

# Representing revolt: working-class representation as a literary and political practice from the General Strike to the Winter of Discontent

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# Abstract

Though the dual sense of representation—as an issue of both aesthetic or organisational forms—has long been noted within Marxist literary criticism and political theory, these differing uses of the term have generally been considered to be little more than semantically related. This thesis, then, seeks to address this gap in the discourse by looking at working-class representation as both a literary and political practice to show that their relationship is not just one of being merely similar or analogous, but rather that they are structurally homologous. To demonstrate this point, this thesis will perform close readings of clusters of texts to chart the development of working-class fiction between two high-points of class struggle in Britain—the 1926 General Strike and the 1978-79 Winter of Discontent—with the intention of exploring a variety of working-class representational practices. Through this, it will be shown that the homology between working-class literary and political representations manifests in the realist working-class fiction under discussion lending itself more readily to those political practices most closely adhering to representational political forms while the experiments of the—much neglected—working-class literary avant-garde, which challenged the boundaries of realism, would lend themselves to those movements similarly challenging representational political practices. In doing so, this thesis draws upon and intervenes in over a century of Marxist literary critical debate, in which the working class—as both a literary and political subject—has often remained curiously absent.

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*E, infine, voglio ringraziare il nostro amico, Zambo; mancato ma sempre con noi.*

# Introduction

Long a concept of crucial importance to scholars in both literature and politics, the dual sense of the word “representation”—as “depiction” or “portrayal” for literary critics and “speaking on behalf of” for political theorists—has seen the deployment of these diverse conceptualisations in their respective disciplines as only semantically or etymologically linked and, ultimately, theoretically unrelated. This theoretical bifurcation is perhaps most striking within Marxist thought, with its ample discussion of both political representation (for instance, around the role of the vanguard party, its relationship to social democracy, trade unions etc) and literary representation (perhaps most (in)famously around modernism, realism and their relationship to Marxism). Yet despite the centrality of such debates within the Marxist tradition, scant attention has been paid to the structural relationship between the *practices* of literary and political representation; that is, the structural function of representation—in both senses—and how representation itself structures the relationship between those represented and those representing, not to mention the practical and epistemological function that such structuring implies *as distinct from* the ideological positions of those inhabiting representational roles. This thesis, then, will attempt to illuminate this relationship by bringing these two seemingly distinct conceptualisations into direct contact, drawing upon structural analyses of working-class political representation in its investigation of the function of form in working-class literary representation. Charting the development of working-class fiction from the 1926 General Strike to the 1978-79 Winter of Discontent, this thesis will argue, through close reading clusters of working-class texts against their respective historical contexts, that the relationship between representational practices in these two fields goes beyond that of mere analogy and, in fact, is one of structural homology. This homology manifests in realist working-class fiction lending itself more

readily to those political practices most closely adhering to representational political forms. Meanwhile, the experiments of the (much-neglected) working-class literary avant-garde, which variously challenged, pushed at or ruptured with the boundaries of realism, would lend themselves to—or, otherwise, be more readily appropriated by—those movements similarly challenging, pushing at or rupturing with representational political practices. Indeed, the relatively *longue durée* under discussion aims to highlight—in a way which investigations into specific periods of working-class writing often miss—how shifting working-class composition and its similarly shifting relationship to both state and capital affected not only their forms of political representation, but their forms of literary representation as well.

## Working-class representation as a literary practice

Realism has long retained an important position within working-class writing and Marxist literary criticism either as a venerated aesthetic form or, by contrast, the formal principles against which one's own aesthetics are defined. This is a partial consequence of the form's reflectionist aesthetic allowing for more clearly perceptible links between text and reality; yet this reflectionist aesthetic is but one aspect of realism: others include a tendency towards some degree of narrative closure; a tendency towards what Levine calls 'detailism' to register 'the particulars of the material world [...] to lessen the sense of manipulation' (2010: 18); and an approach to language implying a transparent function for depicting the social world "as it is" (with emphasis on its external and "objective" features) as well as, according to MacCabe, the construction of narrative prose as a 'meta-language that can state all the truths' of the characters' utterances as well as the relationship of those utterances to the wider world (1983: 14). Meanwhile, Watt's seminal *The Rise of the Novel* outlines the significance of realism as 'the defining characteristic which differentiates the work of the early eighteenth-century novelists from previous fiction' (1963: 10). Watt subsequently highlights various aspects of

the mimetic impulse arising from the genesis of the novel, such as the ‘particularisation of characters’ (18) believable as individual human beings rather than generic character types and the realisation of such particularity within the novel’s setting against ‘a background of particularised time and place’ (22) as well as—perhaps even more significantly—the ‘adaptation of a prose style to give an air of complete authenticity’ (28). These aspects of the novel developed in tandem with parallel concerns in philosophy—Watt cites, among others, Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding* with regards time, place and the individual—as part of ‘that vast transformation of Western civilisation since the Renaissance [...] which presents us, essentially, with a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places’ (32). Connecting this to the increasing ‘power and self-confidence of the middle class as a whole’ (61), Watt shows how realism, as the literary mode of the early novel form, has its origins in the Enlightenment’s focus on the individual subject and, by extension, the burgeoning ascendance of capitalist social relations.

However, this is not to claim that realism can be conceptualised as an internally-coherent, unitary whole or even that all realist texts contain all the elements discussed above simultaneously and/or identically. Beaumont, for instance, opposes the demotion of realism to simply ‘a species of *trompe l’oeil*’ arguing it both ‘overstates its mimetic ambitions and dramatically undervalues its ability to exhibit and examine the formal limitations that shape it’ (2010: 4) before citing Eliot’s *Adam Bede* as escaping realism’s ‘limited definition in terms of a passive, positivistic reflection of banal social reality’ (6). For Gąsiorek meanwhile, realism’s fundamental heterogeneity means it is ‘a notoriously slippery concept’ (1995: 14). Though conceding realist texts share ‘certain general attributes’, Gąsiorek argues realism ‘discloses not so much a set of textual characteristics as a general cognitive stance *vis-à-vis*

the world [...] manifesting itself in a wide range of fictional forms' (14). Though such complications lead Gąsiorek to an unhelpful (for reasons discussed below) conclusion that 'distinctions between "realist" and "experimental" [...] are so irrelevant to the postwar period that they should be dropped altogether' (1995: v), his problematising of realism nonetheless remains valuable, even if the 'general attributes' he mentions—the 'mimetic impulse' and 'commitment to some form of referentiality' (v)—as well as its 'general cognitive stance' are themselves significant enough to merit categorisation, however porous the boundaries of that category may be.

By contrast, various early twentieth-century avant-garde artistic movements—retrospectively grouped under the term 'modernism'<sup>1</sup>—are considered to have broken with such reflectionist aesthetics through a range of formal experiments. Enumerating modernism's 'distinctive characteristics', Auerbach notes aspects such as a 'multipersonal representation of consciousness, time strata, disintegration of the continuity of exterior events, shifting of the narrative viewpoint (all of which are interrelated and difficult to separate)' (2003: 546), allowing the modernist author to capture multiple interpretations, either 'of different persons or of the same person at different times; so that overlapping, complementing, and contradiction yield something that we might call a synthesized cosmic view or at least a challenge to the reader's will to interpretive synthesis' (549).

However, though developing a variety of technical innovations often considered a decisive "break" with realist representational practices, modernism also frequently made use of techniques forged within realism, though applying them with a distinctly new emphasis.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'experimentation' and 'avant-garde' are obviously imperfect in this context, given that realists, too, were once an 'avant-garde' and that formal experimentation is possible *within* the boundaries of realist aesthetics. However, in the context of this thesis, 'avant-garde' and 'experimentation' will nonetheless be used to refer to those aesthetic modes which moved away from the techniques and cognitive stance of realism.

Auerbach describes modernism's deployment of free indirect style 'to express the contents of the consciousness of the dramatis personae' noting also its use 'much earlier [...] but not for the same aesthetic purpose' (535). Though free indirect style may have been deployed by earlier realist authors to depict a character's interiority, the content of such interiority was generally 'limited to things connected with the particular incident being related or the particular situation being described' (535) while, even more significantly, 'the author, with his knowledge of an objective truth, never abdicated his position as the final and governing authority' (535-536). By contrast, discussing Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Auerbach illustrates how through the use of free indirect style in the modernist novel, the writer 'as narrator of objective facts has almost completely vanished; almost everything stated appears by way of reflection in the consciousness of the dramatis personae' with 'no viewpoint at all outside the novel from which the people and events within it are observed' (534). However, Auerbach also notes that this emphasis on the multiplicity of consciousnesses remains nonetheless 'an endeavor to investigate an objective reality', in this instance, 'the "real" Mrs Ramsay' (536). Auerbach describes her as 'encircled by the content of all the various consciousnesses directed upon her (including her own)' in 'an attempt to approach her from many sides' as part of 'a close approach to objective reality by means of numerous subjective impressions received by various individuals (and at various times)' (536). Read against Woolf's criticism of her realist contemporaries for their unrealistic portrayals of life (1925: 188) or Joyce's claim to be developing a 'new realism' (Power 2012: 70), Auerbach's comments show that rather than being a complete break, modernism also borrowed from realism in order to variously stretch, expand, challenge and unsettle—as well as rupture—its boundaries. A concern for "the real" remains, though emphasis shifts from 'detailism' of its external and objective features to its internal and subjective ones.

Yet while realism and modernism may not themselves be strictly dichotomous categories, modernism-versus-realism remained the axis around which much twentieth-century Marxist literary criticism revolved. The most significant proponent of realism within Marxist circles was undoubtedly Georg Lukács with his classic, *The Historical Novel*, expounding the virtues of novelists such as Walter Scott, admired for his ‘middling’ central characters who embody the ‘antagonisms of history [...] in their psychology and destiny, [which] always represent social trends and historical forces’ (1963: 34). Conversely, Lukács was scathing of what he perceived as modernism’s framing of the “universal *condition humaine*” (1964: 20) as ‘by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings’ (20). This ‘ahistorical’ (21) view of the individual, Lukács argues, results from the confinement of the modernist hero strictly ‘within the limits of his own experience’ (21), with no objective reality to act upon or acting upon the hero, who exists ‘without personal history [...] does not develop through contact with the world [...] The only “development” in this literature is the gradual revelation of the human condition’ (21). Writing elsewhere on expressionism and surrealism, Lukács similarly argues they lack ‘any reference to objective reality’ (Adorno et al. 1980: 33) thus eschewing the conditions which allow ‘the novel of education to be written’ (42), which he conceptualises entirely in realist terms and as necessary to prepare the masses for the ‘revolutionary democracy that is represented by the Popular Front’ (56-57). Lukács’ final point regarding the ‘novel of education’ as preparation for the Popular Front is itself revealing in that—without wanting to relitigate the strategic debates of 1930s Communism—the Popular Front was based on a cross-class alliance against fascism and, at least temporarily, a truce for the continued existence of class society. Indeed, the essay’s epigraph from the Moscow Writers’ Club is similarly instructive, describing *Don Quixote* as ‘the most powerful weapon’ in the bourgeois literary arsenal and arguing the ‘revolutionary proletariat could do with at least one little Cervantes [...] to arm it with a similar weapon’

(28). Lukácsian aesthetics thus seems predicated on utilising bourgeois structures (both literary and political) for proletarian ends, in this instance the traditions of the bourgeois novel in preparation for the cross-class Popular Front as part of a strategy for proletarian revolution.

Arguably the most vociferous of Lukács' critics was German Marxist Theodor Adorno, who argues Lukács' treatment of art and science as forms of knowledge assumes there is 'no difference between them' (159). For Adorno, conversely, art does not become knowledge 'by doing justice to a reality which veils its own essence' (159-160) but only 'by revealing whatever is veiled by the empirical form assumed by reality' (162). As such, where Lukács sees in modernism only the ahistorical and individualistic reproduction of loneliness as *condition humaine*, Adorno sees the depiction of loneliness as 'a social product' (1980: 165) which 'potentially destroys and transcends itself by revealing itself in works of art as the hidden truth common to all men' (166). Adorno's argument is an invaluable antidote against Lukács's prescriptive anti-modernism; however, issues nonetheless arise from Adorno's own prescriptiveness vis-à-vis realism, describing it as amenable to 'authoritarian personalities', 'even if it proclaims itself critical or socialist' (179). Adorno is equally denunciatory of debates around committed literature, describing them as ignoring 'works whose own formal laws pay no heed to coherent effects [and] fails to understand what the shock of the unintelligible can communicate' (180). While Adorno is correct to defend the political and artistic merit of avant-gardism from Lukácsian critique, Adorno's own proscriptions turn him into the mirror-image of his Hungarian counterpart. Indeed, the positions taken by the two ultimately present dubious claims to a single "correct" Marxist literary form split along the binaries of "realism" versus "avant-gardism" and the "novel of commitment/education"

versus “autonomous” art; binaries which, as will be expanded upon in this thesis, prove to be fundamentally untenable.

