the factory:

He spoke first in praise of the medieval world in which industry and commerce, like all other human activities, found their place in an ordered scheme. With gathering sarcasm he described the greater freedom, the more individualistic ethic that had come with the Reformation. . . . His irony, however, grew deeper as he went on to speak of the liberal and socialistic ethics by which competitive man had attempted to palliate the results of his destruction of the Christian order. His greatest scorn was reserved for the sentimentalism of welfare ethics. (332)

Donald's lecture, as much an attack on Robin's free market, social Darwinist liberalism as John's mixed economy, egalitarian liberalism is a harsher version of the type of calls for cultural integrity made by the late modernist instigators of midcentury retrenchment. The lecture's point about industry and ethics is a rephrasing of T.S. Eliot's "point that English art and literature will continue to deteriorate so long as they float in the empty ether of rational cosmopolitanism and liberal pluralism" (Esty 163). The resoundingly hostile reaction Donald's speech elicits from John and Robin alike suggests that the emergent social structure of postwar England is controlled by a revamped liberalism rather than the type of illiberal but culturally cohesive framework that Donald and the late modernists recommend.

And yet, Wilson's expansive social novel appears to fit within "the midcentury erosion of the British imperial system [that] coincided with a set of 'anthropological returns' whereby the thought of the social totality came home to roost ... [accompanied by] the recovery of cultural particularity" (Esty 175). Indeed, at one point during an academic congress in Italy, Gerald, his professional rival Professor Clun, and a clergy named Father Lavenham come together as "three elderly English scholars with no real communion of feeling except their nationality, which in the circumstances was a very powerful one" (Wilson 274). Moreover, the revelation that the pagan idol at the Melpham Anglo-Saxon burial ground was in fact a hoax seemingly restores an older narrative of Christianized England. The relative insignificance of this revelation, though, is underscored in one of the novel's late scenes, in which an amateur historian, Cressett, gives a presentation: "he embarked upon a lengthy and very factual discourse upon the government of the British colonies. Coming from one of Mr. Cressett's outdated sources, it would have been most valuable to a student of the Empire before the Statute of Westminster; for seekers of contemporary knowledge, it would have been nothing" (324). The historian whose information is

technically “factual,” but whose sources are outdated and interpretation flawed mirrors Wilson’s vision of Englishness: real, distinguishable, limited, but also extraordinarily provisional and unfixed. Randall Stevenson aligns Wilson with the Angry Young Men of the 1950s (102), but he misses a key distinction: whereas the prototypical novel of that movement, Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954) characterizes “Jim’s tastes [as] earthy and ‘natural’” (Brook 52), Wilson never suggests an organic or “natural” Englishness. For Wilson, genuine “Anglo-Saxon attitudes” do exist, but they—like histories—are continually reexamined, reinterpreted and revised.

Anglo-Saxon Attitudes reaches back past the nearer late modernism of Woolf and Eliot to an earlier liberal pluralist and cosmopolitan modernism. These elements of modernism are combined with realist formal techniques. Wilson’s intention with this mixture is a reinterpretation of liberal humanist politics that comes to terms with its past failures and helps explain midcentury England’s emergent social order. In the process, Wilson undermines the prevalent obsession—set in motion by the late modernists but, ironically, embraced by midcentury realists—with an authentic English identity. Similarly, Greene’s *The Quiet American* channels modernism’s anti-totalizing impulses into its exploration of politics in order to probe the public responsibility of fiction after modernism. Reading these novels as political fiction helps refine the critical interpretation of the midcentury English novel, underlining the significant extent to which many postwar novelists’ negotiations with modernism’s legacy and the politics of postwar England are informed by and reflective of anxieties over totalization.

2. Politics of the Body and the Body Politic in Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone*

England at midcentury—as in the United States, France, and elsewhere—saw a groundswell of progressive social movements³¹ and student activism that reached its apex and then fissured in 1968. This wave of political activity has roots in the postwar refashioning of leftist thought known as the New Left. Dennis Dworkin explains, “Radical intellectual culture began to gradually revive in the late fifties ... The British New Left was a heterogeneous group of ex-Communists, disaffected Labour supporters, and socialist students hopeful of renewing socialist theory and practice” (45). The Suez Crisis of 1956 is often pointed to as a galvanizing event, putting the New Left’s birth around the same time that Graham Greene and Angus Wilson wrote their literary meditations on the legacies of modernism and war.

The New Left project aimed, in part, to reconcile abstract political theory with the lived experiences of culture, expansively defined by formative New Left critic Raymond Williams as a “whole way of life” (xvi). Susan Mary Brook calls the New Left “a grouping of left intellectuals and activists who were associated with two journals, *ULR* [*Universities and Left Review*] and the *New Reasoner*, both founded in 1956. ... The two journals fused in 1960 ... [but all] three New Left journals were characterized by their conviction that *culture*, however understood, was the means both of understanding and transforming contemporary society (17). New Leftists, writes Patricia Waugh, believe “that rational political analysis must proceed by taking account of subjective and culturally lived experience and that literature, though largely but not necessarily a middle-class cultural form, was an important area for the articulation and understanding of such

³¹ In an overview of this phenomenon, Holger Nehring defines “social movements” as “extra-parliamentary political activity” (389), and argues that their proliferation at midcentury can be traced to the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the late 1950s, which leads to student protests, as well as women’s, gay, and environmental activism through the 1970s (398).

‘structures of feeling’” (123). A structure of feeling, a term coined by Williams, “often expresses a new emergent kind of consciousness that cannot be explicitly articulated. Instead, it is felt, or expressed obliquely through literature—hence the privileged status of creative work for [the New Left] as both the symptom and vanguard of change” (Brook 34). New Left criticism thus prized literature that seemed to bring into play emergent or oppositional modes of understanding that are only truly comprehensible as felt experiences of everyday life and custom.

For this reason, the New Left enthusiastically embraced the contemporary “Angry Young Man” literary school. This loose clustering of writers is known for its “new, unprecedented form of realism in which the author no longer felt beholden to any fixed or determining set of social or ethical mores” (Bradford 9). Brook acknowledges that in retrospect the texts yoked together under the “Angry” category mostly “lack a coherent analysis of class and culture” (47), but at the time New Left intellectuals hailed them for “identifying political problems and representing authentic experience” (46), largely since such critics “attributed a revolutionary force to bodies” and they saw a similar discourse of affect in “Angry” writing (48). Importantly, Dworkin cites Lynne Siegel to stress that affinities between the New Left and “Angry” writing were often also underwritten by shared internalized hostility and resentment toward women, for “at a time when men’s roles were likewise being domesticated, New Left men ‘identified strongly with the tough, amoral, cynical, invariably misogynist heroes of Alan Sillitoe, John Osborne, and others.’ Women were never to be trusted but treated as part of the system trying to trap, tame and emasculate men” (59). The New Left politico-literary milieu, then, is decidedly androcentric.

This climate met resistance from several authors. Richard Bradford observes that concurrently “a number of writers began to make claims upon an incipient notion of women’s fiction” (117). For instance, “Lynn Reid Banks’s *The L-Shaped Room* (1960), Nell Dunn’s *Up*

the Junction (1963) and *Poor Cow* (1967) and Margaret Drabble's *A Summer Bird Cage* (1963) and *The Millstone* (1965) all present early 1960s British society via the perspectives and experiences of their young female protagonists" (118). Writers such as Banks, Dunn, and Drabble, among others, tend to "reject some of the problematic features of angry and New Left writing, while reiterating others" (Brook 14). One of Bradford's cited novels, Drabble's *The Millstone*, is a particularly notable 1960s "woman's novel" for its deft bridging of New Left cultural politics with the budding feminist movement that would thrive in the wake of 1968. The overlap, in *The Millstone*, of late-1950s New Left with early-1970s feminism not only helps clarify the complex relationship between the two movements, but it also demonstrates the degree to which postwar political and cultural shifts were widely informed by anti-totalizing principles, such as the New Left's antipathy to determinism and feminism's anti-essentialism.

A starting point for this reading is Patricia Waugh's argument that Drabble's early fiction "explored femininity by focusing on the physical and psychological effects of motherhood" (189) and that *The Millstone*'s protagonist "refuses (in what is psychoanalytically termed 'the flight from womanhood') to acknowledge that the birth of her baby is a physical process" (189). Drabble's early novels "suggest the need for women to 'rewrite' their own bodies ... [which] would become almost a catchphrase ... of feminist theory and fiction in the eighties and nineties" (Waugh 189). If Drabble's emphasis on embodiment anticipates the feminism of later decades, it also dovetails with New Left and "Angry" writing via the "feeling body," a trope common to both movements. This figuration displaces political contestation onto the body to show the recuperative political capacities of emotion and felt connections with others. Drabble rewrites this trope by making the feeling body both female and pregnant, a move that reproduces the New Left's calls for political renewal via affective responsiveness in tension with its

anxieties over totalization. In *The Millstone*, the feeling body brings the New Left's desire for cultural unity and wholeness together with its insistence that individual independence and agency be preserved in the face of conceptions of politics that threaten to know no bounds. Yet, by gendering her feeling body female, Drabble anticipates incipient second-wave feminism and bridges it to the New Left's political orientation. Rosamund's body—solitary but not lonely, and pregnant yet asexual—evinces the anti-essentialism of second-wave feminism, renouncing the totalitarian potential in a patriarchal family structure built upon a foundation of sexual coupling. Drabble's figure of the feeling, pregnant body thus serves as a site where New Left politics can attend to heretofore neglected issues of patriarchy and gender difference and, at the same time, the political possibilities of gender and feminism can be explored.

The Millstone, Drabble's third novel, is by and large a conventional realist *bildungsroman*. Written and set at the dawn of "Swinging London," the novel centers on Rosamund Stacey, a postgraduate student at Cambridge, living in London whilst finishing her dissertation on Elizabethan sonnet sequences in the British Museum. Rosamund's parents, both "quixotic socialists of a vaguely Bloomsbury stamp" (Firchow 100), temporarily reside somewhere in Africa—her father is teaching economics abroad for a term—so she is able to live rent-free in their spacious flat. Like her parents, Rosamund is an odd "blend of socialist principle and middle-class scruple" (Drabble 31), holding notions of social justice and equality alongside her almost pathological self-reliance and reserve. Admitting that she is "at heart a Victorian" (Drabble 22), Rosamund is uneasy in the sexually open climate of her generation.

Rosamund feels the burden of her aversion to sex. Early in the novel, she confesses, "I was guilty of a crime, all right, but it was a brand-new, twentieth-century crime, not the old traditional one of lust and greed. My crime was my suspicion, my fear, my apprehensive terror of

the very idea of sex. ... I walked around with a scarlet letter embroidered upon my bosom, visible enough in the end, but the A stood for Abstinence, not for Adultery” (21). Rosamund concocts elaborate strategies to avoid sex, but even so becomes pregnant after her first and only consummating sexual encounter, a one-night stand with an acquaintance, George, a BBC broadcaster whom Rosamund initially suspects is homosexual. After a failed, albeit halfhearted, home abortion attempt, Rosamund—never telling George of his paternity—accepts the pregnancy and gives birth to a daughter who she names Octavia. In the end, Rosamund manages to successfully balance single motherhood with professional achievement, made possible due to class advantages, the assistance of friends and neighbors, and her own admirable determination.

While rarely identified explicitly as a political novel, much of the critical response to *The Millstone* focuses on the novel’s political undercurrents, especially vis-à-vis feminism. Sandra Saccucci argues that the novel is about an escape from “the psychological tyranny of any doctrine, be it patriarchal, feminist or any other” (4); Els Maeckelberghe concludes that critical discussion of the novel “requires further exploration of the political and moral significance of motherhood” (89); Lynn Veach Sadler posits that Rosamund tries to escape the ideological rigidity of her parents’ socialism and feminism (27-8); and Tess Cosslett contends that the book’s “scenes in the clinic and hospital reveal that for [Rosamund] class identity is stronger than gender identity” (101). While *The Millstone*’s political themes have garnered attention—often in ways that refer directly to issues of female embodiment, such as sexuality and motherhood—critics have yet failed to consider these issues vis-à-vis the New Left, and in particular how the New Left trope of the feeling body bears on the novel’s politics.

Brook addresses the New Left and the feeling body in *Literature and Cultural Criticism of the 1950s: The Feeling Male Body* (2007). Specifically, Brook argues that the contradictory

impulses that make up New Left thought—competing denunciations and celebrations of mass (or popular) culture; defenses of a distinct working-class consciousness alongside calls for the end of class divisions altogether; and a belief in the transformative possibilities of the postwar moment that coexists with nostalgic evocations of a lost organically unified society—“are expressed through the language and imagery of the feeling body, a body that is frequently gendered as masculine” and that “visibly registers the social changes of postwar Britain and symbolizes national renewal” (21). This thesis is in part substantiated by way of Brook’s reading New Left critic Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), above all its accounts of three bodies: the sexualized woman, the working-class mother, and the scholarship boy.

Hoggart’s figure of the scholarship boy crystallizes the centrality of the feeling body to early New Left criticism. In *The Uses of Literacy*, Hoggart positions the scholarship boy as a link between working-class culture and middle- to upper-class intellectualism and mobility. The scholarship boy thus represents both cultural conflict and reconciliation. To show this tension, Hoggart relies heavily on images of the body and physiognomic language. The scholarship boy loses “some of the resilience and some of the vitality of his cousins who are still knocking about the streets” (Hoggart 244), and, spending much of his time studying indoors, he is feminized: “The man and the boy’s brothers are outside, in the world of men; the boy sits in the women’s world” (242), and “his sexual growth is perhaps delayed” (244). Hoggart claims that the scholarship boy’s negotiation of opposing class identities manifests physiological responses: “He rarely laughs; he smiles constrainedly with the corner of his mouth” (247). The scholarship boy profoundly *feels* the contradictions of his existence. According to Hoggart, the scholarship boy “both wants to go back [to his working-class origins] and yet thinks he has gone beyond his class, feels himself weighted with knowledge of his own and their situation, which hereafter

forbids him the simpler pleasures of his father and mother” (246). The body is the site of cultural tensions, but its sensitivity to them—the ability to feel—holds the possibility of resolution.

Brook compares Hoggart’s vision of the scholarship boy to his passages describing women’s bodies, which come in two forms: the sexualized female body and the figure of the working-class mother. Hoggart’s denunciations of mass culture include his criticism of “the increasing explicitness of new magazines” (Brook 24), specifically the fragmentation involved in the magazines’ close-up photographs of female body parts. Brook writes, “It is important to point out that Hoggart does not object to the physicality of the images, but instead to what he sees as their lack of vitality ... However, the mixture of prurience and distaste in Hoggart’s description of these images suggests he is both disgusted and fascinated by the feminized, sexual body as it is itemized and broken down into body parts” (24). By contrast, the “figure of the mother is a central image of [cultural] resistance, and of the continuity of older traditions in the face of new forms of culture” (25). The scholarship boy “both encompasses and transcends the two kinds of female bodies Hoggart describes: the sexualised body in bits, a symptom of cultural change, and the maternal, timeless body, an image of resistance to this change. The feeling, bruised bodies of scholarship boys exemplify broader social wounds, such as the problem of rootlessness, but they also offer the possibility of healing society through their capacity for feeling” (Brook 26). *The Uses of Literacy* thus indicates not only the rhetorical functions of the feeling body in New Left discourse, but also how the trope frequently refracts patriarchal attitudes laden in that discourse.

In a move that aligns her novel with the New Left, Drabble presents Rosamund’s pregnant body as the contradictory site of politics’ disconnection from lived experience and simultaneously the means of reconciling that distance. Drabble intimates this twofold function when she is asked, in an interview, about the meaning of her novel’s ambiguous title: “I don’t

know what I intended [with the title] actually, but I think it was a kind of double reference. The child was both a millstone and also a salvation” (Hardin 280). The child herself, Octavia, cannot be fully disassociated from Rosamund’s experiences of carrying and birthing her, which turn her estranged and unfeeling body into a feeling one and ultimately underscore the fundamental grounding of politics in everyday life, emotion, and human connectivity. Motherhood yields a situation that reorients Rosamund’s whole way of life, and in turn bears upon her politics.

Drabble’s treatment of female embodiment exemplifies the New Left’s use of the body as a way to submerge politics into the immediacy of emotion and everyday life, but disassociates it from the patriarchal assumptions and attitudes of the New Left. Though it is an unstable and contradictory figuration, Brook cites three interrelated properties to the typical New Left feeling body. The first of these properties is “an individual’s capacity for specific emotions” such as anger, joy, and boredom, but “the particular emotion is less important than the intensity with which it is felt” (Brook 10). Another characteristic of the feeling body is “the individual’s capacity for feeling or affect in the broadest sense, signalled by terms such as ‘vitality’, ‘life’, or ‘openness’. These terms are invariably positive, and associated with particular bodies that embody the freedom traditionally associated with the category of the aesthetic” (Brook 10). Thirdly, the body is “ruggedly” masculine: these “male bodies are virile, and aggressively heterosexual; yet, perhaps surprisingly, they are also frequently wounded and hurt” (Brook 10). *The Millstone*’s Rosamund defies all three properties. Rosamund is defined by her aloofness and emotional disconnection from others, far from “open” or “vital.” She is also an upper-middle class female intellectual with no experience of physical labor—neither male nor rugged. Whereas the feeling *male* body is aggressively virile, she is averse to sex, chiefly from trepidation. Drabble’s feeling body, female and pregnant, preserves the New Left’s goal of

submerging political change into everyday life and culture while at the same time prefiguring the political imperatives and implications of gender to be later developed by second-wave feminism.

Rosamund was raised to be, like her parents, a committed socialist and feminist, but also like them her politics are largely abstract. Her avowed socialism is intellectual and sits uneasily with the circumstances of her own life. Rosamund recalls, “It took me a very long time to piece together an economic view of my own, owing partly to the anomalies of my upbringing, which had made me believe in the poor without being of them ... I remember very clearly the way in which I put together my picture of the rest of the world, the way I accumulated evidence about the way that others lived” (94). While Rosamund’s attempts to see past the imposed naturalness of class can hardly be faulted, her endeavors are sterilely academic and only partly successful. When Rosamund’s sister, Beatrice, tells how she felt compelled to prohibit her daughter from spending time with a playmate from a working-class family, Rosamund registers her sister’s hypocrisy, but cannot imagine an alternative course of action (100). Significantly, Beatrice’s objection to her daughter’s playmate has nothing to do with the idea of “class mingling” itself or with that specific child’s behavior; instead, the prohibition is due to Beatrice’s incomprehension over how to interact with the child. After all, Beatrice wholeheartedly agrees with Rosamund’s comment that “upper-class children are just as silly and vulgar and horrid” (100), but counters by admitting that upper-class children are “silly in a way [she] can deal with, and [she] know[s] how to stop them” (100). Political commitments are here shown to be compromised, or to even outright crumble, when they are not densely woven into real experience and interaction.

Indeed, Rosamund and her family’s egalitarianism regularly conflicts with their direct experience. Rosamund recounts how, as a child, her parents insisted that “the charlady sit down and dine with us, introducing her to visitors, all that kind of nonsense” even though the “charlady

went off with all the silver cutlery in the end, [for] she despised them, I could see her despising them, and she knew they wouldn't take any steps. And the awful thing is that they weren't even shocked when she did it, they had seen it coming, they said" (32). Rosamund's socialism is a masked guilty conscience, alleviated by contrived displays of classlessness and declarations of socialist principle that are remote from her and rarely borne out or actualized in everyday life.

Her feminism, moreover, is in effect self-imposed emotional isolation. Shortly before they have sex, Rosamund tells George, "'My mother, you know, was a great feminist. She brought me up to be equal. She made there be no questions, no difference. I was equal. I am equal'" (Drabble 33). A dubious consequence of this upbringing, which emphasizes *equality* rather than and at the expense of *solidarity* with others, is her refusal to incur any form of debt, for to do so would make her beholden and therefore unequal to another. Rosamund's insistence on extreme independence feeds her inability to emotionally connect with others. Early in the novel, Rosamund wryly ruminates that she, as an "emancipated woman," is the product of parents who "drummed the idea of self-reliance into [her] so thoroughly that [she] believed dependence to be a fatal sin" (12). Rosamund's feminism, then, is detached from notions of sisterhood or common cause, and is instead a deeply isolating philosophical position.

Along these lines, several critics of the novel find no significant change in Rosamund's politics or in her character generally. Dominic Head describes her "inability to connect with others" as an inherent "flaw in Rosamund's character" (88) that proves to be insurmountable. According to Head, "The millstone of the title is thus revealed to be Rosamund's nature ... rather than the social stigma of an illegitimate daughter that it ostensibly denotes ... [Rosamund] combines independence with motherhood in the face of convention, only to perceive this as a pyrrhic victory, won by nurturing her deadening solipsism" (89). Head's reading chimes with

Cosslett's assertion that Rosamund “*does* learn something about human attachment, but it is between her and the baby that this unprecedented bonding occurs, and it is a bond that makes her more ‘selfish’ in her dealings with others” (105). Both Head and Cosslett, in other words, argue that the experiences of pregnancy and motherhood do little to change Rosamund, for by novel's end she remains disconnected from, and at times contemptuous of, others.

Head's and Cosslett's readings, however, ignore or misread the ways Rosamund's heightened awareness of her own embodiment begins to connect her to the realm of felt experience that her political consciousness lacks. This process is prompted by Rosamund's sensitivity to her physicality, and hinges on Rosamund's love for Octavia and the complex dynamic between selfishness and selflessness that emerges from it. The affective power of maternity in Drabble's fiction has been noted by critics such as Sadler, who points out that motherhood is often a means for Drabble's protagonists to comprehend alterity (3), and Mary Hurley Moran, who claims that Rosamund's pregnancy brings about in her a profound change of consciousness that disrupts her hyper-rational self-image and systematized lifestyle (45). Marion Vlastos Libby contends that “in the service of love [for her daughter] [Rosamund] transcends division and moves toward the possibility of creating a strong selfhood” (182-3), and in Nancy Hardin's view pregnancy takes Rosamund “from an intellectual position and an undigested Fabian background ... to a real social awareness which only participation can bring about” (31-2). These critical estimations gesture toward the idea that motherhood in *The Millstone* highlights the impotency of politics that are removed from the ethical imperative to recognize alterity.

Now, Rosamund's initial distance from others is indeed instanced several times throughout *The Millstone*. Surveying her fellow recipients of obstetric care via the National Health Service in a hospital waiting room, Rosamund thinks, “[Here], gathered in this room,

were representatives of a population whose existence I had hardly noticed. There were a few foreigners; a West Indian, a Pakistani, two Greeks. There were several old people, most of them respectably shabby, though one old woman was worse than shabby” (43). Rosamund’s tendency to reduce others to a category, ethnic or otherwise, is seen again in her descriptions of her tutees. Along with “a seventeen-year old girl who had left boarding school under a cloud” (57), Rosamund tutors three students: “One was an Indian, one a Greek, and one a Methodist minister” (57).³² Unlike the strangers at the clinic, Rosamund interacts with her tutees directly and regularly, making her impersonal distance from them all the more striking.