Though not addressing the modernism-realism debate directly, Pierre Macherey is another significant twentieth-century Marxist critic on questions of form, theorising texts as composed of internally antagonistic elements with authorial decisions (intentional or not) serving to highlight or suppress that antagonism. As such, the text as a coherent, unified whole simply does not exist; rather, it is ‘founded on the multiplicity of its meanings; to explain the work is to recognise and *differentiate* the principle of that diversity’ (Macherey 2006: 88, original emphasis). Continuing, Macherey explains,

What begs to be explained in the work is not the false simplicity which derives from the apparent unity of its meaning, but the presence of a relation, or an opposition, between elements of the exposition or levels of the composition, those disparities which point to a conflict of meaning. This conflict is not a sign of an imperfection; it reveals the inscription of an *otherness* in the work, through which it maintains a relationship with that which it is not, that which happens at its margins (89, original emphasis)

These ‘conflicts of meaning’ arise because the materials from which writers produce their works—that is, literary techniques, conventions and even language itself—are ‘not neutral transparent components’ but rather have a ‘specific weight, a peculiar power, which means that even when they are used and blended into a totality they retain a certain autonomy’ (47). It is here that Gąsiorek’s limitations become evident: his argument regarding the postwar rapprochement between realism and modernism, though potentially valid with respect to

categorising whole texts according to discrete literary movements, necessitates the abandonment of those classificatory distinctions which would divest critics of important analytical tools for understanding the ‘specific weight’ of various literary ‘materials’ *within* texts associated with those movements. By contrast, for Macherey, the task of the critic is precisely to highlight these varied and contradictory meanings within the text, drawing out what such attempts at unification suggest about that which the text cannot, or refuses, to say.

Macherey’s theories parallel in many ways those from Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious* (2002). Similarly to Macherey, Jameson builds upon the idea of structural conflict internal to the text, ‘the relationship of tension between presence and absence’ (2002: 33), whereby rather than

being completely realised on any one of its levels tilts powerfully into the underside or *impensé* or *non-dit*, in short, into the very political unconscious, of the text, such that the latter’s dispersed semes [...] direct us to the informing power of forces or contradictions which the text seeks in vain wholly to control or master (33-34)

To trace the origins of such *impensé*, Jameson draws on Marx’s “Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon” in which Marx argues that the intellectuals of the petty-bourgeoisie perform their role not out of any mechanistic determinism to do with class origins but because they are ‘driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive [the petty-bourgeoisie] politically’ (37) and it is this ‘which allows what can be thought to seem internally coherent in its own terms, while repressing the unthinkable’ (38). The object of literary study, for Jameson, thus emerges ‘when the appearance of formal unification is unmasked as a failure or an ideological mirage. [...] The aim of a properly

structural interpretation [...] thus becomes the explosion of the seemingly unified text into a host of clashing and contradictory elements' (41), whereby an analysis of a text's contradictions and their historical provenance reveals the *impensé* which impugns its facade of internal coherence.

For the comprehension of such *impensé* in literary analysis, Jameson posits that they 'must take place within three concentric frameworks' (60): firstly, literary analysis must comprehend the text within its determinate political context and concomitant attempt to resolve the contradictions of that context through its existence as a symbolic act. Secondly, through the lens of social class ideologies, whose fundamental content, argues Jameson,

is relational [...] its "values" are always actively defined in situation with respect to the opposing class [...] normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the *legitimation* of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant "value system." (69, original emphasis)

Contrary to the first framework—where contradiction is apprehended within the individual text—here, contradiction appears in the dialogue between 'the irreconcilable demands and positions of antagonistic classes' (70). The individual text is thus conceptualised as 'a *parole*, or individual utterance, of that vaster system, or *langue*, of class discourse' (70) with Jameson counterposing the works of canonical cultural masterworks—which have tended towards the univocal expression of the hegemonic class—against the popular cultural production of peasant societies such as folk songs and fairy tales (71). Individual symbolic

acts (textual or otherwise) thus become statements within wider class ideologies in the dialogue—that is, conflict—between classes.

Jameson's third concentric framework regards the text in history conceived 'in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations' (60). Highlighting the potential methodological issues of such a framework—that is, of a 'synchronic' system within which all oppositional practices are reduced to reinforcing 'the very system that foresaw and dictated their specific limits' (77); or, alternatively, the slide into 'a purely topological or classificatory operation' whereby critics must decide if 'Milton is to be read within a "precapitalist" or a nascent capitalist context' (79)—Jameson points out that historical societies are constituted by the 'structural coexistence of several modes of production [...] including vestiges and survivals of older modes of production, now relegated to structurally dependent positions within the new, as well as anticipatory tendencies which are potentially inconsistent with the existing system' (80). Within this framework, then, the text becomes the site within which various coexistent—yet discordant—modes of production can be discerned. Paralleling Macherey's comments regarding the 'specific weight' of particular literary materials, Jameson explains that 'at this level "form" is apprehended as content [...] it has become possible to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works' (84). As such, the task of literary analysis within this framework becomes the disclosure of how these historical contradictions—whose 'formal processes' carry 'ideological messages'—inhabit the text.

Where *The Political Unconscious* focuses on approaches for reading the *impensé* within a given text independent of the debates around Marxism and form discussed above, Jameson

would, in *The Antinomies of Realism*, take up a strident critique of what he perceives as realism's inherently conservative nature. Like Watt, Jameson argues that 'the realist mode is closely associated with the bourgeoisie and the coming into being of bourgeois daily life' (2015: 5); however, Jameson goes beyond highlighting such "close association" to argue that 'the realistic novelist has a vested interest, an ontological stake, in the solidity of social reality, on the resistance of bourgeois society to history and to change' (5). The techniques and cognitive stance discussed by both Watt and Gąsiorek, become, in Jameson's analysis, 'an epistemological claim (for knowledge or truth) masquerad[ing] as an aesthetic ideal' (5). This ultimately manifests in the 'structural and inherent conservatism and anti-politicality of the realist novel as such' (215) explaining that

An ontological realism, absolutely committed to the density and solidity of what is [...] cannot but be threatened in the very nature of the form by any suggestion that these things are changeable and not ontologically immutable: the very choice of the form itself is a professional endorsement of the status quo, a loyalty oath in the very apprenticeship to this aesthetic. (215)

One such manifestation of this 'ontological stake' is the realist novel's 'conventional treatment of political characters, of figures whose passion is political, who live for the possibilities of change and entertain only the flimsiest relationship with the solid ontology of what exists right now' (213). Citing Dickens' ridicule for his 'missionary' characters in *Bleak House* (one might also add the trade unionist, Slackbridge, from *Hard Times*), Jameson argues that 'satire of the anti-ontological is everywhere in ontological realism and indeed goes hand in hand with the very structure of the form' (214); those movements challenging

society's ontological fixity are thus treated to 'satiric hostility [...] the time-honoured mode of dealing novelistically with political trouble-makers' (215).

Though Jameson's analysis here is as illuminating as it is forceful, it nonetheless suffers from a degree of overreach with regards the 'conservatism' of the realist novel. Yet such overreach (discussed in the following chapter) is merely symptomatic of a wider issue existing in all of the aforementioned heavyweights of twentieth-century Marxist literary criticism: that is, the curious absence in these debates of the working class as a political or literary configuration, a curiosity amplified by the very centrality of their Marxism. Working-class literature is almost entirely ignored in these discussions, Jameson's quasi-parenthetical comment on 'the proletarian novel' as 'a curious subform of realism' (2002: 181) being as close as any get to discussing it as a literary practice.<sup>2</sup>

Moving away from these aforementioned critics, then, it is important to note initially that those analyses which do centre working-class literature, while often producing immensely important work, frequently involve excessive—and ultimately unhelpful—wrangling around terminology and classification of individual writers and texts. To exemplify the kind of classificatory quagmire which often arises, it is worth reading Marxist critic Carole Snee (1979)—with her distinction between 'working-class' and 'proletarian' writing—against anti-Communist David Smith (1978): both relegate or exclude Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* in/from their analyses on the (spurious) basis of its lack of socialist commitment (1979: 171; 1978: 2). Meanwhile, H. Gustav Klaus includes it precisely under the moniker of 'socialist fiction' (1976: 15), which he admits does not 'prevent [him] from recurring to

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<sup>2</sup> Particularly curious considering the potential parallel with Jameson's example of folk tales as *paroles* within the *langue* of peasant cultural production as class discourse.

“working-class” or “proletarian revolutionary” wherever this is demanded’ (15). Finally, Hubble complicates matters still further through his use of the term ‘proletarian’ more straight-forwardly as a synonym for “working-class”, though with the caveat that ‘while proletarian literature consisted of books written *about* workers, these were not necessarily always written *by* them or even (given the price of many books) published *for* them’ (2017: 2, original emphasis).

In a perhaps doomed attempt to circumvent such terminological difficulties, this thesis will shift emphasis away from classifying individual texts or authors as “proletarian” or “non-proletarian” by drawing upon Michael Denning’s concept of ‘proletarian literary formations’ (2010: 202). For Denning, such classificatory issues around who to include and how (and under which banner) ‘all fail because they treat genres as abstract and ahistorical ideal types; they forget that genres are literary institutions that have grown out of particular social formations and must be understood [...] as the products of those formations’ (202). Thus, Denning argues, rather than haggle over the respective backgrounds and affiliations of specific writers, it is more productive to ask “‘What was the proletarian literary formation?’ What kinds of writers did it produce? What effects did it have on the writers who were drawn to it? And what kinds of writing, what genres, forms, and formulas did those writers produce?’ (202). Such will be the conception of proletarian literature used in this thesis, capturing its institutional nature as well as the ecology of writers, editors, publishers and magazines that allowed a milieu to form and develop its literary and critical practice.

While Denning refers to the Depression-era American experience, this thesis will apply the term to a wider period of working-class writing in Britain, from the prewar class fictions of unemployment and Communist-adjacent proletarian writing to the postwar Angry Young

Men and 1970s avant-garde. Yet it must also be stated that the type of class analysis upon which this thesis rests is inherently intersectional, the lived experience of class being inseparable from the specific oppressions—such as race and gender—which structure its concrete manifestations. Such oppressions, rather than competing with class identity, actually compliment it: Gilroy, discussing ‘patterns of class formation’, explains how such an analysis renders ‘connections between history and concrete struggles [...] intelligible even in situations where collective actors define themselves and organise as “races”, people, maroons, ghost-dancers or slaves rather than as a class’ (2002: 24). Indeed, such a theorisation is in keeping with Jameson’s own argument for the ‘reaffirmation of the existence of marginalised or oppositional cultures in our own time [such as] black or ethnic [sic] cultures, women’s and gay literature’ on the proviso that the ‘rewriting of these utterances in terms of their essentially polemic and subversive strategies restores them to their proper place in the dialogical system of the social classes’ (2002: 71). As such, postwar Caribbean literature and 1970s feminist fiction are integrated into this thesis’ approach to ‘proletarian literary formations’. The hope is that working-class literature will be shown to be far more heterogeneous than is often assumed, both in terms of the literary formations generally considered “proletarian” as well as the range of formal experimentation within and between these formations as they grapple with their specific experiences of class, as modalities ‘in which class is lived’ (Hall 1980: 55<sup>3</sup>), resulting variously in attempts to work within, expand or break entirely with the boundaries of realist representational form.

## Working-class representation as a political practice

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<sup>3</sup> Hall here is discussing race, specifically, as ‘the modality in which class is lived’. This thesis, however, will extend this reading to also include gender.

Beyond the working class as a literary formation, this thesis intends also to centre the political formation of the class in literary analysis. This therefore necessitates a discussion of working-class representation as a political practice, which is structurally predicated on an asymmetry—and resultant tension—between the mass nature of working-class movements and representative organisations participating in institutions defined by political and economic systems with which the movement is in conflict. Przeworski is instructive here, highlighting the representative nature of parliament seating ‘individuals, not masses. A relation of representation is thus imposed upon the class by the very nature of capitalist democratic institutions. Masses do not act directly in defence of their interests; they delegate this defence [...] In this manner participation demobilised the masses’ (2002: 14). Yet Przeworski also argues this demobilising tendency is ‘true of unions as much as parties’ with ‘the process of collective bargaining [...] as distant from the daily experience of the masses as elections. Leaders become representatives. Masses represented by leaders: this is the mode of organisations of the working class within capitalist institutions’ (14). The capacity for demobilisation thus becomes a defining characteristic in the asymmetrical nature of representation. This is not to suggest working-class representative organisations *only* contain demobilising tendencies or do not also contain capacities *for* mobilisation; rather, it is to highlight that they are constituted by capacities for both: while mobilisation is necessary to create a constituency to represent, such representation is nonetheless predicated also on the ability to demobilise that constituency. Struggle which cannot be demobilised cannot be represented.

Yet this distinction is frequently elided in discussion about representation, manifest in the recurrent labour movement slogan, ‘the members are the union’<sup>4</sup>. Erik Olin Wright, for instance, performs this slippage in his argument against the common misconception of an ‘inverse relationship’ (2000: 958) between working-class associational power and capitalist class interests, positing instead a ‘reverse-J’ approach whereby as ‘working-class power increases, capitalist-class interests are initially adversely affected. However, once working-class power crosses some threshold, working-class associational power begins to have positive effects on capitalists’ interests’ (959) citing ‘significant gains in productivity and rates of profit due to such things as high levels of bargained cooperation between workers and capitalists [and] enhanced capacity for solving macroeconomic problems’ (959-960). Indeed, according to Wright, one of the key macroeconomic problems unions solve, assuming they are ‘sufficiently disciplined’, is rapidly rising wages and inflation with ‘strong, centralised unions capable of imposing wage restraint on both workers and employers’ (968). Continuing, Wright argues these positives in

workers’ power only occur when workers are sufficiently well organised and solidaristic that their associations can effectively sanction defectors [...] Until worker associations are at least moderately powerful, they lack this dual-disciplining capacity and thus generate little positive effect on capitalists’ interests (976)

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<sup>4</sup> The provenance of this slogan is unclear, but the Trades Union Congress’s *UnionLearn* website (2019) describes it as a ‘well-used phrase in trade unions’ that ‘the union is its members, and the members are the union. Workers pay their subscriptions to be members of the union and, in return, the union works on behalf of their interests’; the elision here of “being” and “working on behalf of” is a significant point in the argument of this chapter and, indeed, the thesis as a whole. In this and subsequent chapters, trade unionism will be the main form of working-class representative organisation under discussion. This is primarily for analytical ease: unions have clearly delimited constituencies and contexts within which they function. However, other forms of working-class representation (political parties, communal organisations, etc) function along fundamentally similar lines, though with less clear boundaries for whom they speak and in what contexts.

Though Wright is correct in his ‘reverse-J’ theorisation, he glosses over the more conflictual elements existent not merely between workers and employers but also between workers and the organisations charged with mediating that relationship with their employer. This omission is evident in the terminological slippage in which Wright moves from ‘working-class power’ to ‘working-class *associational* power’ (my emphasis). No discussion is had on how these terms may differ: Wright defines ‘working-class associational power’ as ‘the various forms of power that result from the formation of collective organisations of workers’ (962) but no definition is given for ‘working-class power’. Moreover, there is no investigation of how the terms may constitute discordantly as either (or both) the power of workers through *the act of association* or the power of associations themselves as institutions.

Thus, ‘strong, centralised unions’ promoting wage restraint exemplify class compromise for the common benefit. What Wright misses, however, is that the emergence of such unions is itself implicated in the struggle between classes, signifying the triumph of more moderate labour movement tendencies over the more militant. Silver, for example, elucidates how a key strategy for undermining worker militancy involved the ‘co-optation of “responsible” elements of the labour movement [...] supplemented by fierce repression of the “irresponsible”’ (2005: 157), with the former ‘expected to impose wage restraint on their members, actively controlling rank-and-file militancy in exchange for a seat at the policymaking table’ (153). Taking up the issue of wage restraint, Panitch shows how those unions promoting it become ‘prone to contradictions and limitations due to the inability to eliminate class conflict over the labour process and distribution’ (1981: 27); any legitimacy given to such policies is eroded over time by ‘the concrete form in which trade unions legitimate/mediate state economic policy [...] via their promulgation of wage restraint “in the national interest” and their administration of it to their members’ (34). Silver’s and Panitch’s

analyses reveal, then, the significance of Wright's omission, a consequence of *post factum* treatment of centralised labour organisations ignoring the conflictual forces from which they emerge as well as the pressures continually brought on them from below. In other words, Silver and Panitch highlight the precise classificatory distinction which Wright omits between union representatives and those they represent as well as the underlying tensions which arise from that distinction.

For a practical explication of this tension between representatives and represented (itself a reflection of the antagonism between classes which it attempts to mediate), the American workers' struggles of the 1930s and, specifically, the challenge to the incumbent hegemony of the American Federation of Labour (AFL) from the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO), are highly illustrative. Most revealing about this moment in labour history, however, is not how the CIO challenged AFL hegemony but rather how similarly, for all their competition, both organisations behaved vis-à-vis rank-and-file workers. As Piven and Cloward explain, these workers 'had their greatest influence and were able to extract their most substantial concessions from government during the early years of the Great Depression before they were organised into unions. Their power was not rooted in organisation, but in their capacity to disrupt the economy' with 'strikes, demonstrations, and sit-downs spread[ing] during the mid-1930s despite existing unions rather than because of them' (1979: 96).

Noting numerous instances of AFL collaboration with management throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Piven and Cloward also underline that while union density had plummeted to 'a historic low' by 1935, 'worker militancy was rising' with the number of industrial disputes more than doubling between 1932 and 1934 (121). Indeed, while many disputes revolved

around winning union recognition, in reality ‘neither the battles nor the victories were the result of existing union organisation or leadership’ (148), even in the car industry sit-down strikes from 1936 onwards, generally associated with the groundbreaking rise of the more militant CIO unions: Piven and Cloward quote CIO spokesman, Charles Howard, as saying his union was ‘not even considering the possibility of a strike in the auto industry, as we preach industrial peace’ (149). Rather, as the sit-downs began, CIO leaders rushed ‘to catch up with and capture the spontaneous outbreaks of angry men and their local leaders’ (149), concluding that the CIO ‘did not create the strike movement [...] it was the strike movement that created the CIO’ (153).

By contrast, the catalyst for this movement came from rank-and-file leaders, often ideologically radical, with Communists ‘generally agreed to have been the most influential’ (150). Yet it is by analysing the evolving praxis of Communist Party (CPUSA) activists that the most instructive conclusions regarding representation can be made. In the early stages, Communists opposed the industrial peace promoted by both AFL and CIO unions, instead approaching unionism as ‘agitators from below’ (152) working to ‘build the movement, to stimulate anger and to encourage defiance’ (153). However, as victories were won and employers forced to recognise unions, these unions ‘did not promote disruption’ but rather ‘undertook from the outset to maintain internal discipline in the factories in exchange for recognition’ (155). This included CPUSA activists who ‘as their organisational roles in the CIO developed, their politics became more ambiguous. Radical ideology was no defence against the imperatives created by organisational maintenance’ (161). Piven and Cloward cite the *Flint Auto Worker* newspaper, edited by Communist Henry Kraus, which argued ‘the problem is not to foster strikes and labour trouble. The union can only grow on the basis of established procedure and collective bargaining’ (156). Jeremy Brecher, meanwhile, similarly

notes Michigan CPUSA secretary, William Weinstone, denouncing ‘the helter-skelter use of the sit-down’ (1972: 204). By World War Two, both AFL and CIO unions had signed no-strike clauses, with *Business Week* magazine observing that ‘Communist-dominated’ unions have ‘perhaps the best no-strike record of any section of organised labor; they are the most vigorous proponents of labour-management cooperation [...] Complaints to the union’s national officers usually will bring all the organization’s disciplinary apparatus to focus on the heads of the unruly local leaders’ (quoted in Brecher 1972: 221).

While CPUSA militants certainly continued to organise on the shopfloor, the tension between being agitators-from-below to representatives-from-above shows the extent to which the problematic of representation is structural and not merely an issue of “poor leadership” or “insufficient radicalism”. Indeed, revolutionaries had assumed representative roles within their unions, which subsequently undertook ‘the responsibility for trying to control the rank-and-file, standing as buffers between workers and management’ (Piven and Cloward 1979: 158). The issue, then, is of a *structural* tension between the revolutionary concern with the negation of class society and the representative’s role as predicated on class society’s continued existence, akin to Przeworski’s point above regarding the demobilising function of working-class participation in capitalist institutions.

Such debates around working-class representation as mediation and containment have a long history within the workers’ movement, transcending the traditional boundaries of the Marx-Bakunin split within the First International. For instance, the Argentinian anarchist union, the FORA, state in a 1922 report that ‘trade unionism is a form of organisation imposed by material necessity, simply a means, which should disappear along with that which brought it to life: the present social and economic system’ (quoted in González, 23, my translation).

This position bears a striking resemblance to the position of a young Antonio Gramsci during the revolutionary upheaval of the “Biennio Rosso”, arguing that ‘the present form and functions of the trade unions’ rather than being ‘the perennial form of the principle of combination’ have in fact ‘been imposed on the unions’ (1988: 74) while socialist parliamentarians accept, ‘frequently in a supine fashion, the historical reality produced by capitalist initiative’ (76). In both Marxism and anarchism, then, a tradition exists wherein representation—both in parliament and the workplace—is theorised as historically contingent and inextricably tied to the class society within which it attempts to mediate social conflict.

Writing two years before the formation of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), Gramsci does not—and, for various political and historical reasons, would not—extend his critique to the Soviet-aligned variant of ‘official’ Communism. This thread would, however, be taken up in the 1960s and 1970s by Marxist thinkers around the Italian currents of *operaismo* (literally, ‘workerism’) and, later, autonomist Marxism<sup>5</sup>. These tendencies attempted to rectify what they viewed as the crisis in the postwar workers’ movement embodied in the PCI’s preoccupation with formal politics over and above the factory as a site of class conflict, resulting in a creeping class collaborationism within the party.

By contrast, workerists thought class struggle ‘much too serious to be left to MPs’ (*Classe Operaia*, 1964a: 1; S. Wright 2017: 59) and, paralleling the analysis above, viewed union struggle as composed of ‘two moments [...]: that of the *worker*, that is, of incessant conflict

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<sup>5</sup> These movements were themselves internally ideologically varied and it would be incorrect to characterise their thought as unproblematically “anti-representational”. Tronti, for example, though temporarily “estranged” from the PCI, never officially left and would slowly reintegrate himself into the party. In 1980, Raffaele Sbardella would argue that even during Tronti’s *Classe Operaia* years, his writing contained the seeds of such reintegration into representational politics. Specifically, that Tronti’s ‘absolutisation of workers’ subjectivity’ resulted in a perspective which viewed the fact that workers, ‘due to a temporary defeat, are forced to alienate themselves in the PCI [...] as the coherent result of the collective subject’s free choice’ (2016). However, despite such internal inconsistencies and individual trajectories, the *operaista* tradition and its descendents nonetheless contain useful frameworks for the critique of representational politics used in this thesis.

around the division between necessary labour and surplus value; and that of the *union*, that is, the constant rationalisation of capital' (*Classe Operaia*, 1964b: 5, original emphasis, my translation). Furthermore, in contrast to Gramsci, some within the *operaista* tradition would extend this critique to the PCI, whose participation within capitalist institutions confirmed for workerists that the 'open clash between the real autonomy of the class movements and the control of the opportunist organisations of the labour movement is in the nature of things' (Scalzone quoted in S. Wright 2017: 107). Moreover, workerists took inspiration from shopfloor developments in Italy, such as the *Comitato Unitario di Base* (CUB – United Rank-and-File Committee) at Milan's Pirelli factory formed by workers dissatisfied with their unions' 'poor handling of recent struggles over contracts and work conditions. [Though] less anti-union to begin with than extra-union, it sought to overcome the divisions imposed by competition between [the various workplace unions]' (108). Formations such as the CUB thus symbolised for workerists the rank-and-file challenge to traditional forms of representation in both parliament and the workplace, which even if not necessarily breaking entirely with them, at least pushed their limits and pointed towards a political space beyond them.