This reduction of others to an abstract category continues even after the pivotal birth of Octavia. While convalescing in a hospital, Rosamund is annoyed at the inanities of her fellow postpartum roommates, whom she condescendingly refers to as Woman A, Woman B, and Woman C (122)—as Cosslett puts it, “dehumanisation could hardly go further” (106). *The Millstone*, moreover, ends with Rosamund’s chance meeting of George, during which she “continues to resist the urge to reveal to George his paternity, and accepts her inability to bridge the gulf between them” (Head 88). According to Head, the fact that Rosamund’s emotional distance from George persists to novel’s end powerfully substantiates his and Cosslett’s shared judgment that Rosamund’s “bond with her baby serves only to make her more withdrawn” (89). Head’s reading, however, not only implies the specious proposition that heteronormative reconciliation between Rosamund and George would be a sign, if not a precondition, of Rosamund’s emotional growth, but also ignores several moments that suggest the ways that pregnancy and motherhood refine Rosamund’s ethical intuitions and affective responses.

³² Regarding her reduced tutoring fees, Rosamund mentions that “somebody pointed out to me that as a good socialist I was making a grievous error by lowering the price of my profession which, God knows, was low enough already” (56)—another example of Rosamund’s failure to live out her principles in practice.

Pregnancy puts definite pressure on Rosamund's superficial feminism and socialism. Indeed, Rosamund herself occasionally demonstrates a faint perception of pregnancy's transformative effects: "At times I had a vague and complicated sense that this pregnancy had been sent to me in order to reveal to me a scheme of things totally different from the scheme which I inhabited, totally removed from academic enthusiasms, social consciousness, etiolated undefined emotional connections, and the exercise of free will" (75). Reflecting on her pregnancy, Rosamund fleetingly realizes, "I had always felt for others in theory and pitied the blows of fate and circumstance under which they suffered; but now, myself no longer free, myself suffering, I may say that I felt it in my heart" (77). The perception is dim, but nonetheless Rosamund and her political consciousness undergo a definite change as a result of pregnancy.

The changes in Rosamund begin during her regular appointments at the clinic, among the women she condescendingly observed upon her first visit. Over time, the shared experiences of motherhood bring Rosamund, against her own inclinations, closer to these other women than she is to her posh and urbane social circle. Although Rosamund states unambiguously that she "hated most of all the chat about birth that went on so continually around [her] in the queue" (68), she nonetheless admits that she cannot help but be pulled into the conversations:

Birth, pain, fear and hope, these were the subjects that drew us together in gloomy awe, and so strong was the bond that even I, doubly, trebly outcast by my unmarried status, my education, and my class, even I was drawn in from time to time, and compelled to proffer some anecdote of my own, such as the choice story of my sister who gave birth to her second in an ambulance in a snow storm. Indeed, so strong became the pull of nature that by the end of the six months' attendance I felt more in common with the ladies at the clinic than with my own acquaintances. (68)

Rosamund does not identify it as such, and never does she even call these women by their names, but in this scene Drabble has in effect rendered a consciousness-raising session for Rosamund, one that is shown to have meaningful effects, despite her initial resistance.

Cosslett, by contrast, reads this scene as an example of Rosamund's disgust with her body. According to Cosslett, "Rosamund sees her participation [in the talk of birthing experiences] in terms of an unpleasant compulsion" (104), for the identification with the other women despite her intellectual disdain for the conversation sums up "Rosamund's social degradation by her uncontrollable body" (104). Cosslett's reading of this scene problematically requires an extraordinary mind/body separation: Rosamund apparently experiences unstoppable somatic responses even as her mind, the ghost in the machine, denies and hates the communality she cannot help but feel with the other women. Cosslett thus interprets this scene as Rosamund's body, of its own volition, feeling a sense of solidarity with other women even as her entrapped mind, which in Cosslett's view expresses the "true" Rosamund, apprehends disgust.

While Rosamund does experience a mind/body conflict, Cosslett's Cartesian dualism does not helpfully explain it. Rather, Rosamund's contrary impulses arise because she struggles to intellectually comprehend the changes that she bodily experiences. Rosamund lives primarily on an intellectual plane, so she is not attuned to her bodily feelings and mounts cognitive resistance against them. If consciousness is housed in and in fact contingent upon the body, then Rosamund's consciousness is at this moment attempting to interpret itself. The narrative trajectory of the novel illustrates an increasing sensitivity to her body's ability to feel that *transforms*, rather than *enslaves*, her consciousness.

This transformation is seen straightaway in the passage that immediately follows the clinic "consciousness-raising" session. After Rosamund's admission that she can't help but

participate in the chats about childbirth, she notes how only after pregnancy does she perceive pregnant women around her: “The streets were crawling with them, and I never remembered having noticed them before. Even the British Museum, and I came to think most particularly in the British Museum, was full of earnest intellectual women like myself, propping themselves or their unborn babies against the desk as they worked” (68). For a character whose supposed fundamental flaw is an inability to connect with others, the implications of these interactions and revelations, which hinge on female embodiment, are significant. The talks at the clinic enable Rosamund to feel closer to her fellow patients than she does with anyone in her academic milieu; likewise, Rosamund’s burgeoning awareness of other women, including other intellectuals like her, is also expanded by her new attunement to their pregnant bodies. Her pregnancy enables, perhaps compels, Rosamund to literally see other women for the first time.

Not only does Rosamund’s pregnancy initiate heretofore missing feelings of solidarity with others, particularly other women, it also prompts her to better comprehend, indeed to *feel*, the (possible) lived experiences of others. For example, a seemingly incidental scene occurs on a tube train: Rosamund is five months pregnant, but the winter coat she wears obscures her otherwise visibly distended abdomen. While sitting on the train, two middle-aged women “stood in front of [her], strap hanging, and proceeded to grumble, very pointedly, about the ill manners of the young. As [Rosamund] happened to be the youngest person in the compartment, [she] could not but take this personally” (90). Exasperated, Rosamund rises and offers one of the women her seat, and the woman’s silent, unthankful acceptance fills Rosamund with furious anger. Later, reflecting upon her rage brought about by this encounter, Rosamund at first dismisses the pair as “nuts, and sad ones at that” (90), but she concludes her reminiscence by thinking, of the woman who took her seat, “who knows, she must have had her afflictions too”

(90). While this expression of empathy is momentary, and certainly Rosamund never wholly curbs her proclivity for immature behavior—for instance, her passive-aggression with her sister-in-law, Clare, never wavers—Rosamund’s affective responsiveness is certainly strengthened.

Along these lines, the most poignant moment for Rosamund is the birth of Octavia. Rosamund gives birth to Octavia in the rather sterile confines of an NHS hospital, and she describes the event as a mundane and passive affair: she is characteristically irritated at the chatter of nurses, and, in the end, she simply “lay there and let [the birth] happen” (Drabble 110). In other words, she is the opposite of a feeling body: inert, unresponsive, and distant. But, once the nurse “put [Octavia] in my arms and I sat there looking at her, and her great wide blue eyes looked at me with seeming recognition, and what I felt is pointless to try to describe. Love, I suppose one might call it, and the first of my life” (114). Additionally, at this moment “[a]ll the nurses too were suddenly humanized” (114). The depth of this love—a felt sensation, beyond language’s capacity to render—initiates another drastic recalibration of her ethical perceptions.

The crux of this adjustment is Rosamund’s new awareness of a paradoxical relationship between selfishness and selflessness. This dynamic is most potently illustrated when the newborn Octavia becomes gravely ill and requires life-saving surgery. After the procedure, Rosamund is prohibited by NHS protocol from seeing her convalescing daughter. Consequently, Rosamund goes into “hysterics,” yelling and creating a scene. Her response is another example of the imperatives of love and attachment made visible in and by the body: “I screamed very loudly, shutting my eyes to do it, and listening in amusement to the deafening shindy that filled my head. Once I had started, I could not stop; ... through the noise I could hear things happening, people coming and going, someone slapped my face, someone tried to put a wet flannel on my head, and all the time I was thinking I must go on doing this until they let me see

her” (149). Eventually the lead physician, Dr. Protheroe—who happens to be a fellow socialist and friend of her parents—makes an exception for Rosamund and takes her to Octavia. When Rosamund sheepishly inquires whether she is getting preferential treatment because of her family connections or if is being placated after she “made a fuss” (151), Protheroe tells her that she was admitted since she was clearly in distress and that for the hospital staff “the human element intervened” (151). Protheroe leaves Rosamund with the advice, ““Think about yourself”” (151). The paradox here is that for Rosamund to think about herself now means to think about Octavia.

This conundrum is pursued in Rosamund’s conversation with another mother admitted into the infant’s ward, a woman who concedes that her access derives from her husband’s influence with the hospital. When Rosamund indicates her uneasiness over their admittance against hospital policy, the woman tells her, ““My concerns are my concerns, and that’s where it ends. I haven’t the energy to go worrying about other people’s children. They’re nothing to do with me. I only have enough time to worry about myself. If I didn’t put myself and mine first, they wouldn’t survive. So I put them first and the others can look after themselves”” (156). Rosamund is shocked to hear this view “gently put forward as the result of sad necessity” without the typical “brisk Tory contempt for the ignorant, or a business-like blinkered air of proud realism” (156). Cosslett factors this scene into her judgment that in *The Millstone* “the middle-class ideology of individualism [triumphs] over the ideologies of female solidarity or socialist egalitarianism” (107). Such a reading misses how Rosamund’s motherhood imbricates her needs and desires with those of another subject whose autonomy nonetheless remains intact.

At bottom, motherhood—distilled in the indescribable love Rosamund intensely feels in her body—redefines the meaning of independence for Rosamund. Autonomy, for Rosamund, must now be squared with vulnerability: her reserved and composed demeanor falls apart when

separated from the recuperating Octavia. The dependence that emerges from her vulnerability and maternal love carries with it a selfishness that, paradoxically, is an expression of her selfless love for Octavia. As Maeckelberghe puts it, “Rosamund realizes that she is becoming more and more selfish on behalf of Octavia. She cannot care that much any more about what other people will think and do when they discover she is vulnerable. She gets rid of a morality that is based on tact, withdrawal, and avoidance. She must become mature; she cannot remain innocent” (86). This lost innocence includes some shattered illusions, according to Maeckelberghe: “She has lost the idea of living independently and living ‘without a body’. She has had to give up the idea that she is the ‘master’ over her own life and had to open herself to other people. She has to get used to the idea that she has become vulnerable because she will need other people” (86). Slowly, through the felt sensations springing from her love for Octavia, Rosamund begins to understand that the gap separating her own self and others has shrunk, if not closed altogether.

Rosamund lives out this realization when, on Christmas Eve, she must run to the chemist for medicine, but wants to neither wake Octavia from her needed sleep nor leave her home alone. Given this situation, Rosamund finally decides that “distasteful though it might be” she “would have to go round to one of [her] neighbors and tell them that I was going” (176), so that Octavia would not be left alone in an emergency. Rosamund is somewhat surprised at the willingness to help demonstrated by a couple whom up until now Rosamund had the impression of being “positively ill-natured” (177). In her narration Rosamund notes how, long after the couple graciously accepted the request to watch Octavia on Christmas Eve, they remained friendly and genuinely interested in her and Octavia’s well-being. While they never become close, Rosamund appreciates the relationship and reflects, “If I asked more favours of people, I would find people more kind” (179). Giving up her refusal to acknowledge dependence transforms Rosamund’s

sense of the social fabric. She now sees from her own experience that dependency leads to the generosity of others that is ironically requisite to enable independence and self-sufficiency.

While Rosamund's relationships with others remain somewhat distant, she has undeniably been transformed. Maeckelberghe grants that when compared to her relationship with Octavia, Rosamund's "relationship with other people is of a second order: a social relationship. They remain strangers. All Rosamund's actions towards these strangers are coloured by the ambivalence between wanting to remain independent and knowing she needs them" (89). The "first order relationship" with Octavia, one literally born of her feeling body and defined by ineffable feelings of love, nevertheless exposes her self-deceptions and refines her ethical registers, dramatically transforming the way she comprehends the social totality: though it is comprised of strangers with whom she will never meet, let alone "feel" in a way comparable to her felt relationship with Octavia, she is yet inextricably bound to them and vice versa.

The ethical potentialities elicited by Rosamund's feeling female body gives *The Millstone* a political dimension that connects it to New Left thought, a juncture that is crystallized in Rosamund's reaction to a letter she receives from her father telling her that he and Rosamund's mother are travelling to India rather than returning to London. The reason for prolonging their time abroad, her father subtly implies, is Octavia. Rosamund responds to this extreme repression disguised as tact with a mix of relief and anger. Reflecting on the letter, Rosamund thinks, "[I] contemplated my growing selfishness, and thought that this was probably maturity. My parents are still children, maybe: they think that they can remain innocent. ... From another point of view, a more warm and fleshy point, they are ... dangerous and cruel" (161). Her parents, representatives of middle-class socialism and feminism, are cast as immature and perhaps

threatening, but Rosamund's new ability to feel and her "mature" selfishness offer the chance to redeem and reinvigorate her parents' withered politics with the substance of felt encounters.

Drabble's feeling body can thus be read as an indictment of "Old Left" prewar politics and culture, shown to be mechanistic, unresponsive, distant from lived experience, and ironically both aged and immature. Crucially, the Staceys' political views themselves are not condemned. Drabble acknowledges that, "in a way [she] rather admire[s] Rosamund's parents. ... And as Rosamund herself said at some point, she does believe in the values that they have taught to her" (Hannay 135). Indeed, in the midst of citing her parents' faults, Rosamund interjects that they "were so nice, so kind, so gentle, and people aren't nice and kind and gentle, they just aren't" (32). *The Millstone*, therefore, is not indicting feminism, class-consciousness, or even radicalism, but instead the problem of their etiolation. Rosamund's feeling body is cast as the potential agent of rejuvenation for the otherwise lifeless politics she inherits—and must reform, not reject.

Of course, while Rosamund begins to perceive the defects and limitations of the politics she inherited from her parents, the practical form of a rejuvenated politics goes unstated, even though *The Millstone* thus ends by reiterating the implication that proper theory is meaningless without genuine practice. In her conversation with George that ends the novel, Rosamund mentions that her (unbeknownst to George, *their*) daughter is named after Octavia Hill:

"Octavia Hill," he said, "who was she? Wasn't she one of those heroines of feminism and socialism?" "To tell you the truth," I said, admitting it for the first time, "I'm not quite sure exactly what she *did*, and once I'd chosen the name I didn't dare go and look her up in case she was unsuitable, or famous for something frightful. I think she was a socialist. I hope she was a socialist. Though I don't suppose it matters much, does it?" (190)

George muses that regardless of her namesake, Rosamund will "bring [Octavia] up the right way" (190), to which Rosamund responds, "It was right, I suppose, the way I was brought up,

but it didn't do me much good, did it?" (190). If the details of a renewed political practice remain conveniently absent by novel's end, Drabble nonetheless closes by again suggesting that it is to be rooted in affective receptivity to the lived experiences of culture.

This realization is prompted by Rosamund's newly feeling body, as it reconciles conflicts between selfishness and independence, on the one hand, and selflessness and vulnerability, on the other, making it a site for resolution, renewal, and wholeness. Libby argues that Rosamund's early "capacity to split mind and spirit ... [comes] at the price of a failure to achieve an integrated selfhood" (182), but that her love for Octavia "transcends division and moves toward the possibility of creating a strong selfhood" (183), a personal process that has a politico-cultural corollary. But her feeling body also resists complete integrity, though in ways that actually strengthen the novel's affinities with the New Left: after all, Brook "suggest[s] that the New Left relied so heavily on a critical vocabulary suffused with corporeal imagery because this imagery was able to express the conflicting and potentially contradictory political and aesthetic impulses that characterized the movement" (21). The New Left's "fascination with representations of feeling bodies at times expressed the desire for a unified society and for whole individuals, yet elsewhere signified the desire for change, disruption, and transformation" (Brook 22). In *The Millstone*, "disruption" comes in the form of the feeling female's contribution to the novel's anti-totalizing thematic counterpoint.

If *The Millstone* resonates with the New Left in that the feeling body is at once the site of a moribund political status quo and its source of renewal, by making the feeling body female and pregnancy the font of transformation Drabble also dialogues with the period's embryonic second-wave feminism. Feminist activity in the early postwar years is not to be diminished, but the historical consensus sees "feminism in Britain as rising in the 1960s [and then] flourishing in

the 1970s” (Meehan 189). Regarding this trajectory, Alan Sinfield observes, “Why feminism was generally in abeyance in Britain ... until the late 1960s is one of the commonest and most reasonable questions asked by students of the period” (230). While not the sole factor, sexist New Left attitudes surely curtailed women’s issues from acquiring purchase.³³

English second-wave feminism, though, is confoundingly entangled in the history of the New Left. Dworkin notes, “In creating a British cultural politics the *ULR* group perhaps may be regarded as prefiguring feminist efforts to break down the wall between private and public spheres ... Yet if those associated with *ULR* were interested in issues that would later concern feminists, they—as well as the New Left in general—were not to create a feminist politics” (59). Feminism instead came slightly later, growing “out of the student movement, the counterculture, and the anti-Vietnam War campaigns of the late sixties. Forced to accept subordinate positions in male-dominated protest movements, and feeling oppressed by sexual roles dictated by the male-controlled counterculture, women appropriated the logic of the civil rights movement and the counterculture to understand their own social position” (Dworkin 192). The active and monumental second-wave feminism that emerged after 1968 was one of the many factions to splinter from the New Left of 1956-1968, meaning that the New Left and feminism cannot either be conflated or opposed. Put in this context, and given its 1965 publication date, *The Millstone* anticipates more than represents second-wave feminism. The novel is a transitional text, written on the cusp of feminism’s break from the New Left proper, but the presence of the feeling body trope creates a triangular relationship between *The Millstone*, feminism, and the New Left.

³³ In addition, Sinfield notes that “feminism was believed to have been successful and hence no longer necessary (like trade unions)” and that the constraints of war reinstated or strengthened ideologies of domesticity, motherhood, and “natural” gender relations (Sinfield 231).

This relationship revolves around the shared rejection of determinism and totalizing ideological programs. Indeed, faced with the increasingly undeniable failures of the Soviet Union and the dogged persistence of capitalism in England and the West, New Left critics “became acutely aware of the conflict between structure and agency, determinism and freedom in Marxism; they began to reformulate the theory so that it did not rely on historical guarantees” (Dworkin 27). The New Left gave politics “a greater emphasis on consciousness, experience, ideas, and culture; it granted an enlarged role to human agency in the making of history; and it escaped the determinist straightjacket by seeing historical outcomes as being shaped by both social being and social consciousness” (29). For example, in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Williams separates “*historical* objectivity—the conditions into which, at any particular point in time, men [sic] find themselves born, thus the ‘accessible’ conditions into which they ‘enter’—and *abstract* objectivity, in which the ‘determining’ process is ‘independent of their will’ not in the historical sense that they have inherited it but in the absolute sense that they cannot control it” (85). Williams and other New Left intellectuals argue that society is “never only the ‘dead husk’ which limits social and individual fulfillment. It is always also a constitutive process with very powerful pressures which are both expressed in political, economic, and cultural formations and, to take the full weight of ‘constitutive’, are internalized and become ‘individual wills’” (87).

New Left theory articulates an interactive dynamic between the objective conditions of culture that shape and are themselves shaped by the subjectivities that are both produced by and constitutive of that culture. The shift from the traditional base and superstructure model to a mode of analysis that prioritized hegemony, a concept embraced after the rediscovery of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, exemplifies the anti-determinism of the New Left. Williams, for one, insists that hegemony—which refers to a “framework within which we conceptualize,

articulate, and explain our beliefs and act out and justify our values”—“is a dynamic process” (Rizvi 150). Since “choices are articulated through hegemony rather than totally constructed by it ... the possibility of resistance, challenge, and the emergence of counter-hegemony” (Rizvi 150) is always present. Williams’s influential theory of culture as a totality is comprised of “relationships between elements” such as “meanings, values, and institutions” (Dworkin 94) through which a society is organized, but the complex that results is an “irreducible totality” (Dworkin 102). This totality is a shifting field of elements that, while *posited* as constituting a whole is only *comprehensible* as interlocking relationships, and is not subject to “iron laws” of historical determinism. Vital to New Left thought, then, is the precedence given to cultural disruption: ideas, texts, practices, and the like that put the lie to attempts at absolute totalization.

Rosamund’s feeling body serves as such a disruption, but by gendering this trope female Drabble manages to use resistance to totalization as a point of uneasy contact between the androcentric New Left and the developing feminism of the early 1960s. This connection can be unpacked by turning to the influence that Simone de Beauvoir’s feminist landmark *The Second Sex* (1949)³⁴ had upon Drabble and her novel. Ellen Cronan Rose’s decree that the common subject of Drabble’s early novels, including *The Millstone*, “was what it was like to be a woman in a world which calls woman the second sex” deliberately references *The Second Sex*, a book that Drabble read while at Cambridge and which “she acknowledges affected her profoundly” (1). The connection to de Beauvoir in turn points toward the feeling body’s destabilizing counterpoint to its calls for unity in *The Millstone*. Rosamund’s body reinforces the New Left’s own attempts to think in terms of an integral totality while avoiding totalizing ideological

³⁴ Coole puts de Beauvoir in the New Left’s lineage, noting that *The Second Sex* is widely credited as foundational for 1970s feminism which “itself emerged out of the New Left and the student movements of the 1960s” (237).

impositions, but it does so by disturbing two prevailing ideological maneuvers widely ignored by the (male-dominated) New Left: the naturalization of gender into biology and the positing of the couple, not the individual, as the fundamental unit of a social totality.

Reading *The Millstone* with respect to de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism suggests a feminist vision for the novel that is anti-deterministic, anti-essentialist, and, correspondingly, antagonistic to totalizing impulses in both feminist and political thought. De Beauvoir's most famous line from *The Second Sex* reads, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (283).³⁵ Judith Butler argues that this "formulation distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired. The distinction between sex and gender has been crucial to the long-standing feminist effort to debunk the claim that anatomy is destiny" (35). Butler claims that extending de Beauvoir's separation of the socially constructed "gender" from the biologically given "sex" has "gender" displace "sex," rendering the biological moot: "If gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not *accrue* social meanings as additive properties but, rather, *is replaced by* the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces 'sex' (*Bodies* 5). Effacing the biological with the cultural mitigates deterministic assumptions about essential gender differences and attributions of "inevitable" social positions to gender, including a rejection of motherhood as a "natural" practice. Given the centrality of motherhood to *The Millstone*, the issue of maternity is a potent point of intersection between it and *The Second Sex*.

³⁵ Translators Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier note that H.M. Parshley's earlier and more widely recognized rendering—"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman"—misses the fact that in this instance de Beauvoir "uses *femme* without an article to signify woman as determined by society."

Now, many readers of de Beauvoir struggle to move past *The Second Sex*'s arguments against motherhood, and the repellent sense of the female body that they apparently offer.³⁶ Jean Bethke Eishtain, for instance, claims that throughout *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir “holds female embodiment at arm’s length as if it were repugnant to her and distant from her” (309). But de Beauvoir, Diana H. Coole reminds, “was committed to an existentialism which stressed the radical freedom of consciousness to define and change its situation. This involved a rejection of all determinism, and it is from this perspective that [*The Second Sex*] opens with a critique of biological, psychoanalytic and historical materialist accounts of women’s oppression” (238). This resistance to determinism persists in de Beauvoir’s analysis of motherhood and childbirth, which she grounds in the idea that the meanings of both conditions are always contingent. Coole stresses that, for de Beauvoir, “woman’s body yields a situation rather than a destiny. With the availability of abortion, contraception, artificial insemination and anaesthetized childbirth, she might gain control of her anatomy and join men in the transcending projects of cultural creation to become a historical subject” (239). Near the end of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir envisions a “world where men and women would be equal” and thus “motherhood would be freely chosen—that is, birth control and abortion would be allowed—and in return all mothers and their children would be given the same rights” (N. pag). According to de Beauvoir, “In a properly organized society ... where the mother would be cared for and helped, motherhood would absolutely not be

³⁶ Butler writes that de Beauvoir’s (and others’) challenges to the so-called maternal instinct “often engenders vertigo and terror over the possibility of losing social sanctions, of leaving a solid social station and place” (42).

incompatible with women's work" (568). If motherhood as it is culturally understood and lived makes it oppressive, advances in science and social organization can transform it otherwise.³⁷

Motherhood as such, however, is not reflexively condemned, since for de Beauvoir motherhood neither has a natural meaning nor designates a specific role, which means women's responses to pregnancy and motherhood are always varied and contradictory. De Beauvoir writes that pregnancy is experienced "both as an enrichment and a mutilation; the fetus is part of her body, and it is a parasite exploiting her; she possesses it, and she is possessed by it; it encapsulates the whole future, and in carrying it, she feels as vast as the world; but this very richness annihilates her, she has the impression of not being anything else" (538). Motherhood is similarly unstable: "maternity is a strange compromise of narcissism, altruism, dream, sincerity, bad faith, devotion, and cynicism" (556). Pregnancy and motherhood as experiences are alike constituted of bundled contradictions, and the lack of a coherent response betrays maternity as "an institutional rather than an instinctual reality" that emerges from the "interplay of constraint and freedom" (Butler 42) central to de Beauvoir's situation/subject formulation.

Like de Beauvoir, Drabble makes the female body central to her anti-determinist perspective, and—also like de Beauvoir—her novel's apparent discomfort with the female body can at times obscure that point of view. Rosamund is quite frankly obsessed with her body and the bodies of other women, even if her reaction to women's bodies is often disgust. At her initial NHS appointment, Rosamund notices "one old woman [who] was worse than shabby. She was grossly fat and her clothes were held around her by safety pins" (43). Surveying women later in their pregnancies than she, Rosamund "was reduced almost to tears by the variety of human

³⁷ Ingrid Makus points to a perhaps intractable paradox in de Beauvoir's thought: "Yet once motherhood becomes an opportunity for transcendence, in de Beauvoir's terms a project that can be freely chosen, it easily becomes irrational to actively choose to engage in it" (167).

misery that presented itself. ... Anemia and exhaustion were written on most countenances: the clothes were dreadful, the legs swollen, the bodies heavy and unbalanced” (64). Though Rosamund concedes that she may have simply not been in the proper “mood for finding people cheering, attractive or encouraging” (64), she decides that pregnancy seems to be the source of bodily deterioration and debilitation. Admitting that she “was one of them,” Rosamund recognizes that she “was trapped in a human limit for the first time in [her] life, and [she] was going to have to learn how to live inside it” (65). Rosamund’s preoccupation with women’s bodies can come across as immature and distasteful, but it ultimately points to a repudiation of the idea that a body, especially a pregnant body, amounts to destiny.

Even as Rosamund comes to terms with the unavoidable “limits” of being a body, she also learns that living inside limits does not necessarily entail any given fate. For instance, in one of the book’s more controversial passages, Rosamund with evident relief records, “After the birth, the muscles of my belly snapped back into place without a mark, but some of the women looked as big as they had looked before” (122). Spitzer reads this reaction as part and parcel of Rosamund’s so-called “flight from womanhood.” By retaining her slim shape, which Spitzer compares to a prepubescent girl’s body, Rosamund “has passed the greatest test of all: having a baby while struggling to pretend you’re not a woman” (243). Rosamund’s postpartum physique, however, refutes her assumption that pregnancy controls the body. The attending gynecologist, upon seeing the “resilience” and “exceptional firmness” of Rosamund’s muscles, inquires if Rosamund is “by any chance a professional dancer” or if she at least has “some athletic pursuits” (123). When she responds in the negative, the doctor replies, “Then you must be just made that way” (123), to which Rosamund “glowed with satisfaction” (123). If one looks past Rosamund’s

shallowness, this conversation underscores multiple ways—by work (physical activity) and by chance (genetics)—that a female body defies motherhood’s presumed controlling power.

This defiance takes a mental form as well as physical. During her pregnancy Rosamund narrates, “I do not wish to suggest ... that the irrational was taking its famed feminine grip upon me. ... On the contrary, I found I was working extremely well at this time and with great concentration and clarity” (76). Pregnancy and maternity are thus shown to have no fixed bodily or mental consequences. In a baldly metaphorical scene, Rosamund—five months pregnant and reading while sitting in the clinic waiting room—is asked by another patient to temporarily hold her sleeping baby (78-9). Rosamund is thus forced to literally balance her scholarship and a child in her lap. The fact that by novel’s end Rosamund is able to raise Octavia and also have “a good job for the following autumn at one of the most attractive new universities,” a published thesis, and rising prominence in her field (172) suggests that the situation motherhood presents does not automatically cost her professional status. No doubt, as Cosslett argues, Rosamund is able to “have it all” in no small part due to class privileges, but that does not mean that the rewards of those advantages are themselves to be vilified, in the same way that the privilege of job security from professorial tenure is not reason to abolish tenure but rather motivation to extend such security to all professions. Rosamund’s advantages show Drabble’s broader point, reminiscent of de Beauvoir’s, that social organization affects the meaning and consequences of pregnancy—Rosamund’s conditions function as a model for a standard that should be available to all women.

The Millstone also undermines the notion that motherhood is a universal or essential experience for women. At first glance, however, Drabble seems to be doing exactly the opposite in her novel: pregnancy’s transformative effects and Rosamund’s instantaneous, seemingly unconditional, love for Octavia could easily be taken as endorsing an uncritical view of

motherhood as universal that is an essential—in both senses of the word—female experience. If Drabble unapologetically renders maternity as empowering, her novel still subtly repudiates the suggestion that Rosamund's experience as prototypical or an unavoidable choice for women.

Drabble's rejection of the so-called maternal instinct can be located in the conversations Rosamund has with Joe Hurt, a hack novelist and platonic friend with whom she encourages others to think she has a sexual relationship. Joe's response to Rosamund's pregnancy is to snidely speculate that she has “probably been longing to have a baby all [her] life” (47). He justifies this comment by adding, “All women want babies. To give them a sense of purpose” (48). Rosamund, “with incipient fury,” retorts, “What utter rubbish ... what absolutely stupid reactionary childish rubbish” (48). But, Rosamund's reaction must be tempered by her drunken musings shortly after learning of her pregnancy: “As I walked I thought about having a baby, and in that state of total inebriation it seemed to me that a baby might be no such bad thing, however impractical and impossible. My sister had babies, nice babies, and seemed to like them. My friends had babies. There was no reason why I shouldn't have one either, it would serve me right, I thought, for having been born a woman in the first place” (19). Motherhood is thus seen by Rosamund, strangely, as both a desirable condition and a fitting punishment. Later, when Rosamund tells Joe of the deep love she immediately felt for Octavia, Joe dismissively responds, “What you're talking about ... is one of the most boring commonplaces of the female experience. All women feel exactly that, it's nothing to be proud of, it isn't even worth thinking about” (115). Again, Rosamund is filled with anger, and she “denied hotly that all women felt [the same intense love she felt for Octavia]” (115). But, she is unable to offer a coherent argument to challenge Joe's flippant attitude. In both cases, Rosamund presumes to reject essentialist notions of motherhood, but her rejection is in one way or another undermined.

Residing beneath both of these encounters, though, is an implicit defense of individual autonomy that harkens de Beauvoir. Rosamund's anger at Joe derives from his positing of motherhood as a universal desire among women, for doing so subsumes her choice to have a baby into an irresistible bodily compulsion and reduces her singular and transformative experience into one that, in its universality, admits itself as inescapable, ordinary and thus altogether unremarkable. Butler's analysis of *The Second Sex* notes that

de Beauvoir's view of the maternal instinct as a cultural fiction often meets with the argument that a desire so commonly and so compellingly felt ought for that very reason to be considered organic and universal. This response seeks to universalize a cultural option, to claim that it is not one's choice but the result of an organic necessity to which one is subject. In the effort to naturalize and universalize the institution of motherhood, it seems that the option character of motherhood is being denied; in effect, motherhood is actually being promoted as the *only* option, i.e. as a compulsory social institution. The desire to interpret maternal feelings as organic necessities discloses a deeper desire to disguise the choice one is making. (42)

Rosamund's anger comes from Joe's attempt to erase or obscure the element of choice from her pregnancy: in his view, neither her decision nor her joy are hers, but are instead manifestations of an instinctual bodily response that she cannot overcome or avoid.

Drabble has Rosamund show a moment of ironic recognition of this ideological naturalizing process. Regarding her antipathy to breastfeeding, Rosamund wryly says, "Anyway, only posh middle-class mothers nurse these days, on principle, and I don't believe in principle. I believe in instinct, on principle" (127). Present in this paradoxical statement is de Beauvoir's idea that what is taken to be natural is in fact ideological—middle-class mothers justify a seemingly instinctual act based on principle, and Rosamund takes a principled stand in favor of instinct. This deliberate blurring of the natural and the ideological reveals a strong anti-determinism—as Butler rhetorically asks, "If motherhood becomes a choice, then what else is

possible?” (42)—and serves as a powerful link between *The Millstone* and *The Second Sex*. The anti-deterministic and anti-essentialist strains of de Beauvoir and Drabble’s feminist visions complement the New Left’s rejection of totalization in ideology: individual subjects are born into preexisting situations—such as biological and historical situations—but they retain the ability to transcend and transform them, a dynamic that parallels Williams’ model of the social totality.

In the end, Drabble’s strategic use of the feeling female body manages to not only rephrase pressing concerns of the New Left, but it also carries with it an implicit critique of the New Left by foregrounding the deficient feminist consciousness in the New Left.³⁸ This double move is perhaps most pronounced in a final way that Rosamund’s body resists totalization: its refuses to submit to the heteronormative logic of sexual coupling. In its asexuality and singleness, Rosamund’s body comes full circle and pulls together the aforementioned thematic strands: the New Left’s desire for integrity and wholeness, cultural politics’ averseness to totalizing impulses, and a form of anti-essentialist feminism centered on autonomy and agency.

Rosamund’s unwillingness to have sex is established as a major aspect of her character from the start of the novel and persists until its closing pages. *The Millstone* opens with Rosamund’s memory of herself and her college boyfriend, Hamish, attempting to check into a hotel for the express purpose of having sex—except that for “some deeply rooted Freudian reason” (8), Rosamund sabotages the plan. Although Rosamund obviously does not stay a virgin, Head points out that her “first [and only] sexual encounter leaves her pregnant by George Matthews, the character she believes to be homosexual and therefore not a potential long-term partner” (88), suggesting that Rosamund sees sex only as a means to an end. She is willing to

³⁸ This problem would eventually be remedied when sizable numbers of intellectuals began to merge feminist and New Left ideas, a practice exemplified in Sheila Rowbotham’s histories, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (1972) and *Hidden from History* (1973).

have sex with a man she assumes is gay, because it offers a way to give her the fulfillment of a parental relationship without the trappings of a conventional romantic/sexual relationship.

Rosamund's resistance to sex, perhaps surprisingly, has political implications that resonate with the anti-totalizing tendencies of the New Left. Rosamund unquestionably desires companionship: she "liked men, and was forever in and out of love for years" and in fact she even compares herself to the "girls on the back page of every women's magazine, for, like them, [she] enjoyed being in love and being kissed on the doorstep and, like them, [she] hated being along" (21). Before her pregnancy, Rosamund uses lies of omission to separately convince two men—Joe and Roger Henderson—that she is sleeping with the other one. This arrangement allows Rosamund to "receive from each just about as much attention as [she] could take, such as the odd squeeze of the hand in the cinema, without having to expose [herself] to their crusading chivalrous sexual zeal" (22). Indeed, when she is most visibly pregnant, Rosamund confesses,

I came to realize how totally I depended on the casual salute as my sole means of sexual gratification: now, of course, I was having to learn how do without it, as men do not lean out of car windows to shout and whistle at expectant mothers, nor do they stare at them intently on tube trains, nor make pointed remarks about them in cafes and shops. In my times I had received much of this kind of attention, being tall and well-built and somehow noticeable, and it had given me much pleasure. (69)

Rosamund also admits to regularly listening to George's BBC radio broadcasts, for despite assiduously avoiding him in person she takes a strange comfort in the company of his voice.

Drabble's protagonist, then, is plainly not averse to physical intimacy or companionship, yet the injection of sex into a relationship fills her with fear, panic, and dread. When Rosamund bumps into George at novel's end, she is overcome by memories: "They were not memories of desire, for I no longer desired him; rather they were shocking, anti-social disruptive memories, something akin to those impulses to strip oneself in crowded tube trains, to throw oneself from

theater balconies. Images of fear, not of desire. Other people do not feel this way about old lovers, I know” (183-4). This association of intense fear and anxiety with sexual coupling can be understood through Michael Cobb’s provocative speculations on the politics of singlehood.

Cobb’s *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled* (2012) makes a case for the totalitarian underpinnings of the couple as the core component of social organization. To substantiate this claim, Cobb begins with Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Near the end of Arendt’s analysis, Cobb notes, she turns to the necessity of loneliness to totalitarian regimes:

“What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century ... By destroying all space between men and pressing men against each other, even the productive potentialities of isolation are annihilated; by teaching and glorifying the logical reasoning of loneliness where man knows that he will be utterly lost if ever he lets go of the first premise from which the whole process is being started, even the slim chances that loneliness may be transformed into solitude and logic into thought are obliterated.” (N. pag.)

Cobb explains that this formulation “distinguishes between the capacity to be in solitude, which does not necessarily imply one is lonely, and the condition of feeling deserted, abandoned. The feeling of loneliness produces sensations of desperation that open one up to the cruel ideologies of totalitarianism—ideologies that produce compelling ideas, full of persuasive power, whose logics are much too consistent, much too able to misread the circumstances of the world, providing instead a paranoid ‘sixth sense’” (N. pag). From Arendt’s contention that loneliness is the precondition of totalitarianism, Cobb argues that the couple form can exacerbate the problem.

In Cobb’s counterintuitive analysis, sexual coupling is not a cure to loneliness but is in fact an enabler of totalitarianism. While falling in love and pairing off would seem to be an obvious solution to loneliness, Cobb reminds that the drive toward “‘being together’ is one of the

primary totalitarian logics that accelerate the feelings of alienation and dislocation. The loneliest of us are not necessarily those of us who are actually alone but rather those of us trying our hardest not to be alone” (N. pag). Thus, Cobb “wants to question what it means to be in any kind of close, intimate contact in an intimate sphere and a public sphere that are so intertwined as to be almost non-distinct. ... The lonely crowd thesis has been much too individually focused, much too inward looking, to be of much use in understanding a crowd that is repetitively figured as a couple” (N. pag). Cobb clarifies, “I must stress that I’m not arguing for the value of individuation at the expense of meaningful connection and ethical responsibility toward others. I’m not even against couples, or love. Instead, I’m thinking about figures of the single, the alone, the isolated, that critique (but do not necessarily abolish) the couple as the default model of very significant relating” (N. pag). *The Millstone*’s Rosamund is such a figure.

When read in light of Cobb, Rosamund’s apprehension toward sex is a red herring, for what truly terrifies her is the presumed coupling—and the accompanying suspension or infringement of autonomy—that seems inextricably bound to sex. Indeed, while recovering in the hospital after childbirth, Rosamund jokes that she is ““one of those Bernard Shaw women who wants children but no husband” (119). *The Millstone* by no means disavows meaningful and loving relationships—as Rosamund’s felt connection to Octavia testifies. Rosamund’s fear of sex is a fear of the couple form, and her eventual embrace of an uncoupled life without sex makes her, at novel’s close, “a very democratic figure ...[who] strips away the ideology that it must always ‘take two’” (Cobb N. pag). In its dismissal of sexual coupling as containing the seed of oppression, *The Millstone* is ultimately more radical than “Angry Young Man” texts favored by the New Left, such as Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954) and Alan Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), both of which conclude with conventional bourgeois coupling—the

contrast is strikingly ironic given Moran's comment that "many critics ... regard Drabble's conservatism as the heart of her vision" (13). Nevertheless, the radical singleness of Rosamund's feeling body—uncoupled, though not lonely—returns *The Millstone* to a fundamental dilemma of the New Left: how to preserve the single in the totality of the multitude. Drabble suggests that the answer is not to depend on the ameliorative power of the couple.

The early New Left of the late-1950s aspired to formulate a total theory of society that circumvented totalizing schemes that erase difference and a deterministic view of history that elide human agency. Such totalizing theories not only typically entail theoretical straightjackets, but, as Jeffrey T. Nealon notes, history "continually reminds us that such totalizing theoretical and political systems are dangerous for marginal groups" (3). Despite presumed attempts to correct for this problem, early theorizations of New Left politics do little to account for the differences in experiences for groups marginalized for reasons beyond class, notably race and gender. Drabble, intuitively at least, is aware of this gap, and *The Millstone* works toward correcting it by finding the anti-deterministic common ground shared by the New Left and de Beauvoir. The result is an illustration of the ways New Left assumptions served as points of departure for the second-wave feminism of the late-1960s and after, as well as an indication of how New Left political thought was refined by a greater emphasis on the politics of gender.

Drabble's *The Millstone* occupies a critical position: after the formative years of the New Left and British cultural studies, but before its multiplication into a range of sub-disciplines, identity politics, and social movements—including second-wave feminism. This transitional period is localized by Drabble in the figure of the feeling female body. In Rosamund as the feeling female (pregnant) body, Drabble appropriates a powerful New Left trope, but injects it with a feminist consciousness that is sorely missing in early New Left discourse. The result

underscores the very real anxieties midcentury English intellectuals and authors had over totalizing impulses, and the degree to which they strove to expunge such totalization from their work. At the same time, however, the feeling female body figuration serves as a device to reconcile and accept, in its manifold contradictions, the political importance of preserving individuality and difference while at the same time embracing connectivity and imagining a social totality.

3. A Confirmation of the New Orthodoxy: Martin Amis's *Money* and Thatcherism

The Conservative election victory of 1979 that elevated Margaret Thatcher to Prime Minister had a profound effect on British culture and society. While it implies a host of attitudes and beliefs, from bellicose patriotism to the reaffirmation of so-called "Victorian values," Dennis Kavanagh defines Thatcher's ideology, at its core, as Neo-Liberalism's emphases on individualism and laissez-faire economics combined with Neo-Conservatism's demands for robust government and social authoritarianism (107). However, "Thatcherism" has since come to indicate a governing style and a cultural shift as much as a political program. Kenneth Morgan stresses the "belligerence and confrontation" (440) that characterized Thatcher's implementation of her political goals, to the degree that Thatcherism transcended politics and "penetrated the very substratum of national culture" (438). Thatcher's ascension was thus "taken as marking a decisive shift in the national mood, politically, intellectually, and culturally" (Morgan 437).

Unsurprisingly, Thatcherism's seismic impact is felt in the fiction of the day. Malcolm Bradbury maintains that novelist Martin Amis, above others, "caught the note of [Thatcher's] era, with its apocalyptic anxieties, sense of moral loss, its cynicism, greed and underlying alarm" (449). None of Amis's novels capture the zeitgeist more fully than *Money* (1984), a frenzied account of greed and degeneracy narrated by John Self, a crude television commercial director. Self is a remarkable protagonist: a misogynistic, materialistic philistine with addictions ranging from fast food to alcohol and pornography, who yet manages, by narrating his experiences in wildly inventive and flamboyant language, to prove captivating, even endearing, to the reader.

Money is in many ways a showcase for Amis's linguistic virtuosity, which is more compelling than the novel's deceptively simple plot revolving around Self's attempt to direct his first Hollywood feature, alternately titled *Good Money* and *Bad Money*. The narrative climaxes

when Self learns that his producer, an American named Fielding Goodney, has all along been inexplicably and underhandedly charging the funding for their movie to Self's account, leaving Self destitute at novel's end. Amis claims that *Money*, published in 1984, "could have been set any time" (Haffenden 61) and that its setting three years earlier in 1981 is by and large arbitrary, but nevertheless it is widely accepted as a satire of Thatcher's England, a time that lives in public memory as one of self-interested materialism and cultural vacuity.

The view that *Money* is a refutation of Thatcherism has long had considerable purchase among critics. For example, James J. Miracky, Laura Doan, and Dominic Head each read Amis's novel as a direct, if not necessarily productive, confrontation with Thatcher's England. Taking a contrary position, however, is Richard Bradford, who scoffs at reading John Self as "a critique of the values underpinning Thatcherite Conservatism" (36) and finds that to interpret *Money* as a trenchant critique of Thatcherism is simplistic. Bradford writes, "Unlike the majority of his contemporaries Amis was not perplexed or horrified by political developments, post-1979. He had always treated the mindset and behaviour they were accused of engendering as, in truth, propensities that most people shared and practically all people denied" (36). Rather than an embodiment of Thatcherism, Self is "an extension of the characteristics close to the core of Amis's previous novels, all but one published before 1979" (Bradford 36).

Bradford is right that *Money* shares thematic and tonal qualities with Amis's pre-Thatcher novels. And, though Bradford leaves the fact unsaid, a surprising number of the novel's initial reviews in major generalist venues—including *The New York Times* and *The London Review of Books*—make no mention at all of Thatcher, reinforcing Bradford's suggestion that the anti-Thatcher reading is aided by hindsight. Still, Bradford's dismissal of the novel's political critique is misguided, for much of the sizable body of criticism relating *Money* to Thatcherism is

persuasive and within a few years of publishing his novel Amis wrote an article for *Elle* explicitly condemning Thatcher's "acquisitive individualism" (*War Against Cliché* 23).