Also significant to this thesis are the methodologies underlying the workerists' theoretical output: they desired to 'confront *Capital* with "the *real* study of a *real* factory"', focusing on 'the relationship between the material structure of the working class, and its behaviour as a subject autonomous from the dictates of both the labour movement and capital', to produce 'an internal history of *the working class*' (3, original emphasis). To this end, one key practice was that of workers' enquiry whereby extensive interviews—as many as twenty thousand for a single factory (110)—were used to create a composite picture of the relations of production and working-class behaviour within it. Eschewing notions of "objectivity" or deterministic

scientific socialism, this method aspired, as Mario Tronti explained, to the status of a ‘non-objective social science which makes no pretence of objectivity’ (quoted in S. Wright 2017: 76). Discussing Tronti, Bellofiore and Tomba explain that he ‘did not intend to produce an objective reading of reality, but rather effects on that reality’, a historiography ‘aimed not at photographing reality, but at producing a new reality’ (2017: 238). *Operaismo*, then, sought to elevate a methodological principle centring working-class experience of class antagonism via its insertion into the processes of production; its use of workers’ enquiry must therefore be understood as the methodological counterpart to its refocalisation away from the machinations of party politics and union representation to the subjective experience of class antagonism as social relationship. In doing so, they produce a framework within which the dual nature of political representation can be understood and working-class autonomy conceived as both implicated in, distinct from and sometimes antagonistic towards such working-class representation.

## A homology of representations

That literature and politics both exist as modes of working-class representation constituted by a variety of approaches which challenge, expand or break with the limits implied by such representation is by now self-evident. However, rather than seeing these two representational practices as merely similar or even parallel phenomena, the argument of this thesis is for a structural homology emerging from the two irreducible aspects which define representational practice: that is, firstly, the relationship between represented and those representing; and, secondly, the relationship of that representational event to the social world in which it operates. It is in the methods by which these seemingly distinct representational practices negotiate these relationships—as well as the underlying logic which forms the basis of those methods—that their structural homology emerges.

Spivak draws out some of these issues in her famous essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in which she accuses Foucault and Deleuze of participating in an ‘unquestioned valorisation of the oppressed as subject’ (1988: 274). One instance of this arises with regards to Deleuze’s praise for Foucault’s *Groupe d’information de prisons* and its supposed establishment of conditions whereby ‘prisoners themselves would be able to speak’ (274). Spivak’s issue is not with the objective of listening to or amplifying the voices of oppressed groups but rather the claim that intellectuals can create conditions in which the oppressed may “speak for themselves” while leaving unquestioned their own roles as intellectuals presenting—or, as Spivak puts it, ‘re-presenting’—those voices. As Spivak elucidates, both Foucault and Deleuze fail to recognise the ‘contradiction within a position that valorises the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical of the historical role of the intellectual’ (274).

In particular, Spivak highlights a ‘verbal slippage’ around the term “representation” whereby ‘[t]wo senses of representation are being run together: representation as “speaking for”, as in politics, and representation as “re-presentation”, as in art or philosophy’ with these two conceptions being ‘related but irreducibly discontinuous’ (274). Responding to Deleuze’s statement that because “the person who speaks and acts ... is always a multiplicity” no “theorising intellectual ... [or] party or ... union” can represent “those who act and struggle” (274, original ellipses) Spivak poses the question:

Are those who act and struggle mute, as opposed to those who act and speak? These immense problems are buried in the differences between the “same” words: [...] representation and re-presentation. [...] The banality of leftist intellectuals’ lists of

politically savvy subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent (274)

Spivak thus highlights these two senses of representation (in art/philosophy and politics) and the supposed ‘transparency’ of the radical intellectual performing (despite protestations to the contrary) the representational function. The pretense of transparency on the part of intellectuals merely conceals the representational function they perform precisely by virtue of their power and position *as intellectuals*. As Spivak notes, it is the intellectual ‘who diagnoses the episteme’ (274), who is capable of transforming subaltern speech into “knowledge” within intellectual discourse. Any representation must have a represented subject, which itself necessitates one who is representing, leaving Foucault and Deleuze no option of “opting out” of such a function, which Spivak sardonically characterises as Foucault and Deleuze professing to ‘merely report on the nonrepresented subject and analyse (without analysing)’ (279). In representing the subaltern, yet denying their role in doing so, Foucault and Deleuze speak for it at the precise moment they give it license to “speak for itself” while their apparent refusal of representation and concomitant affectation of “transparency” in fact marks a ‘place of “interest”’ (279) for the intellectuals themselves. Given that their representational role cannot be refused, Spivak argues they must instead ‘read and write so that the impossibility of such interested individualistic refusals of the institutional privileges of power bestowed on the subject is taken seriously’ (280). In place of the intellectual’s impossible refusal of representation, then, Spivak posits writing in such a way that such representation, its social function and the society it reinforces—and is reinforced by—are all called into question.

Spivak shows that in reading subaltern experience absorbed within intellectual discourse, the reader does not gain direct access to that experience but merely that experience as it is mediated by/through discourse, manifest in the practices—both textual and institutional—which create the text itself. The actual experience of the subaltern and subalternity remains outside of the text—that is, representation—hence Spivak’s conclusion: ‘The subaltern cannot speak [...] Representation has not withered away’ (308). It is at this point, then, that the outlines of the homology between literary and political forms of representation begin to be discerned. What Spivak terms ‘re-presentation’ in art and philosophy exhibits the same tendencies found in, and utilised towards the same ends as, political representation: that is, the elision of the representational role through the supposed ‘transparency’ of those performing the representational function, homologous with the elision of political representation whereby “the union” becomes “its members”—the ambiguity of ‘workers’ associational power’ vis-à-vis the distinction between association as act and as institution—while the gesture of ‘transparency’ silences those it speaks for precisely because it claims to allow them to speak for themselves. Moreover, while representation functions in the space where distinctions are erased and a conflation is made between represented and those representing, the highlighting of those distinctions and contradictions inherent within representation thus functions to radically undermine it.

Some thinkers have highlighted how connections between literary and political forms go beyond Spivak’s ‘related but irreducibly discontinuous’ to the structurally homologous. Arguably the most famous is Pierre Bourdieu whose *The Field of Cultural Production* outlines a conception of ‘fields’ as systems within which actors hold a variety of—often antagonistic—positions, arguing there exists a ‘homology which exists between all fields’ (1993: 96). In literature, for instance, this may manifest in the positions of publishers, journal

editors, established and up-and-coming writers (among others), all interacting and competing to ‘defend or improve their positions’ within their field (30). Bourdieu discusses a variety of ways in which such positions can find themselves in conflict with one another, but a crucial one for this thesis is that conflict ‘between cultural orthodoxy and heresy’ (53), between ‘those who have made their mark (*fait date* – “made an epoch”) and who are fighting to persist, and those who cannot make their own mark without pushing into the past those who have an interest in stopping the clock’ (60). Where success between these two poles may be governed in significant part by the specific strategies pursued by participants, Bourdieu argues that the struggles between orthodoxy and heresy, while never a direct reflection, ‘depend for their outcome on the correspondence they may have with the external struggles between the classes (or between fractions of the dominant class) and on the reinforcement which one group or another may derive from them’ (57). As such, though aesthetic conflicts are ‘highly sublimated and euphemised, such as the “interest” in a particular form of theatre or philosophy which is logically associated with a certain position [which] has every likelihood of masking its own political implications’ (94), Bourdieu argues they are ‘in the last resort, about what deserves to be represented and the right way to represent it [...] political conflicts (appearing in their most euphemised form) for the power to impose the dominant definition of reality, and social reality in particular’ (101-102).

What Bourdieu produces is a sociological analysis of the structural homology between the *fields* of literature and politics; however, it is the theoretical framework provided by Jacques Rancière which focuses more specifically on the *practices* of literary and political representational modes, transforming the growing sense of their analogousness encountered in Spivak into a more clearly perceptible structural homology through what Brant describes as Rancière’s elucidation of the ‘shared stakes of artistic and political representation’ (2017:

235). A key concept in Rancière's analysis is his 'distribution of the sensible', describing it as 'the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it' (2011: 12). For Rancière, then, both politics and aesthetics are implicated in the distribution of the sensible, aesthetics as the 'delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible [...] that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience' while politics 'revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (13). Rancière then goes on to describe artistic practices as "'ways of doing and making'" that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility' (13). Explicated as such, the distribution of the sensible can be understood as the link between art and politics, not only in terms of 'what constitutes "legitimate" political claims and "proper" subjects of art but also the way these two fields intertwine to constitute and reconstitute themselves along with the communities they represent' (Brant 2017: 236); that is, both artistic and political practices act as interventions in who merits representation, in what way and to what end. What is related but discontinuous with Spivak, thus becomes necessarily continuous with Rancière.

For Rancière, then, literature is able to modify 'the sensory perception of what is common to the community' and, in doing so, contributes 'to the formation of political subjects that challenge the given distribution of the sensible' (2011: 40). However, Rancière remains fundamentally sceptical of committed art, calling it 'vacuous' as both a political and aesthetic notion. Rather, Rancière believes the author's aesthetic choices will ultimately be decided from without, giving the example of the progressive or revolutionary writer of the 1920s and

1930s who ‘will generally choose a chaotic form in order to show that the reigning order is just as much a disorder [...] Like Dos Passos, he will represent a shattered reality: fragmented stories of erratic individual destinies that translate, by their illogicality, the logic of the capitalist order’ (2011: 61). According to Rancière, the discussion around committed art must be reversed to how it is normally conceived: rather than certain aesthetic modes being suitable for espousing certain political stances, it is the task of ‘various forms of politics to appropriate, for their own proper use, the modes of presentation or the means of establishing explanatory sequences produced by artistic practices’ (65).

However, Rancière’s thinking around committed literature nonetheless raises numerous questions: firstly, he mentions the ‘chaotic’ forms and ‘shattered reality’ of Dos Passos as emblematic of the progressive or revolutionary writer of the 1920s-30s; but it is unclear how those progressive or revolutionary writers who did not write like Dos Passos, such as Steinbeck or Orwell—let alone those such as Greenwood, Brierley or Wilkinson discussed in the following chapter—fit into Rancière’s analysis of form and historical context.

Subsequently, though his reversal of the relationship between aesthetic modes and political stance is interesting, the question remains about whether some ‘forms of politics’ appropriate certain ‘modes of presentation’ or ‘artistic practices’ more readily than others and why this may be so. As this thesis explores, the explanation for how a variety of ‘artistic practices’ can coexist within a single historical moment can be found in how those different ‘artistic practices’ may lend themselves more readily to particular ‘forms of politics’ and not so readily to others.

Finally, Rancière seems to borrow from a distinctly Adornian framework regarding committed literature, not merely in his dismissal but also replicating Adorno’s binary

whereby “committed art” is synonymous with realism and subsequently distinct from avant-gardism/experimentation. Indeed, Rancière’s description of suitable political art as that involving a ‘perceptual shock’ resulting from ‘that which resists signification’ (63) bears striking parallels with what Adorno calls the ‘shock of the unintelligible’. This adhesion to the common—though, as this thesis argues, erroneous—distinction between commitment and avant-gardism seems confirmed by Rancière’s statement that

for thinking and writing democratic history, it is necessary to look toward Virginia Woolf more so than toward Émile Zola. This does not mean that Virginia Woolf wrote good social novels. It means that her way of working on the contraction or distension of temporalities, on their contemporaneousness or their distance, or her way of situating events at a much more minute level, all of this establishes a grid that makes it possible to think through the forms of political dissensuality more effectively than the “social epic’s” various forms. (65)

That the model for ‘thinking and writing democratic history’ is conceived primarily in modernist/Woolfian terms rather than realist/naturalist/committed Zolian ones seems to replicate the binary described previously, discounting in advance the possibility of committed avant-garde literature (through its omission). Yet the history of committed and working-class writing in Britain is one which collapses this binary entirely with many writers from ‘proletarian literary formations’ borrowing extensively from both realism and the avant-garde. The issue then becomes if, as Rancière argues, art and politics are both rooted in and responding to the apportioning of what is/is not visible/sayable—that is to say, the distribution of the sensible—and artistic practices ‘intervene’ in these ‘modes of being and forms of visibility’, then to what extent do artistic practices differ in that which they make

visible (or not)? What happens when the ‘way of working’ found in Woolf is fused with the social ambitions found in Zola? What are the implications for thinking through ‘forms of political dissensuality’ which are rooted more directly in the experiences of those marginalised by society and upon whose exploitation that society is based?