Although Bradford—who calls *Money* a “conundrum”—does acknowledge that *Money* is not “immune from the effects of Thatcherism” (36), he nonetheless charges that in the main critics have misrepresented the ways, or exaggerated the extent to which, the one criticizes the other.

Bradford's estimation reflects a minority view, but his dissent creates a wedge in the critical conversation surrounding Amis's book, prompting reexamination of its odd connection to 1980s English politics and culture. In *The Novel Now* (2007), Bradford challenges assumptions about British novelists' responses to Thatcherism by referring to “the fascinating issue of the relationship between actuality and invention in post-1979 fiction” (37). That statement echoes Alan Sinfield's remark that Thatcherism, “[l]ike all powerful stories ... partly creates the reality that it expounds” (338). Indeed, the tendency to read *Money* as an anti-Thatcher novel is symptomatic of a culture that Thatcherism itself engineered. My interest here, then, lies in the overlap of Bradford's and Sinfield's observations: how *Money*, ostensibly a critique of Thatcherite values, helps instate Thatcherism's transformative politico-cultural ideology. Navigating between the commonplace that *Money* is a satire of Thatcherism and Bradford's claim that it is “not so much caricaturing as disclosing” (36), my reading contends that *Money* can be read as a critique of Thatcherism only because it cedes so much ground to Thatcherism's premises, thereby codifying as common sense the ideology that it is widely taken to oppose.

My reading, then, is related to Doan's charge that “Amis gestures toward the daring and the radical” but in the end “devises a telos that valorizes the class and gender systems” (79) of Thatcherism. Yet, implicit in Doan's unfavorable assessment of *Money* is the notion that Amis's book should have a particular, in this case oppositional, politics. This assumption would likely

confound Amis, who regularly proclaims fidelity to an apolitical aestheticism. Amis admits, though, that he has “very strong moral views, and they are very much directed at things like money and acquisition” (Haffenden 63). My political argument is that Amis’s “moral views” counterintuitively exist in a symbiotic relationship with contrary values, and that this dynamic has political implications. This reading advances the idea that *Money*’s satire participates in the defining and empowering of an incipient Thatcherism, which, paradoxically, in turn helps establish the conditions that encourage the later readings of *Money* as an attack on Thatcherism.

To substantiate this claim, a preliminary issue is how *Money* evokes, let alone invokes, Thatcherism. After all, politics per se do not figure prominently in *Money*, and Self’s single (misogynist) reference to Thatcher—“we’ve got a chick” (Amis 146)—is fleeting. Ultimately, the “Iron Lady” is an absent presence, cued chiefly by the novel’s depictions of attitudes and moments conventionally understood to indicate Thatcherism and its era. For an example, take *Money*’s juxtaposition of two of 1981’s major events: the extravagant Royal Wedding and the violent racial disturbance in the predominantly Afro-Caribbean London area of Brixton. As Self pithily puts it, “There are street celebrations, street rumbles. London is covered in barricades and bunting. The talk is all of royalty and riots” (215). This contrast highlights Thatcherism’s nationalism that coexists with its “intensification of social division” (Morgan 456), especially among the poor and racial minorities. While *Money*’s renderings of social unrest, a sense of decline, and national chauvinism bind it to perceptions of Thatcherism, Thatcherite values are most palpable in Self’s lowbrow tastes and voracious greed. The word “money” appears on nearly every page of *Money*, and that bombardment calls to mind the vigor with which Thatcherism promoted acquisition. In Stuart Hall’s words, “Thatcherism knows no measure of

the good life other than ‘value for money’” (4). The impoverished culture and deification of money that Self exemplifies is the prevailing source for *Money*’s connection to Thatcherism.

While these emphases and references indicate *Money*’s evocations of a historical moment, Thatcherism is more than a temporal bracket or parliamentary era. Dennis Dworkin summarizes Hall’s influential analysis, which argues that Thatcherism “altered the rules of the political game” (258) to the extent that the Left can no longer compete with alternative policies, necessitating a competing vision of life. Hall also recognizes that global changes “provided the basis on which Thatcherism worked its spell. Whether described as postindustrialism, postmodernity, postfordism ... or a combination of these terms, these shifts were profoundly reshaping consciousness, experience, and the very fabric of everyday life” (Dworkin 258). Thatcherism, in this formulation, is a dramatic ideological realignment, and *Money*, published in 1984, arrives at a pivotal time in its development. Morgan notes that “the Thatcher government in the period 1979-1983 was not far removed in many respects” (456) from the consensus politics instituted around 1945, but Thatcher’s decisive reelection in 1983 gave her the political capital needed to push her agenda with greater intensity. Joseph Brooker observes, “The image of the 1980s that has passed into the popular repertoire ... is really, in Britain at least, a product of the decade’s second half. In this sense, Amis’s book is prescient, not merely imitative” (330). *Money* thus anticipates, and arguably presages, Thatcherism’s mid-decade amplification.

But, by setting *Money* in 1981 Amis also historicizes Thatcherism’s origins. That year saw economic decline and racial unrest exemplified in the Brixton riots referenced in *Money*, and the next year, 1982, saw the Falkland Island crisis, fueling a “mood of self-confident chauvinism that galvanized the nation” (Morgan 457) and emboldening Thatcher. Brooker also reminds that though *Money* “is specifically delineating the world of Thatcherism ... we cannot pin the culture

described by the book too rigidly on the 1980s” (329-30), for Amis takes a longer view. Jon Begley contends that “Amis apprehends the emerging culture of the 1980s as predicated upon the [1973] OPEC crisis and the recessionary cycles and economic reorganization that followed in its wake” (81). Self declares himself a “product of the Sixties” (Amis 65), and *Money*’s descriptions of “haircuts and [its] no-future vision ... sound like legacies of 1970s punk” (Brooker 330). Amis even hints that *Money* identifies a condition with roots that stretch beyond the 1970s and 1960s, perhaps interminably: Self’s meditation upon money that closes the novel concedes that “[t]here’s not even anything very twentieth century about it, except the disposition” (Amis 354, emphasis in original). *Money*’s commentary on the present thus looks backward, drawing on the past to contribute to the definition and actualization of its own moment’s emerging culture.

Amis, in other words, indicts the past as in part responsible for the present’s deteriorated condition. Patricia Waugh develops this line of thought, reading *Money* as Amis’s engagement with the legacy of 1960s social movements. *Money*, Waugh argues, suggests “how the sixties had exposed the spiritual void at the heart of secularized liberal culture and thus precipitated the invasion and occupation of the new evangelizing faith of pure monetarist economics” (31). Waugh makes the unlikely comparison of *Money* to T.S. Eliot’s *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), noting that, akin to Eliot’s explanation for the rise of Fascism, “Amis condemned the moral laxity and complacency of liberal culture as much as the heartlessness of commercial enterprise and showed how the inadequacies of the former had led to the triumph of the latter” (31). Amis’s criticism of the unintended consequences of 1960s Left activism chimes with the complaints of his conservative contemporaries, though his position is “well to the left of Salisbury Tory revivalism” (Waugh 30). This dovetailing of left and right perspectives, in which members from both sides of the political divide find the roots of Thatcherite England’s debased

culture in the political activism of the 1960s radical Left, points the way to my reading of *Money* as an dynamic if unintentional participant in Thatcherism's political realignment.

This process can be clarified by taking *Money* as part and parcel of the period's endemic political acquiescence, a phenomenon born in cultural and political theory but absorbed into and then further dispersed by the wider culture. The intellectual trends that trod this path are not of a coherent and distinct school, but rather part of a broad shift that Timothy Brennan, in *Wars of Position* (2006), assigns the equally broad designation, "the turn." Brennan locates the turn's gestation during the years 1975-1980, a time in which one can first begin to perceive "the fusing of right and left positions still evident today, above all, in viewing the state as an arena of innate corruption to which no claims for redress can or should be made" (ix). Terry Eagleton describes this event as the movement of Left intellectuals from "the countercultural 1960s and 70s" to "the depoliticized 80s and 90s" (Eagleton 40-41), a trajectory he dubs the "path to postmodernism." As Eagleton suggests, de-radicalization intensifies throughout the 1980s and beyond, running alongside and even cooperating with New Right politics toward creating a neoliberal hegemony.

Brennan locates the turn's nexus in the university. Not coincidentally, the New Right insurgency of the 1980s is also roughly the time when, in the academic milieu, "theory" became "the very air we breathe in the humanities and in art circles" (Brennan 5). Per Brennan, while theory has a "left Hegelian strain" stressing "historical agency, the rootedness of social actors in a system of communal relations, and the need to bring speculative thought to bear on institutions and civic life" (8), during the turn the mantle of theory is subsumed by a "later, and reactive, strain derived primarily from Nietzsche's work in the late nineteenth century and Heidegger's from the early twentieth" (8). Brennan calls this species of thought "an *American* and *British* translation of *French* refinements of conservative *German* philosophy" (9, emphasis in original),

with positions that are “revolutionary in posture, openly hostile to the [state], and characterized as Marxist by the media” (9). At bottom, Brennan uses “the turn” as shorthand for a vast “dissimulation of belief as *being* and the vaunting of a politics beyond belief, where ‘belief’ is understood as the taking of positions or the setting of programmatic goals” (x).

The coup of this Nietzschean/Heideggerian branch of theory in which the politics of being displaces the politics of belief was abetted first by growing cynicism toward statist politics during the 1970s and later amplified by the end of the Cold War’s three-world geopolitical model in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This theory betrays its radical affectations, “[reinvigorating] the clichés of neoliberalism by substituting the terminology of freedom, entrepreneurship, and individualism for the vocabulary of difference, hybridity, pluralism, or, in its latest avatar, the multitude” (Brennan 11). By flanking Thatcherism’s “neoliberal triumphalism” (Brennan 67) with a “correlative movement of post-humanistic thought in the universities and in the arts [that] effectively disabled critical opposition ... through a self-contradictory (but coldly efficient) claim that representation—in both its organizational and its semiotic senses—was a form of tyranny” (Brennan 67), the turn ends up making the period’s presumably radical Left an unwitting handmaiden to Thatcherism’s hegemonic project.

Now, Brennan is chiefly interested in American cultural and intellectual trends, but the turn applies to widespread patterns also applicable to England. Indeed, Alan Sinfield, in *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* (2004), shows how British and American cultural histories run along parallel tracks beginning around the Cold War, to which Self’s perpetual transatlantic travel reflects. On the other hand, Brennan’s broadsides against the structuralist theory of the turn do not accurately describe the cultural politics of Left intellectual traditions in Britain, most notably the Birmingham School of Richard Hoggart, Raymond

Williams, Hall, among others, which by and large preserved an emphasis on actionable political belief, even as it delved into the political significances of culture and identity.

However, one incident in particular, which happens in 1981, the year in which *Money* is set, suggests that by the 1980s the turn is in full effect in England as well as America. The event in question is the ousting of Colin MacCabe from the English faculty at Cambridge. MacCabe's firing, sometimes called "the MacCabe affair," was based not on his teaching or publication records, but rather the fact that he approached literature as a structuralist. Of this decision's aftermath, David Simpson writes, "The fight within the Cambridge English faculty that centered upon the firing of Colin MacCabe, an assistant lecturer, in 1981, was the subject of national and even international attention" (245). This uproar over the affair, as well as the substantial support for MacCabe from other intellectuals and the public interest "to know who was and who was not a 'structuralist'" (Simpson 246) testifies to the changing intellectual climate in Britain at the time Amis wrote *Money*, in particular the heightened presence and significance of theory.

Of course, Amis's background is literary and journalistic, not academic. But, Brennan maintains that the turn is not limited to academe. For him, "theory" is "a broad social phenomenon that is essentially mainstream as well as a substantial part of the kind of thinking that inspires Hollywood scriptwriters, advertising executives, and the composers of neo-punk bands. [The turn is] a system of ideas ... widely practiced and believed in the culture at large, not least because of the successful dispersion of those ideas by academics" (2). So, though Brennan's book focuses on the turn's theoretical sources, the phenomenon itself is extensive, including cultural artifacts such as novels. Indeed, Amis's discrediting of 1960s cultural liberalism in *Money* has obvious affinities with Brennan's account of the turn. Reading *Money* within the framework of the turn further reveals its participation in the turn.

In this account, Thatcherism is a nebulous, evolving complex of ideas, values, and practices, which Amis's novel helps define and delimit. This multidirectional process refines the terms of Thatcherism, and the ever-changing sense of Thatcherism further influences retrospective readings of *Money*, again redrawing Thatcherism's borders and perpetuating the process. The turn, then, is a subterranean, messy, and unintentional alliance between Thatcherism's political program and the seemingly oppositional intellectual and artistic work of the late twentieth century. Brennan's articulation of the turn is extremely useful toward unpacking *Money*'s relation to Thatcherism. Placing *Money* within the turn's matrix generates a new way of reading the novel, one in which its evocations of Thatcherite cultural and moral decay are now instead seen as invocations of Thatcherism's hegemonic power. My reading utilizes the turn to change the issue from previous critics' focus, *Money*'s presumed commentary on Thatcherism, in favor of its resonance, even imbrication, with Thatcherism.

The first key intersection between *Money* and the turn is Amis's disavowal of the longstanding expectation that, especially in the realist tradition, characters in novels have clear underlying motivations behind their actions and personality. Lennard Davis, in *Resisting Novels* (1987), contends that literary character in the novel must "be consistent to be understood by readers as a unity and not simply a random collection of attributes" and it must "fit into a pattern within the novel to make sense" (Davis 112). Moreover, Davis argues that literary character "is closely linked to historical and cultural factors and indeed cannot be understood outside of history" (Davis 107). Along such lines, "the coherence of character can be a kind of substitute for the formlessness or irrational nature of modern consciousness and culture" (114). But, in *Money*, Amis casts doubt on the legitimacy of motivation, and his skepticism that rational thought guides human action is a major conceit of the novel. For instance, Self at one point notes

that he examines a bookshelf after being “[r]andomly prompted (and that’s how [he’s] always prompted these days: it is all [he has] in the way of motivation)” (67). Self, and *Money*, repeatedly mocks the notion that people behave according to explainable and rational reasons.

Amis’s view that people’s actions are driven by mysterious, even irrational, forces is explicitly articulated in *Money* by his avatar, the character Martin Amis, a writer, whom Self hires to revise his film’s screenplay.³⁹ Near book’s end, Martin Amis tells Self that, “as a controlling force in human affairs, motivation is pretty well shagged out by now. It hasn’t got what it takes to motivate people any more” (331). Fielding Goodney cruelly illustrates this point, ruining Self financially without explanation, provocation, or reward. The Martin Amis character unequivocally blames the motivation delusion on novels and literary tradition: “It seems to me [that motivation’s] an idea taken from art, not from life, not from twentieth-century life. Nowadays motivation comes from inside the head, not from outside. It’s neurotic, in other words” (341). Martin Amis’s characterization of human behavior as chaotically impulsive and incomprehensible, and his assertion that “motivation” is inapplicable to twentieth century life, is in effect one way of saying that structured, systematic thinking is futile and exhausted.

Martin Amis’s observations on literary character amount to an example of a subtle but crucial slippage between “motivation” and “politics,” suggesting continuity between *Money*’s skepticism of motivation and its refusal to delineate politics outright as a force in its characters’ lives. After all, Martin Amis’s description of motivation—a “controlling force in human affairs” (331)—puts it in terms redolent of political ideology. Motivation is cast as a rational schema for understanding and organizing human activity, guiding thought and behavior, which calls to mind

³⁹ Henceforth I will refer to the author of *Money* as “Amis” and the character in *Money* as “Martin Amis.”

the accepted understanding of ideology as “a system of beliefs of a particular group or class ... [and] the general cultural system for the creation of signs and meanings” (Davis 51).

Just as Self has no discernible impetus for action he is also a decidedly “apolitical figure” (Head 30) who, as Amis puts it, “has no informing ideology of the way he lives” (Haffenden 66). According to Amis, even Self sees himself as a representative figure (Haffenden 62), one who declares himself “addicted to the twentieth century” (Amis 89). Gavin Keulks argues that Self’s depletion of motivation “denotes both literary and cultural exhaustion, a breakdown of unifying structure, of transcendent, signifying meaning” (195). Keulks’s comment on the end of unity, structure, and overarching meaning is similar to Eagleton’s pronouncement on radical politics in the 1980s: “Dreams of ambitious social change were denounced as illicit ‘grand narratives’, more likely to lead to totalitarianism than liberty ... A new epic fable of the end of epic fables unfurled across the globe” (45). Motivation and politics are not fully collapsed into each other in *Money*, but the former is characterized along lines suggestive of the latter and both are almost entirely absent in the novel, allowing for parallels to be drawn. Self may not fully personify Thatcherite ideology, as some critics claim, but he does epitomize political estrangement.

This suspicion of motivation/ideology is one strand in a thicker thread running throughout *Money* that interrogates the status and limits of fiction in the late twentieth century, an investigation that mostly unfurls in talks between Martin Amis and Self. Critics often stress the aesthetic dimensions to these conversations, citing them as a contest between postmodern and realist tendencies. Keulks mentions that *Money* is frequently “viewed within a long tradition of realist revisionings, consciously blurring the boundaries between realism and metafiction to define a new form of ‘postmodern realism’ or ‘meta-mimesis’” (191). Diedrick argues that even if “Self may be the victim of his author’s postmodern assumptions about fiction” quite regularly

“Self and realism alike emerge triumphant” (99). However, these chats that “slyly mirror the critical controversies attending Amis’s postmodern narratives” (Diedrick 97), like Martin Amis’s misgivings about motivation, also show how the novel negates political thinking and action.

Through the conversations of his proxies Amis confronts notions of authorial responsibility and literary representation. After submitting his screenplay revisions to Self, Martin Amis ruminates on the existence of a “moral philosophy of fiction” (241). Specifically, he asks, “When I create a character and put him or her through certain ordeals, what am I up to—morally? Am I accountable” (241). In an earlier conversation, Martin Amis pontificates, “The distance between author and narrator corresponds to the degree to which the author finds the narrator wicked, deluded, pitiful or ridiculous . . . You can do what the hell you like to him, really. This creates an appetite for punishment” (229). In many ways, then, *Money* is an extended probing of fiction’s ethical implications and questions.

On this question of authorial responsibility, Self’s occasional American paramour, Martina Twain—whose name and cultural sophistication align her with Martin Amis—gets to the heart of the matter. While preparing a dinner party, Twain talks to Self about literary aesthetics, particularly with respect to “the unwitting narrator” (126). She wonders, “Why do we feel protective when we watch the loved one who is unaware of being watched? . . . Actors are paid to pretend that they are unaware of being watched, but they of course rely on the collusion of the watcher, and nearly always get it” (126). Twain, who unbeknownst to her is also a character being watched, identifies the crux of fiction’s ethical problem: collusion. The only participant not complicit in this conspiracy is the character, who, according to Martin Amis, retains a “double innocence:” “They don’t know why they’re living through what they’re living

through. They don't even know they're alive" (241). The guilty parties are the writer and the reader, who join together to control, dominate, and at times even torment the character.

Money denounces "ideological" thinking—represented in the forms of motivation and other novelistic conventions—for functioning as the unwelcome colonizers of Self's speciously "autonomous" being. The novelistic compact between author, character, and reader is cast as an inherently tyrannical relationship, and in this way demonstrates literarily the loss of what Brennan calls "the organizational imaginary." Any talk of a collective subject is disarticulated by the logic of the turn, which refuses to accept that "strategies of control . . . can be condemned only conjuncturally, not as a matter of principle" (Brennan 150). If the theory of the turn "decenters, dissipates, and atomizes in the name of plurality, heterogeneity, and the supplement [to the degree that the] cultural Left conspires against the very universalism that a political myth must have to recruit and expand" (Brennan 156-7), *Money* questions the novel's power to effect the social realm it strives to represent by indicting novelistic representation itself as oppressive.

In this way Amis's book is embedded in the turn's short-circuiting of opposition to the postmodern capitalism championed by Thatcherism. The conundrum of *Money* is that its critique of the consumerist ideology espoused by Thatcherism disavows mechanisms needed to counter, defuse, and replace that ideology. *Money* does incriminate untrammelled capitalism, branding it tyrannical and cannibalistic: Self escapes the control of *Money* and money simultaneously, conflating the invasive politics of fiction with the "money conspiracy" of Thatcherite monetarism. Begley argues that *Money* amounts to a "disquieting recognition that . . . in [postmodern capitalism's] absence of normative frameworks, moral arbitration may ultimately be consigned to the inhumane and capricious jurisdiction of the market" (104). But, his reading elides *Money*'s suspicion of normative frameworks—*Money* rejects that for which it yearns.

Money suggests that no organizational framework, including literary motivation, is better than the greed-virus of pure capitalism because, at bottom, any such framework amounts to an external force that corrupts and conquers the integrity of a sovereign being. Brennan argues that the cultural Left of the turn aided its reactionary opponents because it “possessed a highly theorized hostility to organization” (149). In this vein, *Money* attacks the monetarist premises championed by and associated with Thatcherism, but by implicating itself—that is, the novel form—as an equally corruptive force, the critique’s edge is dulled. Amis’s book bitingly articulates the rampant greed that comes to be Thatcherism’s defining feature, helping shape the popular conception of Thatcherism, but *Money*’s default on the possibility of collective action available to curb the money conspiracy allows Thatcherite values to emerge relatively unscathed. In other words, *Money* helps to unflatteringly define Thatcherism as a crudely self-indulgent force, but it goes no further than identification: Thatcherism can be recognized, but the means necessary to challenge it risk overpowering others’ being in the same manner as Thatcherite greed and self-indulgence. Amis names his enemy, but backs down for fear that in any strong act of defiance he will become no better than his rival.

A second way *Money* facilitates the entrenchment of the values it opposes plays out in Amis’s prioritization of the cultural realm over the political. Needless to say, to speak of “culture” in *Money* is to use one of criticism’s most fraught terms. Williams identifies “culture” as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (87). Still, Williams discerns three broad usages of “culture.” The older two are “culture” as an “abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development” (90), and as a noun “which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general” (90). Williams’ third usage of the word is “the independent and abstract

noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (90). When it comes to culture *Money* is a counterpoint to the cultural studies movement that flourished during the 1980s, for unlike that movement, which tended to focus on culture as a symbolic system, Amis draws upon all three of Williams’ senses. Amis’s novel considers culture’s connections to material production and its connotations of personal improvement, both of which bear on the manifestation of culture as a symbolic system at a given time.

Ironically, when Amis grapples with “culture” in *Money*, he is really confronting a presumed absence of culture, a void caused by the primacy of money. His hostility toward commercial culture echoes the “civilizing” implications of culture noted by Williams, which again separates him from the dominant critical attitude of the time. The orientation toward “culture” in *Money* is different than the one taken by much of the prominent cultural studies of the mid-1980s, which typically looked past the influence commerce and commercial values have upon contemporary culture and its artifacts. Indeed, the cultural studies boom that rose to prominence around the time of *Money* contained a powerful “democratic and populist impulse” (Jacoby 71). For example, Andrew Ross’s *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (1989) applauds the growing body of critics who value the “creativity of consumption” (11). Unlike Ross, Amis finds little liberating potential in consumerism and mass culture.

In simplest terms, *Money* pits the values of commerce and mass culture, both part and parcel of Thatcherism’s extreme free market dogma, against the values of contemplation and highbrow culture, which is to say the priorities of intellectuals whom Thatcher derisively deemed “the chattering classes.” Diedrick observes that, when read along these lines, *Money* is a rebuttal to “the influence of capitalism on consciousness in the postwar west . . . In this reading John Self is both target and victim, a one-man carnival of junk taste and junk morality who has

relinquished most of his free will by embracing commodity culture in all its pornographic excess” (77). Mass culture in *Money*, then, is a degrading force and addiction. Self mentions that one of his favorite hobbies is to watch television, even though he knows that doing so is “cretinizing” him. Self acknowledges that, if he continues to watch television excessively, he will eventually become like “[g]irls who subliminally model themselves on kid-show presenters” or “[m]en whose manners show newscaster interference” or, worst of all, like “those who talk on buses and streets as if TV were real” (31). Amis concludes Self’s ruminations on television’s degenerative effects with the dictum, “If you lose your mind, you can get a false one” (31). Self is himself an addict, but he nonetheless understands that his mass culture addictions perpetrate false consciousness.

This disdain of mass culture gives the impression that Amis fears the destructive effects of commercialism, in the vein of critics like Matthew Arnold and Dwight Macdonald. Indeed, like those thinkers’ postulations pitting culture against anarchy or warning of the parasitic danger of “mass-cult,” *Money* positions the sensibilities and accoutrements of highbrow culture as a defense against television, pornography, and commercial entertainment, all of which are in fact the negations of culture. At one point Self muses upon the ways the streets both “sing” and “scream,” from “the monologue malls” to the “all-night space-game parlour [and] the all-night supermarket” (332). However, Self knows that this cacophony does not amount to anything of substance: “You’re told about street culture. There isn’t any. That’s the point” (332). According to *Money*, by being designed to generate money and subsequently measured based upon its ability to do so, mass culture is a black hole that absorbs the individual.

By contrast, high culture—which, for Amis, is in fact simply “culture”—is granted recuperative, even salvational, powers. For instance, a turning point in the narrative is Self’s

recognition that he hears “four distinct voices in [his] head” (104). The first two, which manage to dominate his mind throughout the novel, are “the jabber of money” and “the voice of pornography” (104). The third competitor for his attention is “the voice of ageing and weather, of time travel through days and days, the ever-weakening voice of stung shame, sad boredom and futile protest” (104). However, “the real intruder ... has to do with quitting work and needing to think about things [Self] never used to think about” (104). This voice, it turns out, is calling him toward “the world of thought and fascination” (118). These latter two voices, drawing Self toward reflection and contemplation, are associated with Martin Amis and Martina Twain, characters who by comparison to Self exemplify intelligence, maturity and sophistication.

The voices pulling Self in different directions coincide with *Money*'s pattern of doubling and inclusion of doppelgangers, techniques noted by several critics.⁴⁰ Head, for one, points out “the merging of Self and Amis [the character]” (31), while Diedrick goes further and claims that “Self, [Martin] Amis, and Martina [are] aspects of a single consciousness” (94). In his analysis of *Money*'s pairings, Keulks similarly argues that Amis “embeds ... ideological dualism within *Money* by establishing an oppositional tension” among its major characters (Keulks 180). In Keulks's reading, Self is caught between the pulls of two duos, each representing competing values. The pairing of Twain and Martin Amis offer Self a “morality based not on consumption

⁴⁰ Amis's system of matched opposite numbers calls to mind one of the chief criticisms against Brennan—the argument that “the turn” is simplistically binary. For example, Joseph Keith writes, “Brennan's central argument hinges on such a stark political opposition between the two that he leaves himself little to no room for negotiation. There are no partial disagreements here: one is either part of the solution—i.e., a politics of belief—or part of the problem—i.e., a politics of being” (para. 12). Likewise, Michael Bérubé cites Brennan as a notorious member of “the Manichean left,” for whom “there are two forces in the world, those of good and evil, and everyone and everything that is not on one side is on the other” (N. pag). However, Bérubé is mostly unconcerned with the turn as an explanatory framework, and Keith is “sympathetic to Brennan's trenchant critique of the cultural left's abandonment of democratic politics as a public practice” (para. 13), so their objections to Brennan's political conclusions and degree of nuance bear little on the theorization of the turn itself.

or selfishness but on the higher ideals of literature and self-awareness” (179). Martin Amis provides Self the opportunity to engage in intelligent conversation; likewise, Self observes that “[t]he voices of money, weather and pornography ... just aren’t up to the job when it comes to Martina” (Amis 114). On the other hand is Fielding Goodney and Self’s sleazy English ex-girlfriend, Selina Street, who present to “Self desire, the pleasures of the body, and baser things” (Keulks 180). In the end Self cannot break his addiction, so he returns to Selina, ending his relationship with Martina, and later swings a punch at Martin Amis during a game of chess, two low moments that pave the way to the italicized coda in which Self reexamines his life.

Self’s conflicting alliances with Martina/Martin Amis and Selina/Fielding do not, however, add up to a neat morality tale about culture’s capacity to stave off the corrosive addiction of consumerism. First, the influences of Martin Amis and Martina are not simply ennobling. During sexual encounters with Martina, who “likes it this way, that way, but feelingly, humanly” (Amis 298), Self is consistently impotent. Martin Amis, whose snobbishness and pretention hardly make a flattering self-portrait, offends Self with his “superior tone” (87), and gives Self “the fucking creeps” (61). Beyond being debilitating and haughty, the two signifiers of culture are also implicated in the money conspiracy propagated by mass culture.

Money, after all, indicts the very high culture Self so desperately needs. This critique can be seen in the relationship between Self and Martin Amis. Diedrick notes that, despite frequently taken as contrasts, “Self and the Amis character are secret sharers more than antagonists” (96). Their affinities are on display when the two dine together and Martin Amis admits to Self, “I thought those commercials [of Self’s] were bloody funny” (165), right before he orders “a standard job’s breakfast” (165). Moreover, for some time Martin Amis resists Self’s job offer, citing his ambivalence to work in the film industry, but he accepts once Self doubles his

proposed payment—contingent that the “cheque doesn’t bounce” (222). For all of Martin Amis’s pretensions to cultural and moral superiority, he is still swayed by money. As for Martina, her husband “works in money, in pure money...[using] money to buy and sell money” (Amis 115). Twain’s arguably feigned rejection of money’s import is enabled by her spouse’s mastery of it. Martin Amis’s refinement is a veneer, and Martina Twain’s sophistication is funded by money—high and mass cultures are alike predicated upon money. Ultimately, then, *Money* neither champions high culture as a bastion from materialism nor celebrates “creative consumption” like the cultural studies in vogue at the time: in *Money*, culture has the potential to retard the most devastating effects of consumer values, but it is still unavoidably tainted by those values.

By suggesting that high culture, despite its power to enrich, is yet dependent upon mass culture, Amis delineates a form of totalitarianism that bridges *Money* to the turn. *Money* telegraphs this cultural totalitarianism through references to George Orwell’s monumental political novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Throughout *Money* Self reads *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and praises Big Brother’s totalitarian society: “A no-frills setup, run without sentiment, snobbery or cultural favouritism, Airstrip One seemed like my kind of town” (207). Self sees himself as “an idealistic young corporal in the Thought Police” (207), but Amis has stated that Self is really a victim (Haffenden 65). Appropriately, Self’s hotel room number is 101, the same as the torture chamber that holds Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Diedrick submits that *Money* “extends Orwell’s analysis of totalitarian ideology into the realm of postindustrial capitalist democracies” (78). According to Diedrick, “The totalitarian state of Oceania is dedicated to reducing human freedom and choice by steadily narrowing the range of thought. In the mass-mediated commodity culture in which Self has temporarily thrived, advertising and film have engendered a similar effect.” (102). Totalitarianism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is

enforced through an oppressive political structure, whereas in *Money* it simply *arises* through a debased culture. Furthermore, just as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s rendering of totalitarian politics would shape the terms of the Cold War and its "three worlds" model, the totalitarian vision of *Money*, written during the closing years of the Cold War and at the dawn of the "end of history," sketches the contours of the emerging political status quo—Thatcherism.

Amis's totalitarian fears manifest in *Money* as frequent statements, some jubilant and others acquiescent, that imply monetarist capitalism is the only option. Goodney asks of capitalism, "Why fight it?" (34). Self knows that in 1980s England, "You can't drop out any more. Money has seen to that. There's nowhere to go. You cannot hide out from money" (144). Later, Self puts forward the Orwellian formulation that "money is freedom ... But freedom is money" (250). Ultimately Self admits, "You just cannot beat the money conspiracy. You can only join it" (267). Even the means of resisting the "money conspiracy," namely culture, is still tainted and controlled by money. Culture may lessen the debilitating effects of postmodern capitalism, but it is still subject to it, and the individuals who appear most resistant to money's coercive power are still beholden to money. Thatcherism's greed and self-interest are repulsive, but no alternative is better or even imaginable.

The problem with *Money* in this regard, then, is similar to Brennan's critique of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's landmark study in cultural and political theory, *Empire* (2000). Hardt and Negri's study is in many ways the apotheosis of the turn. Their thesis, based on the questionable assumption that nationalist imperialism is over, posits a decentralized supranational "Empire" created through globalization and international capitalism. However, according to Hardt and Negri, the dissolution of state power in favor of Empire actually reduces coercion and opens up space for true individual subjectivity. Hardt and Negri argue that true totalitarianism

comes from nationalism and in fact national sovereignty itself: “The concept of nation and the practices of nationalism are from the beginning set down on the road not to the republic but to the “re-total,” the total thing, that is, the totalitarian overcoding of social life” (113). Therefore, according to *Empire*, globalization, transnational corporations, and postmodern capitalism—all forces that allegedly diminish the power of nations—actually contain utopian energies.

Brennan’s critique of *Empire* is cutting, and his fundamental objection especially reverberates with *Money*’s relationship to Thatcherism. The key problem with theory of the turn like *Empire*, Brennan argues, is that the “most intense radicalism ... finds its refuge and answer in capitalism itself, the sources of a revolution more radical than mere resentment” (181). *Money* is an example of the turn’s early steps toward internalizing neoliberal assumptions. Self may be abhorrent and *Money* may attack consumerism, but—as the novel explicitly and frequently acknowledges—the remedy to Self’s addictions is implicated in the problem, so the only “cure” is to modulate one’s consumer habits and not be too brash about it. *Money* prescribes a homeopathic treatment to the sickness of Thatcherism, making it predictably insufficient. Not only does *Money*’s apathetic and half-hearted opposition fail to curb Thatcherism, but by narrowing the field of the thinkable it helps institutionalize a new rightwing common sense that is so pervasive, fifteen years later, self-described “communists” like Hardt and Negri praise the “radical” potential of late capitalism.

Amis provides an amusing image in *Money* that illustrates the relationship his book—and the turn broadly—has to the politico-cultural forces it clearly despises: Self “fighting” the weather. According to Self’s narration, sometimes when he walks the streets he pantomimes a battle against the “weather gods:” “I beat them up. I kick and punch and snarl ... Tubbily I execute karate leaps, forearm smashes, aiming for the sky. I do a lot of shouting too. People

think I'm mad, but I don't care. I *will not take it*" (84, emphasis in original). The futility of Self's endeavors against the weather mirrors the futility of *Money*'s endeavors against England's increasingly Thatcherite culture and conservative direction. *Money* is a protest against monetarist principles and the coarse culture ushered in by—or at least eventually associated with—Thatcherism, but without any attachment to concrete politics or the political imagination and will to bring about an alternative, *Money* is like John Self flailing at the rain.

Like Amis's treatment of literary motivation and authorial responsibility, his emphasis on culture—especially the totalitarianism of culture—shapes and perpetuates a negative impression of Thatcherism as coarse and philistine, but it also actively discourages any form of real resistance to it. Now, one could argue that *Money*'s remonstrations against the cultural landscape of 1980s England are still capable of producing meaningful changes. After all, Eagleton acknowledges that radicals like he have long known that “political change had to be ‘cultural’ to be effective. Any political change which does not embed itself in people's feelings and perceptions—which does not secure their consent, engage their desires and weave its way into their sense of identity—is unlikely to endure very long” (46). The inextricability of culture and politics has been explicated at great length by critics including Williams, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, among many others.

Money, however, ultimately follows the turn's tendency to assume that oppositional work requires only “clarifying the political arena that is culture itself” (Brennan 156), rather than yoking culture to its dissident politics. Ironically, given the novel's economic title, its diagnosis of Thatcherism only sees superstructure while the base goes unconsidered. While *Money* helps define Thatcher's England as a cultural wasteland, reinforcing the image of Thatcherism as crass and anti-intellectual, it refuses to connect that barrenness to concrete politics or suggest that an

alternative politics could redeem the state of culture. Amis implies that the cultural impoverishment of the 1980s is an especially strong inflection of a permanent and inescapable state, not the direct and correctable consequences of the actions of a particular type of state.

In sum, even as *Money* draws an unfavorable portrait of Thatcher's England, unequivocally reproving the self-interest, greed, privatization, and philistinism that cluster together under the rubric of Thatcherism, the novel's attempt to critique the politico-cultural developments of 1980s England is precarious: it undermines its own capacity to critically interrogate politics and culture, and no alternative to the status quo is offered or suggested. Now, Stuart Hall, in his landmark analysis of Thatcherism, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1988), argues that analyses of Thatcherism cannot forget that

Thatcherism is about the remaking of common sense: its aim is to become the "common sense of the age". Common sense shapes our ordinary, practical, everyday calculation and appears as natural as the air we breathe. ... The hope of every ideology [including Thatcherism] is to naturalize itself out of History and into Nature, and thus to become invisible, to operate unconsciously. (8)

Money, as an artifact of the turn, makes oppositional gestures, but in effect contributes to Thatcherism's naturalization and its transmogrification from ideology to common sense.

Focusing *Money* through the turn helps undo the conundrum of *Money* and work toward clarifying its relationship with Thatcherism. My reading of *Money* is not irreconcilable with the readings of critics like Head and Begley, who assert that Amis is in fact able to establish a moral position against greed, commercial culture, social disunity, and other Thatcherite conditions. However, my argument maintains that this moral position is attained within the confining assumptions of neoliberal hegemony, meaning that *Money* at best operates as an internal critique within Thatcherism rather than an exterior challenge to it.

However, Amis wages war on Thatcherism with the weapons of the turn, and—as Brennan and my reading illustrate—the turn’s oppositional firepower shoots blanks. The turn, while seemingly subversive and critical, lacks any ability to effect meaningful change, thereby allowing Thatcherism and the New Right to define the rules of the game. In other words, *Money* may dislike Thatcherism, but it neuters its own capacity to resist and offers no alternative vision, so that in the end, while Amis’s novel may be a wildly entertaining and indeed powerful expression of disgust, it accomplishes little more than an expertly delivered sneer. *Money* is a novel of political estrangement that does not simply reflect political estrangement, it actively manufactures it. Even as Amis’s novel helps define for its readers the contours, emphases, and depravities of Thatcherism, it nonetheless implicitly acknowledges, whether one likes it or not, that Thatcherism’s advanced capitalism is the only way possible—that is to say, no matter how objectionable, Thatcherism is the new common sense.

4. Irresistible Encounters: The Public and the Private on Either Side of 9/11

Ian McEwan and Zadie Smith have deserved reputations as novelists whose work captures the current mood of English life. Michael L. Ross points to McEwan and Smith's shared interest in the states of English culture and politics when he places both writers' oeuvres within the "Condition of England" novel tradition. However, the tenor of the portrayals of contemporary England in Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), two of the most important recent novels by any author to address Englishness, are markedly different. Whereas "*White Teeth* is a celebration of the contingent and chaotic stuff of social life, an enactment of haphazard but vibrant multiculturalism" (Head 187), by contrast "*Saturday* is, in many ways, a novel *about* prejudice, misunderstanding and over-interpretation in an increasingly paranoid London" (Bradley and Tate 30). Separating the composition of the novels, and almost certainly a factor in the differences in the two author's depictions, are the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which have come to represent the confrontation between global neoliberal capitalism and Islamic fundamentalism that would later directly hit London on July 7, 2005. Yet, while the trauma of 9/11 and its aftereffects divide *White Teeth* and *Saturday*, the novels are continuous in that both exert pressure on totalizing accounts of English identity and culture.

Saturday, like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) to which it is often compared, follows its protagonist throughout the course of a single day. In this case, the day is Saturday, February 15, 2003, the date of a worldwide protest against the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. *Saturday* tracks Henry Perowne, an affluent, middle-aged, London neurosurgeon, for twenty-four hours, during which he plays squash with a colleague, visits his dementia-afflicted mother, and interacts with his extraordinarily gifted family: his wife Rosalind is a successful attorney, his son Theo is a talented guitarist, his daughter Daisy is a rising poet, and his father-in-law is an

esteemed poet. Pivotaly, while waiting impatiently in his expensive Mercedes during the protest-induced congestion, Henry is noticed by a traffic cop and deferentially waved through a cordon. Henry's illegal maneuver at this moment of privilege causes a minor accident and tense encounter with an unstable hooligan named Baxter that later leads to a truly terrifying event.

In the midst of that evening's family dinner, the luxurious Perowne home is invaded by the thuggish Baxter, who felt humiliated when, during the earlier traffic dispute, Henry publicly diagnosed his Huntington's disease. Amid the retributive break-in Baxter threatens to rape Daisy, whose family learns of her hidden pregnancy after she is forced to undress. But, in a scene derided by several critics as unlikely at best, Baxter is momentarily pacified by Daisy's reading of Matthew Arnold's 1867 poem "Dover Beach," giving Henry and Theo the chance to subdue Baxter, throwing him down a flight of stairs. *Saturday* ends with a lifesaving act of compassion: Henry makes a late visit to the hospital and removes a deadly blood clot from Baxter's brain.

Unlike McEwan's focus on a single character during the course of one day, Smith's *White Teeth* offers a large cast of characters and a panoramic vision of late twentieth-century England. *White Teeth* is anchored by the friendship between Archie Jones, a working-class white Englishman, and Samad Iqbal, a Bengali Muslim, whose unlikely bond is forged when they serve together during World War II. The bulk of the story is set in North London between the years 1974-1999, throughout which the pair maintains their friendship. Samad has immigrated to London with his wife, Alsana, and the couple gives birth, in the mid-1970s, to twin boys, Magid and Millat. Around the same time, middle-aged Archie serendipitously meets Clara, a nineteen year-old bohemian of Jamaican heritage and a runaway from her mother, an oppressively devout Jehovah's Witness. Clara and Archie wed, and their child, Irie, is roughly the same age as the Iqbal twins. From this point Smith tells a cross-generational story as the two families grow,

interact, and meet the bourgeois, secular/Jewish, and intellectual Chalfen clan. Smith's novel is ostensibly about three British families, "the Iqbals, the Joneses, and the Chalfens, which together combine several ethnicities: white English, Asian, Caribbean and Jewish" (Bentley 496), but its implications are on the far larger scale of national identity and reveal an intricate social web.

Smith's decidedly optimistic novel is in a sense a final expression of the hopeful confidence of the 1990s. The sentiment—felt after the fall of the Berlin Wall but before the fall of the Twin Towers—that global conflict had largely dissipated and history had ended may have been misguided and exaggerated, but still it was widespread and palpable. Smith's assuredness is most pronounced in her evident faith in England's increasingly multicultural society. Dominic Head describes *White Teeth* as an "apt summation of the triumphs and the limits of English multiculturalism at the end of the century" (183), demonstrating Smith's perspective that "we are all hybrid postcolonials, biologically as well as culturally" (186). Graham MacPhee similarly calls the novel a remarkably "optimistic" reading of "multicultural British society" (163). Indeed, Kenneth Morgan claims that "*White Teeth* commanded attention in part because of its optimistic view of race relations" (Morgan 561). By contrast to *Saturday*, which indicates the despair and anxiety experienced during the inauguration of the post-9/11 "War on Terror," Smith's novel displays pre-millennial sanguinity.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, mean that *White Teeth* and *Saturday*, despite being published only five years apart, occupy very different historical contexts, which no doubt account at least in part for the dissimilar tones. Yet, while Smith and McEwan are writing on either side of 9/11, their novels similarly grapple with the vexed relation between public and private lives in contemporary England. In *Saturday*, Henry's retreat into his professional and family lives is widely read as the triumph of the private over the public. Andrzej Gasiorek argues

that *Saturday* is the apotheosis of late-twentieth century disillusionment: “Public life seemed to be increasingly dominated by neocolonialist wars, political assassinations, the nuclear arms race, the exacerbation of violence, and the transformation of politics into spectacle” (205). MacPhee claims that *Saturday* “sets up a standoff between an obscure and epistemologically treacherous external world and the solipsism of the atomised and isolated subject, locked in its own purely private and integral experience” (158), and Berthold Schoene argues that it “cosily reinscribes the prerogative of the private over the public, not so much suggesting that the world rests on the family as that the family can endure and perpetuate itself in perfect, independent superiority to the world” (44). Likewise, Nick Bentley writes that *White Teeth* “emphasizes and addresses the multicultural make-up of late-twentieth/early twenty-first century England, and in turn is keen, on one level, to challenge concerns that Englishness and multiculturalism are mutually antagonistic concepts” (495). According to Bentley, Smith assuages fears that a multicultural society will erode a coherent sense of national identity “in a number of ways, one of which is by emplotting the multicultural nation, revealing it through personal stories from characters with a variety of ethnic cultures and backgrounds. ... Smith’s novel emphasizes that multiculturalism should accept a mixing of ethnicity identified at the level of the individual rather than the nation. In this model, each of us is multicultural, and by extension multiethnic” (496). Smith’s vision of the private realm—individuality, family, ethnicity, and multiculturalism as a lived experience—is collapsed with the public realm, which comprises a coherent national identity, the country’s changing political environment, and multiculturalism as a national project. So, both novels turn to questions of the public and private, but unlike *White Teeth*’s dynamic public sphere, where individuals, families, and the public realm are intimately and inescapably interlocked, *Saturday* captures the blockage imperiling English public life, foreclosing engagement from the start.