John Fordham’s work on working-class modernism is invaluable here, rooted in an analysis that modernism is ‘transformed by the working-class writer, becom[ing] a galvanic force, fuelled by the released energy of social oppression’ (2002: 100). One aspect that Fordham isolates is the modernist emphasis on interior consciousness: whereas Lukács argues the confinement of the modernist hero ‘within the limits of his own experience’ results in the form’s ahistoricism, Fordham argues that such interiority, in the hands of the working-class writer, allows for the presentation of ‘those qualities of working-class experience which afford a unique expression of the social totality’ (235). Returning to Rancière’s terminology, the working-class modernist is therefore able to ‘think through the forms of political dissensuality’ in their application of modernist technique and emphasis—whether the ‘contraction or distension of temporalities’, ‘situating events at a much more minute level’, or otherwise—to the subjective working-class experience of class society while still discerning the processes and mechanisms of capital accumulation and the reproduction of class society more commonly associated with the social epic. Moreover, considered alongside Auerbach’s earlier comments regarding the modernist author’s abdication of their role in narrating objective facts, a textual strategy focusing on working-class interiority at the expense of an overarching “objective” narrative viewpoint suggests a fundamentally different relationship between those producing the representation and the working-class subjectivity navigating that totality than that imagined by Lukács’ ‘novel of education’. Indeed, it suggests a fundamentally more egalitarian relationship between author and character, not to mention

between author and the reader Lukács envisages being prepared for the Popular Front: the simultaneous subversion of objective narrative authority and elevation of working-class interiority configures social transformation not as dependent on a unidirectional transmission of objective clarity from intellectual to masses, but rather the ability of working-class individuals to construct an understanding of the social totality beginning from their subjective experience of that totality.

Furthermore, the relationship of the text to the reality it contemplates is similarly altered in the hands of the working-class modernist. In his discussion of modernism (and Woolf, in particular), Auerbach cites the ‘greater confidence in syntheses gained through full exploitation of an everyday occurrence than in a chronologically well-ordered total treatment which accompanies the subject from beginning to end’ (2003: 547). Auerbach goes on to note that the way in which modernists engage the everyday occurrence often leaves the reader ‘with an impression of hopelessness. There is often something confusing, something hazy about them, something hostile to the reality which they represent’ (551). Yet where Lukács may see this as confirmation of modernism’s asocial and ahistorical nature, Auerbach contends that it reveals ‘nothing less than the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment’ (552). Continuing, he explains,

what happens in that moment—be it outer or inner processes—concerns in a very personal way the individuals who live in it, but it also (and for that very reason) concerns the elementary things which men in general have in common. It is precisely the random moment which is comparatively independent of the controversial and unstable orders over which men fight and despair; it passes unaffected by them, as

daily life. The more it is exploited, the more the elementary things which our lives have in common come to light. (552)

Auerbach's argument here, that in precisely the moment that modernism focuses on the 'wealth of reality and depth of life'—that is, the infinite multiplicity of our most personal, or at least, individualised 'inner processes' as we interact with the world—it engages the fundamental nature of what humanity in fact holds in common, is a powerful restatement of humanism and humanitarian values, all the more moving for all the horrors of World War Two which form his text's unstated context. Drawing once more on Fordham, however, this modernist humanism is transformed by the working-class avant-gardist: indeed, what Auerbach calls modernism's 'exploitation of an everyday occurrence' takes new meaning as the daily phenomenon of class exploitation, indicating the limits of liberal humanism and transforming modernism's concern with 'the elementary things which men in general have in common' to the specific—yet commonly-held—experience of class underpinning capitalist social relations. This conception finds a parallel in what Denning describes as the 'social modernism' (2010: 122) of America's Depression-era proletarian writing, a 'third wave in the modernist movement' signaling 'the double sense of both rupture and continuity with the modernist project' (122), which fused modernist aesthetics with the concerns of popular social movements for progressive social transformation. As such, where Auerbach views the canonical modernist's 'hostility to the reality they represent' largely in aesthetic terms, the working-class avant-garde's aesthetic hostility is itself rooted within fundamental class antagonisms manifest in a resistance to integration with the social world it depicts and seeks to transform.

Thus, drawing on the work of Spivak, Rancière, Fordham and Denning as well as previous discussion of working-class representation as both a literary and political practice, this thesis argues for their homology based upon the ‘shared stakes of artistic and political representation’ around the distribution of the sensible. The ways in which this homology manifests is threefold: first, that working-class literary representations adhering most closely to the techniques and cognitive stance associated with realism, will tend towards—or be most readily appropriated by—forms of working-class politics most invested in political representation and the class society upon which such representation is predicated. Realism as a particular ‘epistemological claim’ (à la Jameson) of access to the social world “as it is”, with a concomitant ‘ontological stake’ in reaffirming that social world’s necessity, shares the structural limitation of political representation whose acceptance of class society is ingrained into its structure as the basis upon which its role—of mediating class antagonism—is founded. Equally, that ‘epistemological claim’ of access to social reality “as it is” reproduces the issue Spivak underlines within ‘re-presentation’ whereby the ‘intellectuals represent themselves as transparent’ and, therefore, also reproduces the elision of the asymmetrical relationship between representative and represented discussed by Przeworski (or, contrariwise, not discussed by Erik Olin Wright). Viewed this way, then, working-class literary realism can be understood as the aesthetic form par excellence of working-class political representation.

Conversely, the second part of this homology is that those working-class literary representations which stretch, challenge or rupture with the techniques or cognitive stance most closely associated with realism, will tend towards—or be most readily appropriated by—those forms of working-class politics which likewise stretch, challenge or rupture with political representation and the class society upon which it is predicated. Similar connections

are noted by Eisenzweig, who cites a link specifically between symbolist poetry and anarchism by virtue of ‘a common resistance to the principle of representation’ (1995: 81; my translation). Eisenzweig is referring here to the late nineteenth-century ‘era of bombings’ in France and the support anarchists received from symbolist poets (81); however, as the discussion above shows, resistance to representation was neither unique to anarchism nor expressed through exceptional acts of armed struggle while the connection between extra-representational working-class politics and avant-gardism is more fundamental than the simple analogy which Eisenzweig suggests. Rather, in resisting realism’s ‘epistemological claim’, avant-garde texts loosen their commitment to the ‘density and solidity of what is’, resisting the ontological necessity of the social world they depict and upon which working-class political representation is predicated. Similarly, the avant-garde’s technical innovations of form which draw attention to the contingency of the social world also resist the transparency of the author as ‘representing subject’ (à la Spivak) and, therefore, calls into question the representative function of the author just as the political representative is called into question through highlighting its distinction from the constituency it represents. Moreover, the homology between working-class literary and political representations emerges also in the methodological principle underlying *operaismo* and its ‘non-objective social science’ originating in working-class experience/behaviour in order to create a composite picture of the social relations of production and its clear link to working-class modernism’s presentation of ‘those qualities of working-class experience which afford a unique expression of the social totality’ (à la Fordham). In both instances, individual subjective experiences, rather than hindering an understanding of social relations, actually aid in the construction of a framework for their understanding which simultaneously foregrounds the antagonistic behaviours of those individual class subjects as distinct from—though sometimes also part of—working-class representative organisations. *Operaismo*’s picture of

capitalist social relations in the factory, like Woolf's of Mrs Ramsay, is produced 'by means of numerous subjective impressions received by various individuals (and at various times)' while its eschewal of any 'pretence of objectivity' refuses the claim to intellectual 'transparency'. Thus, the working-class avant-gardist, similarly approaching objective reality via its 'subjective impressions', transforms the modernist method into 'a galvanic force, fuelled by the released energy of social oppression'. In contrast to canonical modernism's humanistic qualities, the 'galvanic force' of working-class modernism reveals instead the specific class-based 'social oppression' underpinning capitalist social relations similar to the composite picture of the social relations of production emerging from *operaismo's* workers' inquiries. Where working-class realism, then, may be the aesthetic form par excellence of working-class political representation, the techniques of working-class literary avant-gardism lend themselves most readily to those forms of working-class politics stretching, challenging or rupturing with political representation and the 'density and solidity of what is'. Given the 'shared stakes of artistic and political representation', working-class literary avant-gardism therefore intervenes in the distribution of the sensible, challenging the traditional boundaries of visible/sayable, thinking through 'forms of political dissensuality' while remaining rooted in the antagonistic working-class subject position.

Bearing these two initial homologies in mind, it then follows that the third homology relates to the context in which texts are produced: that historical periods defined by upheaval or turbulence for working-class political representation and class society—with their concomitant proliferation of working-class politics stretching the limits of its political representation and/or a diminished 'density and solidity of what is'—will tend towards the coalescence of 'proletarian literary formations' which are more heterogeneous in literary output, similarly challenging traditional realist representational strategies. Meanwhile, more

settled periods—in which the ‘density and solidity of what is’ is restored and working-class political representation stabilised—will tend towards ‘proletarian literary formations’ which coalesce around literary principles more rooted in realism, embodying the political horizons of the period’s relative stability.

However, it is important here to underline some caveats: first, is that the homology proposed in this thesis is strictly historically located (as opposed to some transhistorical truth about political and aesthetic representation throughout time). It is outside the scope of this thesis to make claims about how such representational relationships manifested in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century working-class literary and political formations and similarly so with regards to the post-Thatcher era of defeated working-class institutions and political life; nor is it the interest of this thesis to hypothesise how such a homology may reappear in the event of a future reanimated working-class movement. Instead, the proposition of this thesis is that for the period under discussion, specific material conditions—including, for example, the gradual diffusion of public literacy, the popular cultural significance of the novel and widespread working-class political culture, among other things—were in place which allowed the tensions within literary and political representational forms to coexist historically. It is this historical coexistence which enables their structural homology to manifest in the specific way in which this thesis argues.

The second caveat is that such categorisations of ‘realism’ versus ‘avant-gardism’ or ‘representation’ versus ‘rupture’ are used to describe ideal types whose concrete manifestations exist on a continuum rather than as discrete or dichotomous binary oppositions. Real-life texts, historical periods and working-class political formations are composed of a combination of both rather than merely one or the other—see, for example,

the aforementioned role of the 1930s CPUSA as both agitators-from-below and representatives-from-above or the CUB at Milan's Pirelli factory as challenging union representation while not breaking with it. Similarly, texts may be composed of various elements, realist or otherwise, but whose 'specific weight' nonetheless necessitate a reading of how they pull the texts in different—even contradictory—directions. Indeed, such a theorisation is hardly new: McKeon makes this point in his critique of what he reads as the excessive rigidity in Watt's temporisation of the novel's emergence, arguing that contrary to the neat "break" between the novel and older literary forms implied by Watt, aesthetic categories are often 'broadly contemporary with those they "replace"' (2002: 19). Raymond Williams makes a similar point in his discussion of how the dominant, residual and emergent exist simultaneously in any cultural formation: while a period may undoubtedly have 'determinate dominant features', it nonetheless remains necessary to 'recognise the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance' (1977: 121). Thus, for Williams, in the structure of any society there always exists 'a social basis for elements of the cultural process that are alternative or oppositional to the dominant elements' (124), whether rooted in older cultural formations ('residual') or new ones ('emergent'). The task, then, is not neatly classificatory but an attempt to grasp the tensions within working-class representation as it manifests in both literature and politics in any given historical period.

The third caveat is that the intention of this thesis is not to designate realist texts as "bad" or "insufficiently Marxist" while avant-garde texts are "good" and "properly Marxist". Indeed, innumerable realist texts are far more progressive than many avant-garde ones and it should go without saying that a text's value does not hinge on its consideration of the labour theory of value. This thesis does not intend to relitigate the mid-twentieth-century literary critical

debates of “modernism” versus “realism” and, as Simon Dentith succinctly explains, ‘any sense of a meaningful relationship between a working-class political movement and an aesthetics that might connect with it has irretrievably disappeared, so any such choice would be nugatory’ (2003: 53). Besides this general distinction between a text’s literary worth and how progressive its politics, a more specific caveat to this thesis’ argument is that a text’s overt Marxism or espousal of revolutionary change does not itself translate into a critique of representational political forms. Rather, the point is that both realism and experiments with/away from it in working-class writing function as particular interventions in the distribution of the sensible, of what can be said or perceived with legitimacy within the sphere of working-class politics. Realism in working-class writing, as a particular ‘epistemological claim’ with its associated techniques and particular approach/relationship to social reality, lends itself more readily to appropriation by forms of working-class politics based upon a more traditional approach to representational relationships, whether these political forms call themselves ‘Marxist’, ‘revolutionary’ or otherwise.