At bottom, then, both Smith and McEwan explore the vexed relationships between a private family life and a wider public culture. Despite different attitudes and conclusions, not to mention changed politico-cultural contexts, the two novels' political orientations have more in common than typically recognized. Indeed, within their contrasting interrogations of private and public realms, McEwan and Smith alike ultimately take totalization as their object of critique. The totalizing theories and systems targeted as dangerous, in both cases, tend to take the form of fundamentalist perspectives and related notions of "purity," particularly in terms of religious and scientific discourses. Of course, whereas *White Teeth* famously reflects the ebullience and confidence of its time, *Saturday* indicates the loss of Smith's pre-9/11 insouciance toward the actual threat of fundamentalism. McEwan's novel also presents a private life cleaved from public concerns that stands in contrast to Smith's inevitably imbricated spheres. Yet, across both novels, the fear of totalization and its inimical effects persists. In *White Teeth*, Smith employs multiculturalism, as an ethos and lived experience, as the means to disrupt totalizing forces like religious fundamentalism. Although McEwan likewise confronts fundamentalist perspectives, *Saturday* offers literature as an anti-totalizing force. The trauma of terror does little to trouble this principled view of totalization as the principal threat to national progress and harmony.

In *White Teeth*, Smith critiques totalizing impulses manifest in various guises, ranging from religious fundamentalism, scientism, and racism, suggesting that the dangerous common thread uniting such disparate perspectives is a comprehensiveness that betrays the desire to remove all chance and arbitrariness, elements that Smith positions as vital and necessary forces. In this way, Smith's much-discussed portrayal of a post-racial and multicultural English identity is an extension of late twentieth-century liberalism's critique of totalizing ideologies. Furthermore, despite *Saturday*'s melancholic portrait of a lone Londoner, Henry Perowne, who

remains profoundly disconnected from any sense of public commitment, McEwan likewise takes totalization as the overriding danger of the post-9/11 world. McEwan, like Smith, is also concerned with the larger social fabric, except that *Saturday* is frequently misread as a full turn away from the public realm. Such a reading, however, overlooks the perilous equilibrium McEwan maintains in *Saturday*. McEwan positions art, particularly literature, as a force that demonstrates to Perowne and the reader that the fates of all—self and other, privileged and abject alike—are utterly intertwined, while at the same time literature also underscores the ultimate unknowability of alterity. Literature, in other words, can be a mediating force that helps establish a sense of connectedness without colonizing the subjectivity of others, thereby respecting their individuality, autonomy, and agency. *White Teeth* and *Saturday*, then, suggest the surprising lack of fundamental disruption of English political fiction after 9/11, in which novelists' attempts to capture a vision of the social totality while at once resisting—in fact actively rejecting—the deleterious effects of totalization persists.

Smith's rejection of totalization emerges through her novel's acclaimed portrayal of English multiculturalism. *White Teeth* emphasizes the constant encounters between peoples of different ethnicities and religions that contribute to and define a multicultural society. Indeed, Richard Bradford's harsh and at times patronizing review of *White Teeth* muses that he "cannot help but wonder if this novel ... would have found a publisher, let alone generated critical acclaim, had it not been so determinedly fixated upon the theme of multi-culturalism" (207). While Bradford here apparently finds "multiculturalism" to be a trendy and politically correct catchphrase, Smith is far from the only contemporary novelist to take as her subject matter the changing demographics of London in particular and England in general. David Morley and Kevin Robins, for instance, note that "writers such as Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Meera

Syal, and Zadie Smith have been crucial in giving voice to other non-white British cultures” (9). Of these writers, Smith is perhaps most frequently compared to Rushdie. Lindsay Duguid refers to Smith as a “follower” of Rushdie, taking on his “trope of the polyphonic, puzzling text which mirrors post-colonial Britain” (294), and Jesse Matz writes, “Like Rushdie, Smith has chosen to make the absurdities of cultural diversity a comic way to explore and explode myths of identity” (178). Also like Rushdie, Smith’s engagement with English multiculturalism considers the political dimensions to national and ethnic identity.

With respect to questions of multiculturalism and national identity, Bentley’s analysis of the contemporary novel and Englishness is instructive. Drawing upon the psychoanalytic-structuralist work of Jacques Lacan, Bentley defines “Englishness” as “a series of signifiers of the nation that operates within the linguistic field ... without necessarily relating to referential aspects of the nation” (486). He continues by connecting these “series of signifiers” to another of Lacan’s psychological models: the “the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real as three competing orders in the psychological make-up of an individual, or, in this case, the collective psychology of the nation” (487). Within this framework Bentley identifies multiculturalist discourse as a way to incorporate the legacy of colonial exploitation (the Real) into the Symbolic realm of “Englishness” without shattering the prior edifice of national identity. Multiculturalism can appropriate and absorb England’s colonial legacy into a new collective construction of Englishness, thus re-imagining yet ultimately preserving the framework of Englishness. Bentley argues that this process is embedded within the narrative of *White Teeth*, playing out in its encounters and confrontations betwixt England’s manifold ethnic constituencies.

One of *White Teeth*’s foundational premises is that—due to innumerable factors—the ethnic, racial, and religious compositions of England are rapidly and irrevocably changing. This

shift is accompanied by the emergence of a so-called “new racism” “based on cultural differences, on the ‘natural’ preference of human beings for their own cultural group, and on the incompatibility between different cultures—the mixing or coexistence of which in one country, it was alleged, was bound to lead to violent social conflicts and the dissolution of social bonds” (Modood 27).⁴¹ Of course, England throughout the last quarter century did and continues to experience the growing pains of immigration and the often conflicting values of its many ethnic communities; however, Smith refutes the new racist assumption that these tensions are destructive of national identity and cohesion. Instead, *White Teeth* suggests that these encounters between social others are not fracturing but instead reconstituting English culture and identity.

Exchanges between these seemingly incompatible ethnic and religious groups recur throughout *White Teeth*. At one point, Smith’s omniscient narrator surveys a schoolyard and notices “Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O’Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names in a direct collision course” (271). As Bentley rightly points out, though, Smith takes this multiethnic generation not “as combinations of discrete ethnicities but as an indication that the old categories of race are an inaccurate way of describing the ethnic diversity of contemporary England” (496). Smith ultimately seems to anticipate “a world in which humanity comes to recognize that given principles of differentiation have become outmoded ... [but] this new kind of humanism is only imaginable as a consequence of the postcolonial migrant experience, and the complex stages of renegotiating identities and national boundaries” (Head 187). Virtually every character in *White Teeth* experiences sort of crisis through an encounter with difference. Samad’s volunteerism at

⁴¹ Modood makes the important point that the “new racism” is not at all new and in fact the scientific racisms of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century are the exception rather than the rule—the “new” racism is more accurately described as a revived racism.

the twins' school leads to an affair with a teacher. The relationship ends soon, but afterward Samad decides he is being corrupted by modern Western culture. He is thus prompted to recommit himself to Islam, though his return to the faith ends up being no more than "a harmless annoyance to the family" (Scheingold 183). The anxiety produced by the affair's aftermath also convinces Samad to send Magid, the more serious and studious twin, back to Bangladesh for his schooling so he will preserve traditional Bengali and Islamic values. Ironically, though, when Magid returns he is a secular man of science, sharply dressed in Western suits and possessing a stoic "stiff upper lip" demeanor, for in the world of *White Teeth* "no one [is] more English than the Indian" (272). Samad is infuriated by Magid's transformation, which he takes as a betrayal, and is equally—though for vastly different reasons—disappointed in Magid's brother Millat.

Of *White Teeth*'s characters, Millat—combustible and resentful, yet charismatic and beautiful—has perhaps the most complex relationship to identity. As a teenager Millat gravitates toward the Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation (or its uninspiring acronym, KEVIN), and his fluctuating levels of commitment to the group are a major plot thread. One reason Millat never fully gives himself to KEVIN is that he is largely defined by Western popular culture: Hollywood gangster films, rock and hip hop music, punk fashion, and so on. After Millat's mother, Alsana, sees her son on television participating in the public burning of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, she takes all of her son's "secular stuff"—his albums; guitar; comic books; sneakers; copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*; movie collection—and burns them in a pyre, declaring "Either everything is sacred or nothing is" (197). Millat is traumatized and brought to tears when he finds his property burnt to ashes, for despite the attraction of KEVIN he cannot wholly commit to its cause and values. Yet, he cannot entirely disavow KEVIN, either, for "Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or

Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between, he lived up to his middle name, *Zulfikar*, the clashing of two swords” (291). Yet, for all the conflicts and trauma that emerge within the messiness of multicultural England, *White Teeth* posits that they are necessary for the nation and its citizens to determine and reconcile a new multicultural sense of Englishness. By contrast, programs for purity, fundamentalism, and absolute order are the truly destructive forces. Smith’s novel is deeply distrustful of dogma and explanatory systems that promise total coherence and order, and positions the project of multiculturalism—its discourse as well as its lived implementation—as an oppositional force to such totalizing systems, theories, and rhetoric.

Instead of mastery, control, and absolute knowledge, Smith’s novel champions randomness and unpredictability. For instance, Archie and Samad’s deep wartime bond is established when they are stranded together after their tank’s chance malfunction; Archie and his wife Clara come together “quite by accident” (38); and twice Archie saves the life of a eugenicist, the second time “with no more reason or rhyme than the first” (447). Archie, arguably the most quietly heroic and compassionate character, habitually makes importance decisions through the randomness of a coin toss. The greatest danger, according to *White Teeth*, is the apparently irrepressible human impulse to remove messiness, unpredictability, and variety through systematization, totalization, and universalization. For example, a psychiatrist speculates that Millat’s attraction to fundamentalist Islam is “more likely born out of a need for sameness within a group” (365) than faith or politics, Joyce Chalfen compares her mentoring of Millat and Irie to the regulatory procedures of horticulture, and Marcus Chalfen’s controversial genetic engineering project, FutureMouse©, is linked to Nazi eugenics. When it comes to the eradication of detrimental genetic mutations, Marcus proclaims, cryptically, “You eliminate the random, you rule the world” (283). Irie Jones protests against the various fundamentalist forces seeking to

impose order and homogeneity. Shortly after losing her virginity to Millat—to whom she felt an unrequited love throughout her adolescence—she also has sex with Magid. Irie is impregnated, but because of the similarity of the twins' genes and the propinquity of sexual encounters paternity is impossible to determine: "Irie's child can never be mapped exactly nor spoken of with any certainty. Some secrets are permanent" (437). The baby is a paean to uncertainty, incomprehension, and unknowability.

Irie's child with Millat or Magid serves as a vortex for the totalizing tendencies that *White Teeth* denounces. He or she can simply not be known or classified through the conventional means by which we attempt to comprehend, and therefore exert mastery over, others: namely, paternity and ethnicity. On a page separating *White Teeth*'s fifteenth and sixteenth chapters, Smith provides three epigrams, two of which are the definitions of "fundamental" and "Fundamentalism" from *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. The four related meanings of the former term include: "1 Of or pertaining to the basis or groundwork; going to the root of the matter. 2 Serving as the base or foundation; essential or indispensable. Also, primary, original; from which others are derived. ... 4 Of a stratum: lowest, lying at the bottom" (341). The confounding child of Irie and Millat or Magid—"Mijlat. Milljid." (437)—is taken by Irie to be a harbinger of change, specifically for a future in which the essentialist meanings of "fundamental" are rendered incoherent and therefore insignificant: "In a vision, Irie has seen a time, a time not far from now, when roots won't matter anymore because they can't because they mustn't because they're too long and they're too tortuous and they're just buried too damn deep. She looks forward to it" (437). Irie's baby offers the hope that origins can be obscured to the point that any attempt at locating an original or pure foundation for race is so futile that the attempt to do so—meaningless to begin with—is simply abandoned and forgotten.

The impending birth of Irie's unknowable child signifies *White Teeth's* celebration of impurity and difference, as well as the hope that outdated, not to mention inaccurate, ways of thinking about race and ethnicity will, over time, dissipate. This promise, as well as the general reconciliations between virtually all of the characters, contributes to the novel's hailed optimism.

Smith's dismantling of essentialist or fundamental conceptions of race and ethnicity dovetails with *White Teeth's* anti-totalizing political theme, which turns on the conflation of fundamentalist religion with politics. Along with the definition of "fundamental," Smith includes on the same page the meaning of "Fundamentalism": "The strict maintenance of traditional orthodox religious beliefs or doctrines; *esp.* belief in the inerrancy of religious texts" (341). In the fundamentalist perspective, a single interpretation of a single religious text absorbs all experience into its all-encompassing narrative. The totalizing tendencies of fundamentalism, *White Teeth* suggests, move religious belief—which always sits uneasily between public and private—fully into the political arena. When Millat begins expending more time to KEVIN, Alsana's niece Neesa warns her aunt of the trouble that might result, explaining, "They're a political group. And some politics" (288). Smith's narrative voice later describes KEVIN as a "radical new movement where politics and religions were two sides of the same coin" (390). Millat's attraction to what is now called Islamism, however, is conflated with other modes of thought, for instance the eschatological Christian fundamentalism of Irie's grandmother, Hortense, and the radical, arguably eco-terrorist, animal rights' group called Fighting Animal Torture and Exploitation (FATE) with whom Joshua Chalfen joins, in part as rebellion against the scientific experimentation done upon animals by his father.

These three groups—KEVIN, Jehovah's Witnesses, and FATE—all independently disrupt Marcus Chalfen's press conference announcing the successful genetic engineering

project, FutureMouse©. Millat is sent from KEVIN to shoot the scientists, Joshua and FATE plan to free the genetically engineered mouse, and Hortense's Jehovah's Witnesses host an apocalyptic protest outside that bubbles toward violence. Ironically, these groups—united in their fundamentalist worldviews and proclivity to violent implementation of their totalizing projects—not only have more in common with each other than they realize, but also with the source of their protestations. Marcus Chalfen's scientific research, after all, is devoted to “*eliminating* the random actions of a mutagen” (282). Marcus's broader outlook, moreover, hinges on “the firm belief in the *perfectibility* of all life, in the possibility of making it more efficient, more logical (for illness was, to Marcus, nothing more than bad logic on the part of the genome, just as capitalism was nothing more than bad logic on the part of the social animal), [and] more effective, more *Chalfenist* in the way it proceeded” (260). Marcus's scientific prejudices and fundamentalist conviction in the superiority of hard rationality—not to mention his entrenched belief that all of humanity should conform more closely to the superior behavior of his own family—is explicitly linked to violence, for Marcus's scientific mentor is an aged former Nazi eugenicist.

Genetic manipulation and control is thus linked to the “political religion” of Nazi totalitarianism, and in a sense the other totalizing fundamentalisms included in the novel. Scheingold notes that all of these groups and their totalizing visions “contribute to the cross-cultural maelstrom by taking it as a given that they represent cosmic truths—whether the modern truths of the Chalfens, the traditional truths of Samad's Bengali culture or the fundamentalist Christian truths of Hortense” (189), but the farcical finale of the novel demonstrates “the comically ineffectual tactics of the voices of fundamentalist Christianity, extreme Islam and dogmatic environmentalism” (191). These various groups with incompatible points of view are

conflated, in that all of them attempt to deny human agency and control human activity by placing it within a comprehensive, and therefore limiting, framework. This underlying similarity “links [*White Teeth*’s] principal themes: the complexity of national identity and ethnicity, and the moral problems that complicate the active assertion—or, worse still, the attempted control—of ethnicity” (Head 183). The novel begins at the culmination of World War II, but the threat of mass extermination lingers in Marcus’s genetic research, which is also linked to the totalitarian principle of total control present in various forms of dogmatism and fundamentalism.

However, multiculturalism—in the sense of individual “multiethnic” identity as well as in the sense of a unstable, mosaic, heterogeneous national identity—is presented as an alternative, and antidote, to such totalizing impulses. Scheingold, despite identifying *White Teeth* as a novel of political estrangement, acknowledges that in Smith’s novel “the lives of her characters also reveal multiple avenues of access into the mainstream for both first and second generation South Asians and Caribbeans” and that multiculturalism is not only inevitable but also enriching to British culture (192). At the same time, as Head points out, “Smith is also anxious to demonstrate how the ugliness that is dismissed as ‘fundamentalism’ is produced by an exclusive English ethnicity” (184). Systematic exclusion and lack of recognition from a singular totalizing narrative tends to breed alternatively exclusionary counter-narratives. But, Irie’s baby, whose genetics, ethnicity, parentage, and heritage are unknowable, and therefore meaningless, suggests that the perpetual and unpredictable reconfigurations of multiculturalism offer not an alternative totalizing scheme, but rather an escape hatch from such totalizing logics altogether. Smith is therefore attempting, in *White Teeth*, to employ multiculturalism, as a lived experience and a project, in order to envision an integral totality—Englishness as a national identity—that still

resists homogeneity, purity, and singularity by taking mixing, randomness, contamination and plurality as its organizing principles.

Smith presents multiculturalism as a new way of thinking not only about individual ethnicity and heritage, but also about politics. The tensions between and within various ethnic and religious groups, as well as the internal conflicts felt by multiethnic individuals struggling to reconcile various facets of their own experience, bleed into the nation's attempts to reconcile its many constituents within an overarching and coherent notion of "Englishness." This process must reconcile, however, various legacies of institutionalized racism. Indeed, Charles Mills argues that liberalism itself "has historically been predominantly a racial liberalism, in which conceptions of personhood and resulting schedules of rights, duties, and government responsibilities have all been racialized. And the contract, correspondingly, has really been a racial one, an agreement among white contractors to subordinate and exploit nonwhite noncontractors for white benefit" (1380). But, according to Laila Amine, Smith sees multiculturalism as a means for liberal thought "to reconceptualise British history as nothing more or less than a commitment, despite a diversity of origins, to a single nation, supplanting the 'ethnic' with the 'civic' conception of community" (77). Consequently, "Smith redefines nationalism ... as the collective's desire to be part of a community, and this voluntary membership bonds Britain's plural inhabitants (Amine 72). Multiculturalism, by gradually erasing the premises of ethnic identity, promises to convert national identity into an entirely political issue stripped of its racist undercurrents, and therefore release liberalism from its racialized character. Moreover, as KEVIN and the other fundamentalist organizations in *White Teeth* suggest, ethnicity is already political. Until multicultural multiplicity and heterogeneity are

incorporated into national identity, however, the political imperatives of excluded ethnicities will likely be oppositional and inimical rather than participatory and enriching.

White Teeth can thus be read as an enactment of the ways that a multicultural and postcolonial England collectively attempts to articulate a newly comprehensive national identity in which civic inclusion, participation, and recognition can overcome ethnic Balkanization. Of course, one irony is that, at the same time that Smith advances multiculturalism as an anti-totalizing mechanism, *White Teeth* also puts forward “multiculturalism as inevitable—indeed, as a fact of British life” (Scheingold 179). Multiculturalism thus runs the risk of becoming the type of totalizing master narrative *White Teeth* strives to dismantle. In this sense, multiculturalism is the handmaid to the all-consuming and leveling processes that constitute globalization. On the other hand, Kwame Appiah observes, “People who complain about the homogeneity produced by globalization often fail to notice this globalization is, equally, a threat to homogeneity” (101). Multiculturalism as Smith sees it, like globalization, may be an inescapable condition, but the paradoxical one “essential” quality of multiculturalism is a resistance to essentialness and purity that occurs by way of constant reconfiguration and mixture. As Matz writes, “The ‘mixing up’ here is typical of the novel and its globality, but typical also is the sense of what happens ‘despite’ the mixing up: the strange cultural affiliations globality cannot undo” (178). Even as multiculturalist transformations inevitably and unstoppably push forward, their characteristic mixing and remixing of conditions short-circuit their own totalizing energies.

Saturday extends the critique of fundamentalist totalization into the twenty-first century and, like Smith in *White Teeth*, McEwan seeks out an alternative anti-or de-totalizing totalizing force. Whereas *White Teeth* locates the potential for such a paradoxical phenomenon in the multiculturalist project, McEwan turns to literature. Of course, the possibility of literature

playing such a role is not lost on Smith; as Matz notes, in *White Teeth*'s "extensive parody of genetic engineering, Smith indirectly mocks the routinization at work in global technologies (and in hypertext), and thereby carves out a place for the modern novel" (178). McEwan, however, gives literature's potential as an anti-totalizing agent considerably more attention. This shift in emphasis from multiculturalism to literature as the solution to totalizing forces like religious fundamentalism, besides reflecting the different prerogatives of the authors, can perhaps in part be explained by the changed mood in England only five years after *White Teeth*'s publication. Certainly, the political circumstances and public consciousness that *Saturday* reflect, reveal, and in fact help construct have been dramatically reconfigured by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath. Part of this transformation's effect is a greater skepticism toward multiculturalism and paranoia over the conflicts that globalization has seemingly wrought.

Along such lines, McEwan's particular portrait of the "post-9/11" consciousness is a source of considerable critical contention. For instance, though Michiko Kakutani ends her favorable review by claiming that "McEwan has ... fulfilled that very primal mission of the novel: to show how we—a privileged few of us, anyway—live today," Bradley and Tate point out that such sentiments,⁴² while "clearly intended as praise ... could just as easily be read as an indictment" (21). *Saturday*, then, is seen as an attempt—for better or worse—to capture life in the "bourgeois, consumerist West" (Siegel 34) of the early twenty-first century. While McEwan's portrayal is considerably more melancholic than the exuberance of *White Teeth*, stretching across Smith's and McEwan's novels is the idea that the prime impediment facing English identity, politics, and culture is totalization, especially in its fundamentalist guises.

⁴² In particular, Bradley and Tate respond to Theo Tait's comment in his review of *Saturday* for *Times Literary Supplement*, "The prevailing public mood has come to resemble closely that of an Ian McEwan novel" (21).

Totalization itself is the problem, which means that the very impulse toward totalization is the obstacle that must be overcome. However, whereas Smith posits multiculturalism and its energies as the means by which to counteract totalization and its inimical consequences, McEwan turns to literature and the literary imagination as the best possible solution.

Ironically, then, McEwan's representative figure of post-9/11 England, Henry Perowne, despite his intelligence and erudition, is an outspoken philistine. He is perplexed by those who readily spend valuable free time as "a spectator of other lives, of imaginary lives" (65). His daughter tirelessly tries to hone his literary tastes, but her reading list leaves him unmoved. Henry finds minimal insight in the "messages" of *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary*, and he is dubious when Daisy offers that the genius is in the details. Still, the great nineteenth-century novels "had the virtue, at least, of representing a recognizable reality" (66), unlike the magical realism that Daisy prefers but which Henry cannot abide. Henry—a surgeon who "attempts to ease the miseries of failing minds by repairing brains" (66)—views the imagination as one function of a remarkable but comprehensible organ, and thus prizes a "respect [for] the material world, its limits, and what it can sustain" (66). Magical realism further "persuaded Henry that the supernatural was the recourse of an insufficient imagination, a dereliction of duty, a childlike evasion of the difficulties and wonders of the real, of the demanding re-enactment of the plausible" (66). In short, Henry finds realist fiction unenlightening and conflates experimental fiction with the absurdities of the supernatural.

Yet, Henry is not entirely immune to the affective power of art. He recalls feeling "pleasantly becalmed among the giant slabs of dusky purple and orange" (144) in the Mark Rothko exhibit at the Tate Modern, and his son's virtuosity on the blues guitar prompts him to contemplate "the missing element" in his own life, and think that "[t]here has to be more to life

than merely saving lives” (28). The art to which Henry responds—abstract painting and music—is non-referential and its function, as he sees it, is to soothe. This definition of art, combined with his scientism, produces a belief that language is little more than a means to communicate empirical fact. As a reader, “it interests [Henry] less to have the world reinvented; he wants it explained” (65). Still, his lack of literary appreciation by no means makes him a bad person. Indeed, his anesthesiologist Jay Strauss once stayed up all night “finishing an eight-hundred-page novel by some new American prodigy” (65), yet he is altogether more coarse than Henry. The traumatic intrusion of violence and terror into Henry’s serene existence, however, serves as McEwan’s illustration of the affective and ethical power of literature, a force that is at its core anti-totalizing, given its ability to bind self with other without also subsuming the other into self or the self exerting mastering over the other.

To perceive *Saturday*’s anti-totalizing orientation necessitates comprehending the way McEwan represents the literary imagination and its effects. McEwan crystallizes his conception of literature’s psychological and ethical power during the home invasion scene, at the culmination of which Daisy’s reading of “Dover Beach” mesmerizes and mollifies the vengeful Baxter. This scene is much discussed, and while some critics are moved by the way Baxter’s “brutality is profoundly quelled by beauty” (Wall 786), others find his change from “lord of terror to amazed admirer” (McEwan 231) of poetry to be absurd and unconvincing—ironically echoing in their complaint Henry’s own insistence that fiction amount to a “re-enactment of the plausible” (66). To be sure, McEwan gives the cause of Baxter’s metamorphosis some degree of uncertainty by having Henry offer a possible neurological explanation; nevertheless, the heavy implication is indeed that Daisy’s sonorous recital transfixes, and transfigures, her tormentor. Wall notes that Baxter’s response to Daisy’s recitation “allows Perowne to see the world through

the eyes of the other” and “teaches [him] that empiricism does not provide the only way of knowing” (786). Similarly, Peggy Knapp posits that “recognizing the alterity of the mysterious other” (140) gives Henry the moral strength to save the life of the man who threatened his family just a few hours prior. In other words, Henry is more affected by his witnessing of Baxter’s transformation than he is by the poem itself.

Daisy in fact performs two readings of “Dover Beach,” and McEwan narrates Henry’s interior monologue during both recitations. Initially, Henry—who, like Baxter, believes the poem to be one of Daisy’s compositions—interprets the poem as an autobiographical account of his daughter and her lover. Despite this literalist reading, Henry begins to move away from his blinkered view of language as purely instrumental: describing the poem’s lines as “meditative, mellifluous and wilfully archaic” Henry “feels himself slipping through the words into the things they describe” (228). Baxter at once demands a second reading, indicating to Henry “a possible ebbing of intent” (229) to harm. Sensing an opportunity, Henry is now more attentive to the language and its effect on Baxter’s demeanor. During the second reading Henry refines his interpretation of “Dover Beach,” perceiving ways that he misheard it the first time, and decides that the “poem’s melodiousness ... is at odds with its pessimism” (230). As the poem moves across his consciousness his mental cinema no longer stars Daisy: “Instead he sees Baxter standing alone, elbows propped against the sill, listening to the waves” (230). Henry moves beyond seeing only Baxter amid the poem’s imagery, and by poem’s end, “it’s through Baxter’s ears that he hears the [sea]” (230). The spell is quickly broken; the transient near imperceptibility of the moment gives way and Henry returns to assessing the best way to safely proceed.

Henry's encounter with alterity—his moment of ethical knowledge through reading—is not an epiphanic moment.⁴³ Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace points out that Henry “experiences no moment of revelation” but then concludes that he thus “has no power to enlighten the reader” (479). Of course, this common critique ironically inverts the equally common judgment that Baxter's transformative “moment of revelation” is unbelievable and facile. This objection, though, fails to consider the way ethical knowledge is produced through literature. As Dorothy Hale explains, such knowledge “is so intuitive as to seem a bodily knowing. To formulate this knowledge as epistemology, as we must do, is to register the moment when we move from being bound to binding and back again” (“Aesthetics 903). In step with this analysis, Henry does not experience a radical transformation nor can he logically explicate that which he has undergone; however, he feels the binding, and that feeling is the encounter of alterity.

Henry's “reading” of Baxter's response to “Dover Beach” involves being confounded by the unknown. At novel's end Henry reflects, “Baxter fell for the magic, he was transfixed by it, and he was reminded how much he wanted to live. ... Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will” (238). Henry encounters another person whose interiority he confronts and acknowledges to be unfathomable—he will never know “what” Baxter heard. Through incomprehension Henry recognizes Baxter as distinct in the same way Henry knows himself to be distinct, paradoxically binding them. McEwan illustrates this connection when, during the instant of Baxter's fall down the stairs, “Henry thinks he sees in the wide brown eyes a sorrowful

⁴³ Indeed, as Clement Spahr argues, “Literature can engender an ethical encounter with the other, but this is no guarantee that it will not simultaneously obscure the structural conflicts that shape these individuals' lives” (234). Henry's experience is neither epiphanic in the sense of a transcendental moment nor in the sense that it is unburdened with further blockages and misunderstandings. The transformative effects are incremental and minor in the singular, but cumulatively significant and profound.

accusation of betrayal” (236). Henry and Theo’s violent turn against Baxter, however understandable, is a severing of Henry and Baxter’s temporary bond.

Alongside recognition of the other, literature’s ethical value also illuminates “how possibility is produced” (“Aesthetics” 903), giving it a political dimension. Throughout the day Henry vacillates between positions on the upcoming war in Iraq, playing the hawk to the fiercely anti-war Daisy but the dove to his anesthesiologist, Jay Strauss, who supports the invasion. Watching Tony Blair make the case for war on television, Henry worries that the Prime Minister “could be on the verge of a monstrous miscalculation” (143). Despite Blair’s resolute certainty, Henry knows “[i]t’s a future no one can read” (147). Later, despite assuring Daisy that “if it was down to [him], those troops wouldn’t be on the Iraq border” (194), Henry admits, “The invasion’s going to happen” (194) and not fighting now will “only postpone the confrontation” (195). Though he is “somewhat moved” (101) by the anti-war demonstration as democracy in action, he still considers it a misguided waste of energy. Henry, then, is at once certain yet uncertain and engaged but detached: he is tuned into the day’s major events, but is disinclined to participate; he is unsure of the rightness of war in Iraq, but accepts confrontation regardless; he wishes for peace, but is confident that further violence is inevitable.

Despite his uneasiness Henry is indeed sensitive to suffering and is generally concerned for the welfare of others. He considers the humanitarian rationale for war in Iraq “the only case worth making” (68), and after the tense traffic dispute with Baxter he cannot but worry that he’s abused his privileged position as a doctor by using Baxter’s degenerative condition as leverage. Regardless, his political ambivalence is in fact a sign of ethical contraction. The rational and kind Henry can perceive political complexities, but his ethical laxity creates an “unexpressed longing or frustration” (McEwan 28), impoverishes his political imagination, neutralizes his

political will, and keeps him “stuck in a nearly pathological self-absorption” (Wallace 479). He even has some perception of his condition, acknowledging that, despite good intentions and a political conscience, awareness without action “amounts to a consensus of a kind, an orthodoxy of attention, a mild subjugation in itself” (185). For some critics, like Wallace, Henry’s political inertness constitutes *Saturday*’s failure; for more generous readers, like Richard Rorty and Scheingold, it serves as McEwan’s political intervention. Literature provides a means to cultivate a sense of and appreciation for alterity in a way that respects the unknowability of alterity. McEwan positions this ability, a form of double-consciousness, as a vital force in the post-9/11 world. The underlying threat, according to *Saturday*, is not terrorism per se, but the impulse toward totalization, whether that impulse is manifested in fundamentalist religion or the inability to imagine the experience of others outside the limitations of one’s own subjectivity.

Henry (and the novel) remains skeptical of large-scale political programs of social change. This sentiment is encapsulated in Henry’s closing inner monologue, in which he muses,

And what was their body count, Hitler, Stalin, Mao? Fifty million, a hundred? ... Beware the utopianists, zealous men certain of the path to the ideal social order. Here they are again, totalitarians in different form, still scattered and weak, but growing, and angry, and thirsty for another mass killing. A hundred years to resolve. But this may be an indulgence, an idle, overblown fantasy, a night-thought about a passing disturbance that time and good sense will settle and rearrange. (286)

Henry, and McEwan, explicitly aligns fundamentalist Islam with the political totalitarianisms of the first half of the twentieth century, and the unifying characteristic across these destructive movements is zealous belief in a comprehensive vision toward a future utopian total social order. Indeed, in an earlier scene, Henry’s narration notes, “Out in the real world there exist detailed plans, visionary projects for peaceable realms, all conflicts resolved, happiness for everyone, for ever—mirages for which people are prepared to die and kill. Christ’s kingdom on earth, the

worker's paradise, the ideal Islamic state" (176). Like *White Teeth*, then, *Saturday* is not rebuking a certain strand of thought, but rather the broader tendency to believe that misfortune and conflict can be eternally eliminated, if only the proper master and total plan is implemented.

The seemingly superior course of action, then, is gradual and modest progression that is less revolutionary and more evolutionary—in both its incrementalist and haphazard senses. Henry's son Theo, who is closer to his father in personality than Daisy—unlike his sister, he will only be at the war protest “in spirit” (36)—tells Henry that “the bigger you think, the crappier it looks” (35), so his motto is “think small.” Citing this aphorism, Rorty soberly proclaims that *Saturday* “is about our inability ... to sketch out a credible agenda for large-scale change” (92). Even as *Saturday* draws to a close and Henry reflects on the pivotal experience with Baxter, he still seems disinclined to political activity or civic responsibility (Scheingold 200). However, the imperative to “think small” might also suggest, that as Thom Dancer puts it, rather “than trying to understand *why*—this is Henry's constant question throughout the book—we might simply try to understand *what* and *how*” (216). Dancer argues that this change of questions reflects McEwan's “critical modesty.” According to Dancer, “Critical modesty states that when literature does change us it is not because of the coercive force of reason, political imperative, or methodological principle. Rather, it is because of the modesty of readers, evinced in their good faith, sincerity, and generosity, who join with the text instead of mastering it from afar” (205-6). In Dancer's words, “Under attack here are the assumptions that allow people, whether they are Henry with his ‘materialism’ or social theorists with their constructivism, to hold their view immodestly. The problem is not that people have these theories, it is how they hold them: reverently, piously, taking as natural what are only hypotheses and ignoring or explaining away any view that does not fit” (216). The apparently intractable problems of political and social

change, ever in danger of latent oppressive totalizing tendencies, are mitigated by such critical modesty, which is cultivated through literature, particularly through literature's ethical value.

Literature's modest but absolutely vital potential for political and social renewal emerges in the book's final chapter. After Henry performs lifesaving surgery on Baxter's brain, he approaches his sedated captor turned patient. In this moment Henry compares his feelings to light ("wavelike"), and—as if he were back in his physics class—he "break[s] them down into their components ... [so that he] will he know what to do, what's right" (271). Hale's ethical "knowledge ... that is of the emotions" ("Aesthetics" 903), which Henry experienced during the "Dover Beach" incident, is continuous with Henry's knowledge of his emotions, now directly accessed to help him "decide precisely what should be done" (271). When Henry returns home he tells Rosalind of the earlier confrontation with Baxter on the street: how his impatience and disregard for traffic law caused the inciting accident, and how he exploited his diagnosis of Baxter's disease in order to gain the upper hand. Henry thus assumes responsibility, not just for his behavior in that specific episode, but also for a broader selfishness and neglect of the underprivileged, the unseen, and the abject that Baxter's response to Arnold—a "yearning [Henry] could barely begin to define" but recognizable to him as Baxter's "claim on life, on a mental existence" (288)—pronounces and makes felt.

Before succumbing to sleep, Henry reflects on the park outside his bedroom window as a space where thriving young Londoners share an incredibly close physical proximity with "the various broken figures that haunt the benches" (281). Henry's closing thought that "[n]o amount of social justice will cure or disperse this enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town" (282) rings with political defeatism, yet clearly he has "become more keenly aware not only of his privilege but of his civic inadequacies" (Scheingold 200). Moreover, though his

reductionist conclusion that the downtrodden are largely victims of genetic quirks and neurological misfiring betrays his scientific determinism, that belief nonetheless points to a perception that human suffering is very often the result of forces beyond one's individual control, and like physical and mental illness the social causes of such social ills can be pinpointed and remedied. His heightened awareness that society has a responsibility to all of its members, even if the most that can be done is to "minimise their miseries" (McEwan 282), therefore indicates a discernible ethical growth and purposefully modest political consequences.

Henry eventually decides that Baxter must be spared the indignity of prosecution and be given at least the chance to live his remaining years fully. Henry is resolute: "He must persuade Rosalind, then the rest of the family, then the police, not to pursue charges. The matter must be dropped. ... Is this forgiveness? Probably not, he doesn't know, and he's not the one to be granting it anyway. Or is he the one seeking forgiveness? He's responsible, after all" (288). Henry's ethical encounter with alterity does not dramatically change his skeptical worldview, and his politics remain pragmatic and incrementalist. Nevertheless, his constitutive unsettling during the "Dover Beach" episode prompts him to semi-consciously recalibrate his understanding of the world, expanding his sense of the possible. Yet, the "avowal of our epistemological limits is something that must be freshly performed, undergone again and again" ("Aesthetics" 901), so the impact of Saturday's events alone appears deceptively minor.

He does, however, come out of the ordeal with a refined sense of his own social position and the ways that position binds him to others who are also, but differently, positioned. This increased awareness pushes against the common critical reading that *Saturday* reflects a wider post-9/11 literary turn "to concerns of trauma and commemoration, a shift in emphasis that displaced concerns with the political work that literature can do" and that "has been reluctant to

imagine a future that significantly revises the present” (Spahr 221). Such a reading misses Henry’s experience with Baxter clarifies his buried sense of responsibility toward, and in fact kinship with, others beyond the intimate space of his family. In the back of Henry’s mind, after all, he “suspects he’s becoming a dupe, the willing, febrile consumer of news fodder, opinion, speculation and of all the crumbs the authorities let fall. He’s a docile citizen, watching Leviathan grow stronger while he creeps under its shadow for protection.” (184). For most of the novel, up until the encounter with Baxter, “whatever larger global consciousness or awareness of social responsibility the Perownes may have tends to expend itself in petty debates about whether, for example, it is justifiable and ‘politically correct’ for Henry to shell out on an expensive car” (Schoene 53). However,

[a]s Henry’s coincidental face-to-face encounter with a street-sweeper indicates, in this world fortune is always counterbalanced by misfortune, and no self-righteous neo-liberalist reasoning can ever quite contain the sheer outrage of this truth. ... Steering clear of comforting fantasies of right-on resistance, McEwan brings us face to face with our own complicity, collusion and guilt, which complement rather than contradict our fundamental decency and good-heartedness” (Schoene 54-5).

Henry’s intrinsic propensity for self-analysis and retrospection is newly attuned by the encounter with Baxter and the ethical effects of literature. That confrontation crystallizes his sense that the privations and violence of the public realm cannot be divorced from the comforts and the pleasures of his private realm.

Despite the seemingly unbridgeable gap between private and public spheres depicted in *Saturday*, the novel in fact implies the complete imbrication of various social strata, personal experiences, and political circumstances. Henry, somewhat bitterly, comes to realize that the answer to his earlier rhetorical question—“Isn’t it possible to enjoy an hour’s recreation without this invasion, this infection from the public domain?”—is, ultimately, no. This

interconnectedness extends into a global scale: just as Henry's and Baxter's fates are tied, "the rise of [fundamentalist] organized religions is structurally part of our complex global modernity, even when their doctrines are not modern" (Sassen 445). Slavoj Žižek, in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), argues that "even if terrorism burns us all, the US 'war on terrorism' is not our struggle, but a struggle internal to the capitalist universe" (55). Henry's conviction that Baxter must not be prosecuted, a stand made possible by Henry's ethical reading and taken against the near-debilitating uncertainty still plaguing him, mirrors Žižek's mandate that the "first duty of a progressive intellectual (if this term has any meaning left in it today) is not to fight the enemy's struggles for him" (55), and therefore should be understood as a profound act of political consciousness.

McEwan does not explicitly articulate Henry's new awareness, not because the knowledge does not exist, but rather because the knowledge is internalized and tacit; through Henry's ethical "reading" of Baxter his new knowledge is now intuitive truth. As Hale explains, the effect of any one ethical reading may seem slight, but "the reader feels he or she comes to know more each time his or her current knowledge is confounded" ("Aesthetics" 903)—ethical knowledge through literature is a strictly and slowly cumulative process. Reading one brilliant novel or poem will not fundamentally or even necessarily "improve" a reader. McEwan, through Henry, is demonstrating the more subtle ethical value of reading: the literary encounter of alterity is a "felt recognition of the limits of our ways of knowing [that] opens up ... the possibility that we might change for the better" ("Aesthetics" 901). Henry's ethical encounter with Baxter's alterity therefore gives him the essential, and heretofore absent, components of a necessary politics. Literature fosters Henry's insight to envision a different possible future for Baxter and

the determination to make it happen that, by being based in Henry's inability to fully know what Baxter comprehended, avoids the totalizing maneuver of colonizing Baxter's experience.

Saturday's political imperative to comprehend a global totality while at the same time embracing difference and unknowability, thereby diffusing a sense of a totality that emerges from an oppressively totalizing perspective, is continuous with the politics of *White Teeth*. For Smith, the vehicle for this elusive political sensibility is the incorporation of the multiculturalist project into liberal democratic political cultures. Multicultural liberalism, Smith suggests, will transform outmoded ethnic bases for national identities into civic and participatory ones, a process of inclusion that mitigates the appeal of totalizing and exclusionary alternatives to liberalism. In *Saturday*, perhaps influenced by a post-9/11 atmosphere in which weariness and indeed fear over the violence and destruction carried over by globalization are significantly heightened, locates its anti- and de-totalizing politics in literature. Specifically, McEwan's novel positions literature's affective and ethical power as a force that can disrupt both solipsistic and totalizing perspectives. Henry's experience with Baxter, which replicates the encounter with alterity that literature engenders, attunes Henry to his connection and interdependence with others, a subtle transformation that illuminates the imbrication of public and private realms. However, the significance of literature as this force is that it preserves, indeed foregrounds, the supreme alterity of Baxter's subjectivity. Henry is thus forced to at once recognize his responsibility to Baxter while granting Baxter's agency and autonomy its requisite dignity. The parallels between multiculturalism in *White Teeth* and literature in *Saturday* suggest that 9/11 provoked a far less dramatic transformation of the politico-literary imagination that commonly assumed. Indeed, across the new millennium and the terrorist attacks of the early twenty-first

century, anti-totalization and various fears over the destructive inherent to comprehensive political programs persist as a dominant theme within English political fiction.

Conclusion: Orwell's Heirs

In October 2002, Christopher Hitchens retired his column "Minority Report," which had run bi-weekly in *The Nation* for twenty years. This one move represents the political lurch toward neoconservatism that defines the last decade of his life. Hitchens, of course, famously proclaimed to pattern his thought and career after George Orwell, whose contrarianism he deeply admired. In his memoir, *Hitch-22* (2010), Hitchens recalls that his first attempts at writing were inspired by both Orwell's tone and subject matter: "I was following Orwell to Wigan Pier ... and shadowing him in mind on his other expeditions to the lower depths. Highly derivative in my approach, I began writing grittily polemical and socially conscious essays and fiercely anti-militarist poems" (71). Over the years, Hitchens would continue to write like, for, and about Orwell, styling himself to be Orwell's fiercely independent successor. In his obituary for Susan Sontag, Hitchens reminisces, "Our heroes and heroines are those who managed, from Orwell through Camus and Solzhenitsyn, to be both intellectual and engaged" ("Sontag" 196). Hitchens's attempt at staking out an "Orwellian" position amid the aftermath of September 11 and the invasion of Iraq is the primary cause of ire from former comrades. Scott Lucas contends that Hitchens's strategically attempted to position himself as a twenty-first century Orwell, "the lone voice of decency among the ranks of a naive and/or nasty Left. It's an effective tactic. Like Orwell, Hitchens has made himself the poster boy of "principled opposition," even as he sides with the dominant powers in the US, by wielding a scatter-gun, 'commonsense' rhetoric that does not have to deal with troubling political or economic considerations" ("Dishonorable" 235).

If Hitchens's political realignment severed alliances, it also brought about a new ideological confluence with his close friend, Martin Amis. Terry Eagleton, who has had heated public exchanges with Amis over issues of religion and politics, said of the pair in 2010: "For a

long time, they were quite divergent politically: Hitchens was still some kind of socialist and Amis was vehemently anti-communist in an uninteresting, cold war kind of way. But they've since converged" (51). While Hitchens's and Amis's post-9/11 politics do animate each other, they neither should be fully conflated nor, as Eagleton does, reduced to merely "ugly, illiberal, supremacist noises about the superiority of the west" (51). Rather, Amis's 2008 collection of fiction and non-fiction responses to September 11, entitled *The Second Plane*, and his 2010 novel, *The Pregnant Widow*, offer a more troubled dynamic between the writers. Given Hitchens's reputation as a latter day Orwell—a persona he cultivated and promoted—reading Amis's texts alongside Hitchens can suggest how Orwell's legacy is being rethought by novelists for the twenty-first century. Amis's engagements in *The Second Plane* and *The Pregnant Widow* with his close friend Hitchens's Orwell-inspired politics, influential upon him and the broader public discourse, suggest an attempt on the part of contemporary English political novelists to not only dismantle and move past the totalitarian framework, but also to adopt a model better suited to think through and represent present political circumstances and predicaments.

Hitchens's and Amis's late writings practically demand to be read in view of their friendship, given that each writer inhabits the other's work. *The Second Plane* twice approvingly cites Hitchens, and, in the press for *The Pregnant Widow*, Amis admitted that Hitchens inspired Nicholas, the older brother of the protagonist and Amis analogue, Keith Nearing. *Hitch-22*, which coincidentally appeared shortly after *The Pregnant Widow*'s release, features an entire chapter devoted to Amis. When the memoir arrives at September 11, Hitchens proudly notes that Amis "wrote outstanding articles, expressing the support of non-Americans for the United States against this unashamed cult of death" (249). By 2010, Amis and Hitchens were speaking to, with, and for each other, to the point that, as Andrew Martin puts it, "when you think of Hitchens

you think of Amis, and vice versa” (51), turning each into a ghost who haunts the other’s work. Amis has taken this spectral imagery even further in the wake of Hitchens’s death, saying that he believes “Hitchens has passed on his love of life to him” (“Life”). But, for Amis, Hitchens’s phantom has been as much poltergeist as benevolent spirit. Tracking Hitchens’s presence from *The Second Plane* to *The Pregnant Widow* reveals Amis’s efforts at a sort of politico-literary exorcism, seeking to at once distance himself from Hitchens’s questionable political postures, yet ennoble, even redeem, his friend’s legacy.