The final caveat is that the claim in this thesis is categorically *not* that avant-garde texts are “better” than realist ones, politically or otherwise; rather, it is that particular literary practices lend themselves more readily to particular political practices and so particular texts pursuing particular political practices will tend towards particular literary practices and not others (while certain historical periods are more conducive to some political and literary practices rather than others). While the politics to which realism lends itself may have its limitations, it is not clear that extra/anti-representational working-class politics is able to exist in its absence. That some texts express politics which remain contained within the logic of representation and class society does not negate the worth of such practices, whether literary or political. For all their limits, it is entirely possible that such politics provide the basis from

which a politics rupturing with working-class representation is made possible: working-class political representation can therefore be conceived as a stumbling block, a stepping stone or, indeed, both. Moreover, working-class texts by their very nature are often those written at a social disadvantage to more famous contemporaries and the additional struggles involved for such writers in producing their texts (not to mention navigating the world of publishers and critics) should always be borne in mind as part of the extraordinary achievements of working-class writers in their storming of the canon. If nothing else, this thesis should be read as a critical appreciation and reappraisal of texts unfairly neglected within the institutions of English literature. All such texts are insurgent interventions within the distribution of the sensible; the point of this thesis is to understand the different strategies they deploy to do so and to what end as well as to place the practices of working-class representation—both literary and political—into a wider historical view than is sometimes afforded, in an attempt to produce a deeper understanding of both.

To pursue this argument, this thesis is made up of three chapters acting as snapshots of working-class writing against the backdrop of specific moments in twentieth-century class composition in Britain. Chapter One looks at British working-class fiction emerging from the calamitous defeat of the 1926 general strike followed by the Great Depression and how these events highlight the tensions within working-class political representation discussed in this introduction. The chapter highlights how, contrary to common critical assumptions and the aspirations of the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress, working-class writing in this period was not a uniformly anti-modernist social(ist) realism with many writers—particularly those around the Communist-adjacent proletarian literary formation—responding to the widespread sense of capitalism on the brink with works overtly drawing on modernist representational forms at

the same time that they often challenged traditional working-class political representational forms.

Chapter Two looks at working-class writing in the postwar period of renewed stability and political consensus around state involvement in the management of British welfare capitalism. This chapter shows how, contrary to prewar proletarian fiction, postwar working-class writing tended to embody this renewed sense of stability and unprecedented integration of the British working class—via its representative institutions—into the nation in a renewed dominance of social realist literary form as well as a conception of class that was increasingly sociological/classificatory rather than relational and antagonistic. Yet, despite this dominance, the aesthetic challenges of emergent subjectivities meant that writing from the period was neither uniformly nor unproblematically realist: Sillitoe's writing, for instance, deployed literary techniques which pushed the limits of both realist form and postwar social democracy. However, it is with the writing from that literary milieu depicting the experiences of Britain's recently arrived Caribbean migrant population—that is, those arguably most fully excluded from the postwar social contract—which tends towards far greater heterogeneity and avant-gardism than the working-class writing of their white contemporaries. Though capitalism's restored stability saw a restoration of realist dominance in working-class writing, the limits—and, therefore, potential for fracture—of consensus politics can nonetheless still be discerned in the fiction of the period. These fractures would explode by the late-1960s as the politics of consensus gradually gave way to multifaceted social conflict.

Chapter Three thus highlights how the traditional institutions of working-class political representation struggled to mediate such conflict, perhaps most spectacularly during the Winter of Discontent—when workers struck against wage restraint agreed by a Labour

government in conjunction with trade unions—but also with the diffusion of struggle to arenas where representative institutions were less entrenched, such as women’s and black liberation. Against this backdrop of revolt, the chapter analyses literary formations not often considered “proletarian”, but nonetheless of direct and significant relevance to a working-class movement whose horizons at that moment were expanding the boundaries of what was commonly understood as class politics. The return to open class antagonism, then, with its widespread challenge to traditional representational forms in politics was, once more, concurrent with a widespread challenge to traditional realist forms in literature.

Drawing on the theoretical framework outlined in this introduction, each chapter in this thesis aims to complicate traditional assumptions around working-class literature and politics.

Meanwhile, the lengthy period under discussion in the thesis as a whole—bookended by two of the most significant flashpoints in twentieth-century British working-class history—allows for a wider view of working-class writing and politics whereby the adherence to specific representational forms, rather than being necessary expressions of working-class cultural life, are in fact highly contingent and subject to challenge. This thesis, then, aims to draw out the conditions under which such challenges occur, highlighting how these two, seemingly distinct, practices of representation function in ways beyond mere analogy and are, in fact, structurally homologous.

# Chapter One: Literature in an Age of Crisis

## Crisis of labour, crisis of capital

The homology between literary and political representational practices is discernible throughout the working-class writing of the 1930s, a literary period the dominant reading of which was, until recently, as being ‘an embarrassing, if spectacular, failure’ (Croft 1990: 15). This is, to put it courteously, a gross mischaracterisation of a literary period far more heterogeneous in output than is often assumed. Yet to understand how this homology manifested in practice, it is important first to outline the context which would underpin the period’s proletarian literary formations and their output; specifically, the catastrophic defeat of the 1926 General Strike and its effects on the workers’ movement as it entered the Great Depression.

Arguably the high watermark of class struggle in Britain, the General Strike demonstrated both the collective aspirations and internal schisms of the trade union movement, as millions went on strike to support the miners in their struggle against a pay cut and extension of the working day. As Cole explains, the response was ‘practically universal [...] and remained, with only insignificant breakaways, solid to the end’, astonishing ‘not only the Government, but scarcely less the strike leaders themselves’ (1966: 419). While much has been made of the Strike’s “good-natured” character, Ferrall and McNeill, in their survey of General Strike literature, note that ‘Thousands were arrested; troops were deployed in Liverpool; dissenting leaflets and publications confiscated; riots and brawls in Edinburgh and Glasgow erupted’ (2015: 4). Though certainly not an insurrectionary moment, accounts of picket line solidity and even working-class violence undermine not only notions of the Strike’s tepidity but also highlight a rank-and-file determination far outstripping their leaders who had entered the

dispute ‘in no mood to win’ (4). Cole verifies these sentiments when he describes the trade union leadership as having ‘declared war; but [...] not meant to be taken at their word’ (1966: 418). As such, union leaders were

in a vastly complicated state of panic. They were afraid of their own followers - afraid at one and the same moment that they would drift back to work and that they would get out of hand and imitate Churchill by giving the strike a revolutionary turn. They were afraid of the Government and afraid of themselves, afraid to lead and afraid to admit failure. (420)

It was in such a state of panic that the TUC called off the Strike ‘without further consultation with the miners or the rank and file, and without any understanding from the Government either as to the acceptance of the Samuel terms or as to reinstatement’ (420) while nonetheless declaring the Strike ‘had been settled honourably on the basis of the Samuel Memorandum’ (421). Similar subterfuge was employed by individual unions: John Bromley of train drivers’ union, Aslef, claimed ‘his men were going back, and trains were running. “Unless the general strike is called off now there will be thousands of trains running”’ (Symons 1987: 208). Yet Symons, in his history of the General Strike, uses Ministry of Transport statistics to show ‘there was no considerable move on the part of railwaymen to return to work’ (208) and that Bromley, along with National Union of Railwaymen leader JH Thomas, were ‘fabricating a case almost out of whole cloth, in their eagerness to see the end of the strike’ (210). Consistent with the previous analysis of both AFL and CIO unions, the TUC’s concern was that workers’ associational power would outstrip—and ultimately supplant—the representational function of the workers’ associations. As Thomas himself explained in the House of Commons on May 13th, ‘What I dreaded about this strike more

than anything else was this: if by any chance it should have got out of the hands of those who would be able to exercise some control, every sane man knows what would have happened' (quoted in Symons 1987: 211). As the events of the Strike continued, concerns over its increasing militancy grew; union leaders 'preferred surrender to such an intensified struggle, with its implicit threat to their own power' (211).

The rank-and-file response was one of 'bewilderment that quickly turned to anger' (212). Ultimately, however, the strike disintegrated with the miners continuing alone, or rather, being locked out until driven back to work on whatever terms employers wished. As employers pressed home their advantage, the entire labour movement suffered with union membership dropping by over 1.5 million by 1927 (Cole 1966: 426). However, defeat was not felt equally throughout the movement as 'leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party were able to use the General Strike to their advantage' (Todd 2015: 58). Ferrall and McNeill concur, stating that 'top-down, centralised models of politics in both the Labour Party and trade unions came to dominate over membership-led initiatives' (2015: 5) while Cole highlights the rise of Mond-Turnerism—named after the negotiations between industrialist Sir Alfred Mond and the TUC's Ben Turner—whereby unions and employers would work together 'not merely for the prevention of disputes, but in order to launch a joint policy for the furtherance of industrial prosperity' (1966: 427). While engaged with officially by the TUC, for employers they were unofficial and in practice 'meant nothing' (428).

The disaster of the General Strike was exacerbated by the 1929 Wall Street Crash and resulting economic depression. As such, the 1930s 'was not on the whole a period of great strikes' (Klugmann 1979: 21) and, elucidates Cole, those which did occur were often unofficial, involving a 'breach of agreements entered into by the Trade Union officials with

the employers. The Trade Union leaders accused the Communists of stirring up these strikes with an entire disregard for the necessary conditions of orderly collective bargaining' (1966: 444-445). One such example is the 1931 hosiery workers strike at Leicester's Wolsey factory where its largely young female workforce—a demographic recruited with increasing frequency in the Midlands and South-East as a cheaper alternative to older male trade unionists—walked out against the scientific management of the Bedaux system, arguing it would 'reduce their earnings [and] invariably led to workers being set highly demanding targets' (Todd 2015: 103). In keeping with the Mond-Turnerist trend in industrial relations, the Leicester Hosiery Union (LHU) initially took the side of management, formally supporting the strike only some days later, before eventually calling it off on the basis of an agreement whereby the Bedaux system would still be introduced, albeit modified to allow the union 'to negotiate with the firm on pay rates for piecework' (103). Similar unilateral action by union officials was taken by the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), then led by future Labour minister Ernest Bevin, during the 1937 London Omnibus strike. Initially empowering the union's Central Bus Committee with the responsibility of conducting the dispute, it then 'recalled this power and ordered the men back to work, and subsequently signed an agreement on their behalf without consulting them' and suspending the Committee claiming it 'had fallen under the influence of "unofficial" (i.e. Communist) bodies' (Cole 1966: 445).

Numerous parallels exist between post-General Strike industrial relations in Britain and previous discussion of American labour representation functioning to contain workers' militancy. In the British context, as with the American, workers' associations buttressed their representational functions not merely while but actually *through* undermining the union's associational function. Moreover, parallels can also be observed in the dual function of

Communist Party (CPGB) militants: on the one hand, as noted by Cole, British Communists functioned as rank-and-file activists pushing at the limits of trade union representation similarly to their CPUSA counterparts; on the other hand, Joe Jacobs, former Secretary of the Stepney CPGB, discusses the Party's emphasis on 'capturing' official union positions 'in an endeavour to outmanoeuvre the right-wing Labourites in control' (1991: 193). According to Jacobs, these positions were increasingly

held to be more important and sacred than the outcome of this or that particular struggle. In the clothing industry in London, these people became identified with many defeats. No amount of explaining they were Communists who had to work in the reformist organisations and could not risk losing their positions, would satisfy the workers [...] who felt they had been betrayed and could not differentiate between Trade Union officials who called themselves Communists and those who were Labour. (193)

While undoubtedly functioning as rank-and-file militants within the trade union movement, Communists in official union roles were nonetheless subject to the same structural limitations as their social democratic counterparts with results not dissimilar to that of their American counterparts discussed previously.

However, it was mass unemployment—rather than industrial militancy—that typified the 1930s working-class experience. Todd points out that unemployment 'rose dramatically' (2015: 61) following the 1929 financial crash and by 1931, '23 percent of adult male workers were recorded as out of work, and 20 percent of women' (61-62). That year also saw the introduction of the Means Test for those claiming "Public Assistance". Todd underlines how

being means-tested was ‘as humiliating as the principle of the test was degrading’ with officers inspecting ‘an unemployed person’s home to see if they had goods they should sell before claiming benefit’ (69). Yet public discourse lauded the system: Todd cites several national newspaper editorials claiming the dole functioned as ‘an alternative source of almost permanent maintenance’ while ‘income-tax payers are, unlike the unemployed, paying out and getting no return directly for their money’ (quoted in Todd 2015: 69). Meanwhile, many unemployed felt there was simply an almost total absence of jobs available with even those apprenticed in a particular trade unable to find work after training. Many were ‘forced out of their trade once they had completed an apprenticeship and qualified for adult wage rates’ as ‘teenagers who were too young to qualify for adult wage rates were in greater demand than adult men: once they reached twenty-one they were dismissed’ (73-74).

While newspaper editors decried working-class fecklessness as the source of mass unemployment, working-class people themselves took a different view: many began to mobilise hunger marches and unemployed demonstrations under the banner of the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement (NUWM), though these were ‘frowned upon by the official Trade Union and Labour leadership on the grounds that they were conducted under Communist influence’ and were often broken up by police (Cole 1966: 441). Yet while some were radicalised by the experience of unemployment, ‘it was the hopelessness of the long-term unemployed for which the thirties became known’ (Todd 2015: 71). Investigations into long-term unemployment saw unemployed people recount their despair and bitterness ‘against all politicians of all political parties’ (76) whose experiences ‘stressed how thin the line between respectability and poverty was’ (77) as unemployment ‘cut across the divisions of the skilled and unskilled, the “respectable” and the “rough”’ (92). However, with mainstream political discourse at best disapproving of—if not actively hostile to—working-

class political action against unemployment, ‘the only legitimate role offered them by either politicians or liberal social investigators was that of helpless victim’ (94).

There was a slight return of class conflict to pre-General Strike levels from the mid-1930s onwards. However, such trends towards an antagonistic class politics would be dwarfed by the increasing urgency of anti-fascism: Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933, the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and increased activity of Mosley’s blackshirts as well as the ever-growing inevitability of war meant increasingly that the struggle against fascism was taking precedence over the struggle between classes. From this context the “Popular Front” arose, which had ‘as its base a “united front” of working-class organisations and, predicated on that, a wider popular alliance of groups and individuals opposed to fascism [which] extended to social democrats, socialists, liberals and some conservative elements’ (Taylor 2018: 7). For Communists, it increasingly seemed their ‘primary task for the time being was not the stirring up of Socialist revolution in the countries of Western Europe, but rather the defence of peace and democratic or partly democratic institutions, wherever they existed, against Fascist aggression’ (Cole 1966: 448). Thus, the Popular Front policy—regardless of arguments regarding strategic necessity—represented a move *away* from the politics of class antagonism, of rupture with class society, *towards* a cross-class alliance to save capitalism from its most monstrous offshoot. Just as working-class representation contained working-class militancy through its mediation of class antagonism (a role predicated on the continuance of class society itself), so, too, did the Popular Front integrate the working class into the defence of class society via the cross-class alliances of its representative organisations.

## Writing the crisis

Although the tumultuous post-General Strike years unsurprisingly had a significant effect on the writing of its period, the Strike itself has, bar a few notable exceptions (Miller, 1999; Davies, 2000; Shiach, 2004), been relatively neglected in literary criticism. Ferrall and McNeill put this down to a multitude of factors, from the Strike's falling between 'convenient periodising markers' such as World War One and the Great Depression (2015: 6) to its 'best writing' occurring outside England, 'the assumed centre of literary production in the Isles' as well as the general exclusion of working-class writing from most literary canons (7).

However, with numerous writers caught up in the melee of the dispute—such as Ellen Wilkinson, C. Day-Lewis, Christopher Isherwood, William Empson and Leonard Woolf to name a few—the 1926 General Strike was 'from its outset [...] always already a *literary* event' (12), even if the time-lag often accompanying events and their literary portrayals means that many of the texts dealing with the Strike were produced during the 1930s as part of that period's general proliferation of working-class writing.

The immediate context for much of this writing was the aforementioned experience of mass unemployment and the Great Depression; indeed, many working-class writers—such as Greenwood, Brierley and Hanley, among others—began their literary careers as a direct result of their own lengthy spells out of work. While working-class writers had existed previously, it was during the mid-1930s (synchronously with the Popular Front period) that saw the beginning of left-wing intellectuals actively seeking 'to discover and support working-class authors' (Hilliard, 2006: 130): 1934 saw the establishment of the *Left Review* journal while, in 1936, publisher Lawrence & Wishart was founded—out of a merger between two smaller left-wing publishing houses—as was another journal, *New Writing*, under the editorship of John Lehmann. In Hilliard's estimation, Lehmann was the most

successful supporter of working-class writing at the time’ (130), explaining that he would frequently make ‘supportive gestures to the working-class writers he sponsored. He lent money without specifying a date for repayment, and he acted as a go-between or agent, passing stories and poems on to other publications [...] and arranging opportunities for his protégés at magazines with which he had a connection’ (138). This literary ecology—of which only the barest bones have been sketched here—was tasked with an ‘institutional commitment [which] was crucial to the development of a published, native, working-class imaginative and documentary literature, and in turn to the national establishment of a lively left literary culture’ (Croft 1990: 47); this, in turn, formed the basis of what can be theorised as the British proletarian literary formation of the 1930s.

Building upon Denning’s subsequent questions around the kinds of writers and writing that proletarian literary formations produce, it is important to note that texts emerging from the increasingly developed institutional base underpinning working-class literature in Britain were typified by a number of distinctive characteristics. Cunningham highlights 1930s working-class writing as ‘a voice consciously of the provinces, the British regions to which history had consigned the industrial working-classes’ (1989: 315); indeed, of the proletarian novels discussed in this chapter, it is significant that only one (*May Day*) is set entirely in London while another (*Clash*) contains London-based sections held in tension with regional sites of action in places such as Midlands coal mining villages or the industrial towns of Northern England and Scotland. As such, it is unsurprising that ‘Working-class fiction conspicuously employed dialect, slang, and technical terms from specific industries, words and phrases outside the repertoire of “standard English”’ (Hilliard 2006: 123), though how this was deployed—either as a tool for mimetic realism, for estrangement between reader and text, or some combination of the two—differed between texts (as will be discussed below).

Unsurprisingly, and much to the chagrin of some critics, proletarian literature often focuses on the hardships of working-class life: poverty, unemployment, detailed minutiae of financial transactions (both real and potential), the strain of and alienation from everyday labour as well as workplace accidents resulting in serious injury and even death form recurrent motifs in the action of proletarian novels, as are working-class responses to such hardships in the form of strikes and demonstrations, often resulting in that other frequent motif of the genre, violent police repression. This itself has become a source of criticism with EM Forster decrying it as ‘all poverty, exasperation, disease, and attempts to free oneself’ (quoted in Cunningham 1989: 314) while Cunningham points to what he feels are issues of “triteness and melodrama of plot’ (309). Though perhaps legitimate in some instances, Cunningham’s complaints about ‘Deaths sudden, deaths gruesome [...] deaths down the pit, the deaths of good workers [...] under the tyrannical hooves of police horses [...] make a grim backdrop to a kept-up tale of life’s [...] relentless unfairness to the working-class’ (310) seems only to exhibit an utterly blasé attitude to the very real suffering of people living through arguably the most punishing decade of the twentieth century.

Less frequently discussed than its regionalism or attention to economic hardship, is proletarian fiction’s focus on the intersections between gender and class. Hubble argues that proletarian literature was not ‘simply the expression of a “predominantly white, male, manual labour force” [but] the output of a much more intersectional set of cultural values which subsequently underpinned social change outside the patriarchal hierarchy’ (2017: 40). Strong female characters are often at the heart of working-class novels, challenging societal ideals around feminine respectability, gender roles and reproductive autonomy, the last of which recurred as the ‘central fact of the fear of pregnancy’ (Worpole 1983: 99) permeating

portrayals of working-class lives already stretched to breaking point by economic crisis. However, such an intersectional approach to class and gender does not exist unproblematically within the works of proletarian writers. In her study of the British working-class novel from 1890 to 1945, Pamela Fox argues that ‘British proletarian fiction traditionally operates as a masculine genre, largely concerned with “public” and transformative experience’ (1994: 150). Therefore, romantic subplots within working-class novels and the ‘suggestive connections among romance, pleasure, individualism, and rebellion [can] serve to unsettle the whole enterprise of working-class writing’ (150), which Marxist critics have often viewed as ‘a regressive capitulation to popular taste or a sentimental substitute for the “real” political narrative’ (150-151). Yet, as Fox explains, the romantic subplot conveys ‘a longing for relations based in tenderness, rather than exploitation’ as well as ‘a utopian private arena in which one is valued for one’s *gendered* “self” alone’ (150, original emphasis) and, as such, can function in working-class fiction as a ‘means of expanding the political terrain of the proletarian novel’ (151). The intersections between gender and class thus remain a site of constant tension within the 1930s working-class novel, though a tension far more complex and productive than the postwar working-class masculinities of the next chapter.

Despite these common threads running through the genre as a whole, proletarian literature nonetheless resisted precise definition by contemporary critics. In 1935, Empson described it as a ‘popular, vague, but somehow obvious, idea’ (1995: 21), conceptualising it as ultimately a form of ‘Covert Pastoral’ (13) based on ‘a double attitude of the artist to the worker, of the complex man to the simple one (“I am in one way better, in another not so good”)’ (19). Meanwhile, Orwell had shifting views on proletarian writing, suggesting first in 1936 it was ‘all’ written by the middle classes (1970a: 288), before revising the position in 1940 to accept

proletarian writing as a 'literature of revolt' (1970b: 57) though with the caveat that the proletariat cannot 'create an independent literature while they are not the dominant class [...] their literature is and must be bourgeois literature with a slightly different slant' (54).

In a similar vein, later critical appraisals have also struggled to accurately conceptualise proletarian literature. Cunningham, for instance, criticises proletarian fiction as excessively doctrinaire, whereby its heroes, 'especially if they're Communists, as lots of them are, keep being proved doctrinally right' (1989: 311). He continues, 'Proletarian novels are generally keen on the current party line [...] and whoever puts the case for the line is always made to win his arguments' (312). Yet he also claims that regarding 'their aims, ambitions, and the theory of proletarian or socialist realist fiction, "proletarian novelists" themselves could evidently differ as sharply as their fictional practices could vary' (309), simultaneously proclaiming the heterogeneity of proletarian fiction while reducing 'proletarian' to a mere modifier of 'realism', eliding the possibility for non-realist proletarian writing. Indeed, this elision is repeated in his claim that 'products of Socialist Realism and proletarian fiction [...] were in form frequently very mouldy fig, cousins to Zola, as Zola was cousin to Balzac' (321). But as Croft argues, critics have tended to 'overstate the direct influence of Communists in English letters and to imagine that there was ever a party "line" on literature, that Communist writers, reviewers and readers all knew what it was, endlessly repeating it against their better judgement' (1995: 26). This is not to claim a complete absence of the doctrinaire within proletarian fiction but rather to situate it properly within the context of a proletarian literary formation far more heterogeneous than Cunningham admits. Moreover, such ideological intransigence—to the extent that it does exist—must also be understood as intimately linked with questions of narrative form and, in keeping with this thesis' wider argument, forms of working-class political representation. That characters—Communist or

otherwise—might be made to monologically “win their arguments” speaks not merely to the text itself but also to the text’s relationship with the practices of working-class political representation.

Yet while working-class writing was more varied than critics often credited, the image of a dogmatic and proscriptive realism was often not helped by the pronouncements of Communist critics themselves. Indeed, though Croft is correct to mock ‘the notion of British novelists dancing in unison on the end of strings pulled by the Comintern’ (1995: 27), there was nonetheless a “line” (even if frequently ignored), embodied perhaps most infamously in Radek’s description of *Ulysses* at the 1934 Soviet Writers’ Congress as a ‘heap of dung, crawling with worms, photographed by a cinema apparatus through a microscope’ (2011). Though Radek’s direct influence on British literary critical debates is questionable, his bombastic denunciation was nonetheless emblematic of broader tendencies in prewar Marxist criticism: Cunningham mentions Marxist critic Christopher Caudwell’s dismissal of modernism as “rebellious” and anarchic, rather than truly revolutionary’ (299) while *Left Review* founder Montagu Slater argued that ‘to describe things as they are is a revolutionary act in itself’ (quoted in Hilliard 2006: 117). Indeed, Denning notes how, though only codified into Marxist orthodoxy in 1934, ‘the idea of a socialist realism was [...] the culmination of decades of socialist debate’ manifesting in ‘the hegemony of realism among socialists’ (2006: 706-707), while the 1929 publication in Britain of Soviet novels such as Gladkov’s *Cement* further cultivated an atmosphere conducive to a burgeoning socialist realism and anti-modernism. Yet, nonetheless, many proletarian writers did draw on modernism for inspiration, animated by ‘aesthetic as well as social and political concerns, and conscious of being artists, they were not the unmediated voices of working-class experience they were taken to be’ (Hilliard 2006: 128-129). Thus, while high modernism was less of an influence

on 1930s working-class authors than other formal approaches, ‘modernism was not off-limits’ (160). For example, for Sid Chaplin, a distinctly non-modernist working-class writer, modernism remained ‘a stimulus but not an intellectual rupture’ (Hilliard 2005: 775), while James Hanley, whose novel *The Furrys* will be discussed in more detail below, was hugely and overtly indebted ‘to the modernist enterprise’ (779); indeed, numerous others similarly engaged with modernist aesthetics, some of whom—like Hanley—will be discussed in this chapter. What these writers reveal is that any supposed elitism within modernism did not go uncontested: what Raymond Williams correctly highlights as an ambivalence within modernism’s anti-bourgeois hostility, which he argued ‘could go either way’ to ‘find its place either in a new social order or in a culturally transformed but otherwise persistent and recuperated old order’ (2007: 62), can be reconfigured in light of the discussions hitherto around proletarian literary formations and working-class engagement with modernism. What Fordham describes as the ‘galvanic force’ of modernism in the hands of the working-class writer resolves the aforementioned ambivalence noted by Williams to find its place within the new social order.