In *The Second Plane*, Amis evinces two related themes of Hitchens’s post-9/11 writing: the failure of the Left and the toxicity of religion. After 9/11, Hitchens consistently denounced the intellectuals who would later inspire Michael Bérubé’s evocative label, the “Manichean Left.” Bérubé’s term describes a Left constituency that insists on viewing all political events vis-à-vis the depredations of American imperialism. Hitchens compares such critics to Christian fundamentalists who blame 9/11 on a presumably blasphemous American culture. For Hitchens, “Loose talk about chickens coming home to roost is the moral equivalent of the hateful garbage emitted by Falwell and Robertson, and exhibits about the same intellectual content” (“Against” 46). This political/religious parallel—echoed in Bérubé’s term—reflects Hitchens’s core position: that at bottom he opposes types of thinking that cannot accept contradictions or make critical moral discernments. In this way, Hitchens’s criticism of the Left dovetails with his advocacy for atheism, the topic that made him arguably the most public of public intellectuals.

To describe his distance from the Manichean Left, Hitchens cites Marx’s “observation that when people are learning a new language, they habitually translate it back into the one they already know” (“Stranger” 55). But, if Hitchens is right that his opponents on the Left cling to the detritus of *les soixante-huitard*, he reaches even further back to the language of early Cold

War liberals. Fundamentalist Islam, or “Islamism,” is, in Hitchens’s words, “explicitly totalitarian” (“Bush’s” 83). Hitchens regularly draws from Paul Berman’s analysis connecting Nazi fascism to what Berman calls “Muslim totalitarianism” or “the Muslim variation on the European idea” (60). Berman’s conclusion is thus firmly tied to the common characterization of totalitarianism as a “political religion.” Yet, this neat totalitarian framework, as Bérubé notes, “seemed to seduce Hitchens into his own sectarian form of Manicheism” (146). For example, one year after 9/11, Hitchens confessed that amid his initial reactions to the attacks was “exhilaration,” for “here was a direct, unmistakable confrontation between everything I loved and everything I hated. On one side, the ethics of the multicultural, the secular, the skeptical, and the cosmopolitan. ... On the other, the arid monochrome of dull and vicious theocratic fascism” (“Good Time” 63). This strict secular/theocratic binary pervades *The Second Plane*, operating as Amis’s overarching theme.

Amis’s ardent employment of this binary creates a slippage with the totalitarian model found in Hitchens’s work. In his first post-9/11 essay, Amis virtually channels Hitchens, writing, “All over again the West confronts an irrationalist, agonistic, theocratic/ideocratic system which is essentially and unappeasably opposed to its existence” (8). This claim in fact presages Hitchens’s comparable assertion that September 11 verified that “we had not by any means escaped the reach of atavistic, aggressive, expansionist, and totalitarian ideology” (“A War” 153). Also evident in *The Second Plane* is Hitchens’s slippage from Islamism to the radical Left. Hitchens notoriously condemned “peaceniks” who opposed the invasion to Iraq as “quasi-Stalinist” (105) demagogues, and referred to the tenuous relationship between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda as “a sort of Hitler-Stalin pact” (109). Amis similarly claims, “In organizational terms, Islamism is Leninist. The radicals, with their advanced consciousness, form a vanguard,

and seek power in the name, not of the supranational proletariat, but of the *umma*, the supranational community of believers” (189). With at least ten instances in which Amis notes “similarities between Islamism and the totalitarian cults of the last century” (78), *The Second Plane* illustrates, perhaps more plainly than anything written by Hitchens, what Timothy Brennan calls the “oddity” of the terms “East” and “West”; that is, “that they allude both to the Cold War and to an imperial divide of race and civilizational conquest” (41). When it comes to opposing this “totalitarian cult,” *The Second Plane* further conforms to familiar Cold War arguments, in that throughout it Amis conscripts art into his ideological battle.

Literature and the literary imagination are the means Amis proposes for transcending the East/West divide. Amis cavalierly dismisses “ideology” and religion as “belief systems,” since, he claims, the former possesses “an inadequate basis in reality,” and the latter has “no basis in reality whatsoever” (14). Rather than atheism, which Hitchens compellingly championed but which Amis somewhat grudgingly concedes “isn’t strictly rational either” (15), the alternative is literature, for it purportedly “forms a single body of thought, yet its voices are intransigently and unenlargeably individual” (16). Amis thus positions the literary imagination against “ideology” and “religion” as the space in which the genuinely individual consciousness can be constituted, finding its expression and resonance with others in literature.

This formulation is put in practice in the two pieces of fiction included in *The Second Plane*. First, “In the Palace of the End” is narrated by a body-double for a ruthless Middle Eastern dictator. The double’s subsumption into another’s identity is taken to ludicrous extremes, to the point that he is killed in a way that mirrors the ruler’s ignominious assassination. This absurd case is meant to show the total loss of self under totalitarianism. Yet, the double’s last words suggest incomplete totalization: “When you have been hurt yourself, there awakens a part

of you that doesn't want to hurt anyone" (46). The phrase "there awakens a part of you" implies, as Brandon Kempner puts it, that "a universal, rational, kind subject emerges even in the worst of situations" (70). Whereas Hitchens meditates upon the 9/11 hijackers and imagines only their "wolfish smiles" ("Good Time" 63), Amis tries to show literature's ability to find a vital, rational, and benign individual subject even within a consciousness dominated by totalizing forces. The problem, Kempner explains, is that while Amis's approach "may initially seem generous, it is ultimately a way of containing everything within a Western framework" (70).

In *The Second Plane*'s second short story, "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," Amis dramatizes the terrorist attacks of September from the perspective of its head conspirator. As Atta pilots the plane he has hijacked into the World Trade Center, however, Atta has a revelation: "How very gravely he had underestimated life" (120). Kempner rightly observes,

By attributing a revelation to so unlikely a character, Amis essentially eliminates the idea of Islamist difference: deep down, such characters are humanist subjects. ... The concept of interiority used by Amis is essentially the humanist, liberal subject; by attributing this to Atta, he controls Atta, he colonizes him. ... Here, we see an embrace of humanism at its most exclusive and colonial, as Amis employs a model of humanism that designates all non-Western experience as false. (70-1)

Amis's unreconstructed notion of the Western subject turns out to be, in both its presumed universality and Amis's deployment of it to overwrite other subjectivities, as totalizing as the impulses and ideologies he seeks to combat.

This problematic humanism is also found in Hitchens's post-9/11 writing, but perceptible in *The Second Plane* is Amis's yearning to think past such a framework. The point for Amis's departure is found in the essay, "The Wrong War," first published in March 2003, which outlines Amis's opposition to the invasion of Iraq. This unwavering position is of course a deviation from Hitchens. Though the two rarely addressed the disagreement in print, the issue of imposed

regime change in Iraq creates a wedge in Hitchens and Amis's heretofore shared outlook, and *The Pregnant Widow* instantiates the growing distance between the two writers. Amis claims that he based Nicholas Nearing on Hitchens in part for novelty's sake and in part to satisfy practical needs of plot (Alter n.p.), but the rebuke of Hitchens's politics in the novel has not been missed. John MacArthur, for one, writes that in "*The Pregnant Widow*, Amis distanced himself from Hitchens's violent, regime-changing passions through his protagonist, Keith Nearing" (n.p.). The full extent and implications of Amis's evolving politics, however, has yet to be developed.

Amis's political vision in *The Pregnant Widow*, first of all, is not a radical break from prior positions, including those shared with Hitchens. In several ways, *The Pregnant Widow* is an extension of *The Second Plane*. Amis once described the novel as "blindingly autobiographical, but with an Islamic theme. It's called *A Pregnant Widow*, because at the end of a revolution you don't have a newborn child, you have a pregnant widow. And the pregnant widow in this novel is feminism" ("30 Things" n.p.). As Amis notes, his novel is ostensibly about the 1960s Sexual Revolution, but themes regarding Islam and terror pervade this subject matter. This intermixture is continuous with *The Second Plane*, in which Amis concedes, "Geopolitics may not be my natural subject, but masculinity is" (x). Indeed, across *The Second Plane*'s essays, Amis makes the controversial and dubious argument that Islamic terrorism can be partly attributed to the sexual repression of fundamentalist Islam. *The Pregnant Widow*, then, maintains Amis's method of exploring politics and religion through the prisms of sex, feminism, and masculinity.

While the bulk of the novel is set in 1970, detailing the misadventures of a group of twenty-somethings during a summer spent at an Italian castle, *The Pregnant Widow* extends into the present through intermittent flash-forwards and the novel's final quarter, in which Amis cycles through forty years' worth of events. But, the crux of the story is the summer in Italy.

Keith, an aspiring poet, goes to the estate with his girlfriend, the inhibited Lily, but pursues Lily's friend Scheherazade, who has only recently "grown into" her remarkable beauty. Other characters come and go, chiefly in and out of each other's beds, but all depart traumatized or damaged in varying degrees. At times, the implied conclusions Amis draws about a time when "girls acting like boys was in the air" (22) seem quite reactionary. Neill Denny writes, "Amis is exploring the way the sexual revolution split women into three groups: the old-fashioned ones who were left behind, the pragmatists who went along with sexual permissiveness up to a point, and the embracers, who separated sex from emotion in an almost pornographic, masculine way" (n.p.). Keith's dysfunctional relationships from 1970 onward are meant to suggest that one regrettable effect of the Sexual Revolution was to disconnect sex from feeling and reproduction; moreover, Amis verges on patronization by implying that this sea change was more detrimental to women, for it allegedly puts burdensome pressure on women to be sexually adventurous.

Nicholas Nearing, the character based on Hitchens, contrasts with Keith and the other characters gathered at the castle by way of his political consciousness and activity. In this way, he also serves as a historical reference point, putting the sexual escapades and solipsism of Keith and the others into a wider context. Brendan Bernhard writes, "Over three decades' of history (1970-2006), or news, is alluded to throughout *The Pregnant Widow*, which deals primarily with the sexual revolution while making frequent references to the various political changes that are normally the province of Mr. Hitchens" (n.p.). One such political flashpoint is the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and when it is brought up Amis attributes to Keith—almost verbatim—some of his own stated objections to the war: "There would be regime change in Baghdad, in 2003, so that there would be no regime change in Washington, in 2004. Nicholas, who supported it, tried to instil in him some courage about the Mesopotamian experiment, but Keith, just now, couldn't begin to

bear the thought of flying iron and mortal flesh, and what happened when the hard machine met the soft” (136). Whereas in *The Second Plane* Amis leaves his disagreement with Hitchens over Iraq unsaid, here he disputes Hitchens in both political and moral terms. This confrontation with Hitchens serves as the starting point from which Amis’s reconsidered politics begin to emerge.

In *The Pregnant Widow*, Amis draws a perhaps fundamental line between himself and Hitchens by identifying sex and sexual politics as the ultimate arena for enacting social and cultural change. As the portion of the novel set in 1970 comes to a close, Keith reflects that his older brother “looked like what he would soon become—the foreign correspondent” (301). But, as Nicholas prepares for travel to report on various political revolutions occurring across the globe, Keith informs his brother, ““You’re interested in the wrong revolution, mate ... Mine’s the one that makes the world go round”” (302). Keith believes that his brother goes around the world seeking revolutions, whereas he has found the upheaval that makes the world go around. Of course, Keith/Amis is here referring to the Sexual Revolution. Amis’s refocused critical eye, turned inward to the cultural changes initiated by his own generation, allows him to step out of the totalitarian framework and place the events of and since 9/11 in a different frame.

This new frame begins with *The Pregnant Widow*’s Mediterranean setting. The Italian countryside becomes a common meeting ground for an increasingly conservative Islam and an increasingly transgressive secularity. These two entities are brought together in Whittaker, an older American guest, and his Libyan and Muslim boyfriend, Amen. Accompanying Amen is his sister Ruaa, who, because of her burqa, is nicknamed “The Blob.” Ruaa, however, has “a dialectical counterweight” (Taylor n.p.) in Rita, an exhibitionist and sexually aggressive woman given an equally demeaning moniker, “the Dog.” These two women are unsubtly juxtaposed at poolside: “there they were, by a castle on a mountain in Italy, Ruaa and Rita—yes, the Blob in

her burkha, the Dog in her birthday suit” (Amis 193). The polarity of the Dog and the Blob may seem to simply parody the extreme ends of two opposing impulses, and indeed Keith finds Ruaa and Rita intimidating for entirely different reasons, but the tableau featuring the two unlikely poolside companions also crystallizes Amis’s new way of thinking about religion and politics.

Amis’s juxtaposition of Ruaa and Rita stakes out the range of perspectives and expressions of sexuality included in the sexual revolution. Indeed, Keith makes a point of remarking upon how all the guests found it memorable to see “Rita and Ruaa, in the same frame of vision” (190). These two seeming opposite extremes are placed together, side by side, rather than against one another. Rather than the project of and for a certain sect of secularized and liberated Western young adults, Amis casts the sexual revolution as a collision, conglomeration, and reconfiguration of identities. Along with Ruaa and Rita, the sturdily agnostic Keith’s houseguests also include Scheherazade’s evangelical Pentecostal boyfriend, Timmy, and Gloria Beautyman, a sophisticated woman with ravenous sexual appetites who, later in life, converts to fundamentalist Islam. Identities are porous, and a wide range of religious expression—from fundamentalist embrace to atheistic rejection—is presented as a participatory, not oppositional, force in the seemingly secular project of sexual liberation.

The Pregnant Widow in a sense tracks Amis’s reconsidered politics by way of Keith’s changing—but never resolved and always conflicted—attitudes toward religion. Shortly after meeting Ruaa, Keith admits to Whittaker that his discomfort around her is related to his longstanding ambivalence toward religion: “I was raised to respect all cultures. And I respect Ruaa. But religion—religion’s always been my enemy. It teaches girls to be a drag about sex” (148). Whittaker responds to Keith, “You know, Keith, there might be a moral in Ruaa for *you*” (148). Whittaker’s supposition does suggest Keith’s narcissism, one indeed inflected with

orientalist presuppositions about the purpose and value of the East, in that Ruaa's existence serves to reveal meaning to and for Keith. Nevertheless, if Ruaa is taken as an extreme instance of the religious impulse, then Keith's exposure to the various ways religion is lived and experienced while staying at the castle is indeed transformative.

This transformation is directly related to religion's relationship to sex, as evidenced by Keith's dalliances with Gloria, who later in life converts to Islam but at the time in Italy with Keith is a Roman Catholic:

Keith's attitude to religion was evolving, it seemed. He now had cause to thank God—to thank religion. ... Many times, in her themed fantasies, Gloria returned to the idea of blasphemy. *In half an hour's time they're taking me to the church*, she soliloquised, slipping into her white cotton dress. *I'm getting married to an older man. How very fortunate that I'm still a virgin. Just so long as I don't crack now. Oh, hello. I didn't see you lying there ...* And then again, at the very last, in the bathroom, in front of the mirror. Religion aroused Gloria Beautyman. And who could quarrel with it if it did? (276-7, emphasis in original)

Sexual satisfaction for Gloria and Keith is based on blasphemy, which of course is itself contingent upon a broader framework of genuine belief and obedience. Gloria demonstrates her devoutness when Keith makes light of a missionary's arrest for smuggling Bibles into Moscow. She snaps at Keith, "And I'll thank you to keep a decent tongue in your head when you talk about such things. To risk prison for your convictions. Excuse me, but I'm a Roman Catholic. ... Yes, that's right, I happen to believe in God. And I think that man's incredibly brave" (226). Her fantasies' powers, therefore, come from their relation to her genuine faith. Keith's sexual experiences with Gloria, a professed and practicing Catholic, show him how transgression and fidelity can operate together. Gloria's—and Keith's—sexual pleasure derives from (pretend) blasphemy that only has meaning and power through religious conviction. This interactive and

productive dynamic, like Rita and Ruaa by the pool, complicates dichotomies by reinforcing the way seemingly antagonistic forces are in fact mutually dependent.

Keith's revised view of religion bears on the novel's, and presumably Amis's, politics. Religious fundamentalism and secular liberalization are presented not as Manichean opposites at war, but instead as fluid and interactive constituent components of a dynamic whole. The problem, Amis's novel suggests, comes from closing oneself off from and denying this completeness. One character who performs such a maneuver is Scheherazade's evangelical boyfriend, Timmy, who spends much of the novel in Jerusalem attempting to convert Jews to Pentecostal Christianity. Tim conveys the frustration that comes from his endeavors, describing "the chaps with the little berets on their heads ... [and] the funny sideburns" who resist his proselytizing as "narrow-minded": "Well you go up to them, and you tell them, you know, there's another way. There's another way! And they just look at you as if you're ... You see, they're *so* narrow-minded. It's amazing. You wouldn't believe" (274). This conversation takes place as Keith and Timmy play chess. Timmy, a chess prodigy, soundly defeats Keith, who reflects on Timmy's remarkable playing:

Chess and math and music: these were the only spheres, Keith had read, in which you encountered *prodigies*. Human beings, that is to say, who were capable of creative originality before the onset of adolescence. There were no prodigies anywhere else. Because these closed systems did not depend on life: on experience of life. Religion, too, maybe, was prodigious, when children dreamt, with all their authentic force, of Father Christmas and his sleigh. (275)

Keith's surmise—which "had read" and "maybe" reinforce as speculation, not fact, about math, chess, music, and religion—is certainly contestable. Still, his line of thought here suggests that the most powerful form of religion is a childlike unshakeable faith. The problem, however, is the creative power of this immature belief is that it is a "closed system" divorced from experience.

Timmy finds the non-Christians who resist his proselytizing to be “narrow-minded” since he is cut off from and resistant to other ways of living in the world. Paradoxically, religion’s totalizing danger emerges when it closed off from the total range and diversity of lived experience.

In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), Slavoj Žižek argues against the ideological maneuver that occurs when Islamist terror is separated from globalization and liberal capitalism. Žižek asks, “What if the true aim of this ‘war’ [on terror] is *ourselves*” (154)? *The Pregnant Widow* suggests that the self-serving interests of the Iraq War prompt Amis to think along lines closer to Žižek than, say, Samuel Huntington. Amis lets the ultimate meaning and value of the Sexual Revolution remain indeterminate, but by rejecting the notion that it was wholly secular and Western, he suggests that the political dilemmas to which his novel alludes are the products of complementary and interdependent, not antithetical, ideological forces. Present dilemmas are now thought through the framework of bodies sharing intimate space and changing relations.

Compared to *The Second Plane*, this outlook marks a shift that can be gauged by Amis’s handling of a specific issue. In a 2007 book review, entitled “Demographics,” Amis validates concerns over Europe’s Muslim population, writing that if some inhabitants of a liberal democracy “believe in sharia and the Caliphate, and so on, then the numbers are clearly crucial” (156). “Demographics” goes on to lament that the most effective responses to secular Europe’s imminent “Islamization” are untenable authoritarian practices, such as recriminalizing abortion. On the other hand, a scene from *The Pregnant Widow* set in 2006 involving Keith’s stepdaughter Silvia presents a different take on the issue: “Silvia, the other night, said that Europe was destined to become a Muslim-majority continent by about 2110. ‘The feminised woman only has one child,’ she said. ‘So the end result of your sexual revolution might be sharia and the veil ... Of course it won’t work out like that. That’s a whole century away. Imagine what else’ll happen

in between” (357). This quotation not only underscores the interactive relationship between sexual revolution and fundamentalist religion—that one might empower rather than put pressure upon the other—but it also points out the essential error in deterministic calculations based on demographic projections: the indeterminacy and changeability of history’s movements.

The Pregnant Widow is hardly a political manifesto, and Amis is by no means embracing fundamentalist religion or dismissing the dangers it presents. But, unlike *The Second Plane*, *The Pregnant Widow* rejects a Manichean opposition of secular liberal democracy to totalitarian fundamentalist Islam, and is willing to accept their entwined histories. In *The Cosmopolitan Novel*, (2010), Berthold Schoene writes, “Experience warns us to steer clear of any seemingly workable global management plans—such as Communism, neo-liberalism or religious fundamentalism—because these are prone to totalisation, either disenfranchising and subsuming the individual or recklessly fetishising the self at the expense of society” (180). Like Amis, Schoene positions literature as the means for circumnavigating seductive totalizing schemes: “Cosmopolitanism encourages us quite literally to dis-close ourselves and to abstain for good from globalisation’s agglomerative practices of segregation, partitioning and self-enclosure. What is needed to accomplish this feat is first and foremost an act of the imagination, informed by an understanding of how literature, critical theory and politics might conditionally come to (re-)create the world” (181). Amis is still anti-totalizing, but *The Pregnant Widow* recognizes and avoids his prior attempts to replace the universalizing and totalizing myths of fundamentalist religion with the universalizing and totalizing myths of Western subjectivity.

Nicholas, and by extension Hitchens, never re-conceptualizes global politics in this way, and this failure is in part due to his admiration for Orwell. Jonathan Freedland writes,

Hitchens is a devotee of Orwell; some have suspected a self-conscious desire to emulate him, right down to the jacket

photographs with accompanying cigarette. Yet many admirers of Orwell admit to a stab of envy: he was lucky to be writing in such epic times, they moan, reporting on the titanic struggles of the twentieth century; if only we were blessed with such material, we too could reach those heights. . . . To be like Orwell, Hitchens had to be writing on a struggle of Orwellian clarity, as morally uncomplicated as the battle against Nazism or Stalinism. And so he saw the post-September 11 wars the same way.” (n.p.)

Unfortunately, the dramas of Orwell’s age cannot be straightforwardly overlaid on top of those of the twenty-first century. Religious belief, moreover, does not figure in to people’s lives in exactly the same way as political belief; besides, the historical circumstances of religious and political belief in Hitchens and Amis’s time is considerably different than in Orwell’s lifetime.

As a consequence of never coming to terms with these facts and instead insisting upon directly transferring Orwell’s totalitarian model onto the political travails of the age, Amis implies that Hitchens faces a diminished presence. Amis writes, “There was a time in Keith’s childhood when Nicholas was absolutely everything—he filled the sky like a Saturn; and he still looked godlike (Keith thought)” (300). Contained in this phrasing is the recognition that Keith’s immature view of Nicholas as infallible is gone, and indeed Keith recurrently reminds his brother that he has missed the truly significant revolution. Amis thus appears to at once pay tribute to his profound and lingering admiration for Hitchens and lament his friend’s blinkered political vision. Hitchens once joked that he has only one complaint about the character he inspired: ““He doesn’t appear enough”” (Alter n.p.). *The Pregnant Widow’s* punning subtitle is *Inside History*, and Hitchens’s relatively small role in Amis’s novel suggests that Amis believes that, despite a valiant effort, his friend’s presence in history will ultimately be minor.

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