Yet while both modernism and realism held significance within 1930s working-class writing, debates around the “proper” or “improper” form for the promotion of proletarian politics continued within left-wing literary criticism. In 1937, John Lehmann claimed that not only would a socialist society ‘eventually discover new forms for its culture, but also that the Soviet Union is in the process of making these discoveries’ and ‘is likely in a very few years to give something entirely new to the world’ (1937: 581). However, for Cunningham, ‘the desired new literary forms simply kept failing to materialise in the desired fashion’ (1989: 318) as ‘literary forms proved widely resistant to change. [...] For all that the novel was made to include proletarian dialect-speakers, the larger grammar and ideolect of the form stuck

more or less sturdily to the same old and received bourgeois style' (319). Interestingly, Cunningham's criticism of proletarian literature here is problematic for the same reason it is understandable; that is, that he accepts at face value—and responds to—the claims of left-wing critics (in this instance, John Lehmann) whose theoretical framework is significantly informed by the Marxist-Leninist tradition then hegemonic within the 1930s radical left and whose socialism was modelled on a Soviet Union built upon the continuation of 'capitalist forms in the relations of production both at the factory level and at the level of overall social production' (Panzieri 1976: 22). Such a vision of socialism—in which work is maintained as a separate sphere of social life based on wage labour and commodity production—necessitates an idealisation of "the worker" as a positive identity, lionised specifically in its role as a producer of commodities, with the Stakhanovite movement arguably its most egregious example. These tendencies manifested also within Britain's left-intelligentsia, such as novelist Alec Brown's statement that the 'writer who is allying himself to the proletariat' is 'proletarianising himself, in the deepest sense' (quoted in Cunningham 1989: 320). Whereas Marx conceptualises the proletariat as the 'negative side of the antithesis', 'compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat' (1956: 36), "proletarianess" as configured by Brown—and frequently within the Marxist-Leninist tradition more generally—becomes a positive identity, a set of qualities held to be innate in or aspirational for individuals. However, in such a perspective the working class is transformed from the social group to bring about socialism into its metonym—as in the "workers' state", for instance—and, as such, reaffirming the social relations which necessitate the existence of a proletariat. Thus, proletarian literature was often erroneously expected—by supporters and critics alike—to produce 'new forms' while still existing within the "old society" (or, in the Soviet Union's case, a "new society" based upon relations of production highly reminiscent of the old), the

assumption being that proletarian writing can break with bourgeois forms by virtue of a quality of “non-bourgeoisness” while nonetheless remaining proletarian in a bourgeois society.

Instead of such chimeric expectations on proletarian writing—and subsequently excoriating it for its inevitable “failures”—a more productive analysis may be to view it as, to use Raymond Williams’s terminology, an ‘emergent’ culture ‘oppositional to the dominant elements’ of its contemporary cultural formation; or, alternatively, drawing on Jameson, *paroles* within an irreducibly antagonistic class *langue*. In situating the working-class text as part of—and so constituted by while simultaneously antagonistic to—the wider cultural formation, emphasis can be placed on its strategies for negotiating social antagonism, as opposed to adjudicating “success” or “failure” in its “break” from bourgeois forms. With this in mind, it is instructive to turn to Carole Snee’s discussion of the class nature of literature itself<sup>6</sup>. Snee argues that ‘the written word is not a mode of discourse which has been developed by the working class’, itself ‘excluded from the dominant literary language’ with realism therefore ‘the most readily available mode of expression for writers not schooled within a literary tradition’ (1979: 167). Yet Snee also highlights, similarly to discussions in the previous chapter, that the

language and structure of the traditional realist novel is a mode of discourse developed and ascribed value by the dominant class; it reifies and codifies its experience and its perception of reality, and privileges certain feelings and experiences, whilst implicitly condemning others. (168)

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<sup>6</sup> Snee herself is not immune to adjudicating “success” and “failure” in working-class fiction with Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* judged to have “failed” while Lewis Jones’ *Cwmardy* “succeeding.” For a good critique of Snee’s proscriptions, see Fox (1994: 60-61).

According to Snee, then, while ‘form is not “neutral” [...] neither are its structural limits so rigid that they can only accommodate one particular perception of reality’ (168). Elucidating further, she states

There is not one unified class ideology which exists without contradictions, nor is ideological hegemony imposed from above, but demands all kinds of negotiations and concessions between the dominant and subaltern groups. Thus working-class writing can exist within the dominant cultural formation, but in contradiction to it [...] the realist novel [...] can also incorporate a *conscious* ideological or class perspective, which in itself undercuts the ideological parameters of the genre, without necessarily transforming its structural boundaries. (169)

Pamela Fox—though critical of Snee’s terminological proscriptions—makes comparable arguments when she expresses her misgivings that a preoccupation with avant-gardism ‘misidentifies the cultural resources available to working-class writers’ who have a different relationship to the discursive realm where there is no neat separation between ‘the act of recording their experience “truthfully” through language’ and ‘contesting dominant culture through language’ (1994: 22). Fox highlights how Marxist literary critics find themselves ‘caught between championing the challenge to hegemonic ideological values that [proletarian] texts pose and cringing over their seeming distance from other kinds of counter-hegemonic literary values’ (1994: 46); when working-class texts already exist as *parole* in a class *langue* in dialogue—that is, conflict—with those of the dominant class. Using Snee’s and Fox’s analyses, then, realism in working-class writing can be ‘considered an oppositional strategy in itself, a deliberate choice of the working-class writer potentially leading to wide-

ranging reform if not outright insurrection' (Fox 1994: 47) while still limited by the 'structural boundaries' of the form.

Snee's and Fox's analyses in defence of realism as a working-class literary practice are significant not merely for their validation of a significant tradition within working-class writing but also because they add nuance to Jameson's argument regarding realism's 'structural and inherent conservatism'. They highlight an absence—an *impensé*, even—in Jameson's second concentric framework around the dialogical relationship between class *langues*: that is, while Jameson correctly grasps the 'irreconcilable demands' and antagonistic relationship between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic *langues*, he does not discuss disunities and internal contradictions within class ideology. As such, what goes untheorised is the existence *within* an oppositional class *langue* of individual *parole* which *do* attempt to reconcile the 'irreconcilable demands' and mediate the dialogue between class *langues*. For example, the trade unionism observed during the Wolsey, London Omnibus and 1926 strikes—despite their respective ignoble conclusions—cannot simply be conceived as hegemonic class ideology or strategy (at least not entirely or immutably). Rather, it is more fruitful to conceive it as neither wholly hegemonic nor counter-hegemonic but rather an 'oppositional strategy' ultimately limited by the 'structural boundaries' of its form. Therefore, rather than entirely contradicting Jameson's point regarding realism's 'inherent conservatism', Snee and Fox refine it: like trade union officialdom or social democracy, working-class realism is an 'oppositional strategy in itself' (à la Fox), existing 'within the dominant cultural formation [...] without necessarily transforming its structural boundaries' (à la Snee). In such a theorisation, the works of working-class literary realism are not, as Cunningham may have put it, failed attempts at new forms which nonetheless stick 'sturdily to the same old and received bourgeois style'; rather, they remain *paroles* in a counter-

hegemonic class *langue*, ‘contesting dominant culture through language’, while simultaneously negotiating the limits of hegemonic ideology through the form’s ‘structural and inherent conservatism’.

## Woolf, Lawrence and the circumvention of antagonism

Proletarian fiction was part of an ‘emergent consensus that social conditions could not continue as they were’ (Hubble, 2017: 6), of which Britain’s 1930s proletarian literary formation was only one expression. Indeed, even the wider avant-garde movements of the period were absorbed by this consensus; yet, as discussed in the introduction, avant-gardism—in and of itself—does not necessarily signify a rupture with or challenge to working-class political representation, nor even the espousal of radical political positions. It therefore becomes interesting to look at the works of modernist writers following—and, in part, responding to—the General Strike in order to better understand how avant-gardism, in and of itself, does not necessarily resolve the political-aesthetic difficulties of realism’s ‘structural boundaries’. One example being Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927), centred around the Ramsay family summer home and their various crises emerging from the devastation of World War One. Published the year following the General Strike, Woolf began work on the novel’s ‘Time Passes’ section on April 30th 1926, completing it mostly during the Strike itself (Ferrall and McNeill 2015: 69). Interestingly, and somewhat indicatively, Woolf’s diary from the time makes little mention of the Strike (69), though does—once the strike was defeated—express sympathy with the workers (71).

Ferrall and McNeill read Woolf’s ambivalence against the arc of her drafts of *To the Lighthouse* and the evolution of Charles Tansley’s character in particular. Tansley unambiguously represents the politicised proletariat, the son of a ‘working man’ who ‘went

on talking, about settlements, and teaching, and working men, and helping our own class' (Woolf 2002: 9). But he is also depicted as a generally disagreeable character: rude, arrogant and deeply misogynistic though mildly pitiable in his desire for 'somebody to give him the chance of asserting himself. [...] Why did no one ask him his opinion?' (65); interpersonally he proves difficult for the house's middle-class inhabitants who only through force of will and a large dose of benevolence overcome their initial distaste. Mr Bankes, for example, does 'his best to make allowances' for Tansley, instructing himself to observe his more positive traits (68).

Yet the version of Tansley that finally appears in the novel is in fact one which, during Woolf's drafting, became 'more sympathetic in a wider pattern of individual solutions and also removes some of his political resentment and the kinds of demands being made on her that she resented' (Ferrall and McNeill 2015: 76). Read like this, Woolf's strategy seems one geared towards an accommodation of the working class while recognising the barriers to such accommodation on the part of the middle classes. However, as Ferrall and McNeill argue, as such accommodation requires the removal of those class demands which Woolf herself resented, the "class problem" is resolved through its redrafting 'into purely interpersonal relation. Woolf charts a middle way between exclusion and the recognition of social conflict' (72).

This 'middle way' can be seen in how Woolf constructs Mr Bankes' compliments to Mrs Ramsay about a dinner she had organised: 'It was perfectly cooked. How did she manage these things in the depths of the country? he asked her. She was a wonderful woman. All his love, all his reverence had returned' (Woolf 2002: 72-73). Here, Bankes erases labour entirely from the texture of the house: the 'she' referred to above is clearly Mrs Ramsay

(hence his ‘love’ and ‘reverence’ returning) rather than the cook whose labour produced the dinner. However, this erasure is categorically *not* Woolf’s but Mr Bankes’, as evidenced in ‘Time Passes’. Spanning the entirety of the First World War, it sees the Ramsays experience a series of crises, including the deaths of two children and Mrs Ramsay herself while the summer home is left empty, maintained only by the onerous efforts of their servants, Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast. Performing her duties, Mrs McNab thinks ‘It was not easy or snug this world she had known for close on seventy years [...] How long, she asked, creaking and groaning on her knees under the bed, dusting the boards, how long shall it endure?’ (97). Mrs McNab thus provides an alternative perspective on class society, her ‘creaking and groaning’ echoing that of the bed underlining a symmetry of how both the servant and the bed itself support the comfort of those who lie on it. Furthermore, through the servants’ subjectivities, a glimpse is afforded of the cook—and therefore a recognition of her labour previously erased Bankes—ascribing her a degree of individuality (albeit limited) (102).

Woolf thus resists the exclusion of working-class perspectives from her narrative by showing how the servants’ labour keeps the house together as the Ramsays are engulfed by crisis— itself possibly symbolic of the working-class women who entered the workforce during the war. Woolf’s narrative strategy, then, while drawing attention to the role of working people in society as a counterweight to bourgeois post-Strike triumphalism, limits itself at the “acknowledgement” or “recognition” of class in British society. Woolf’s recognition—contra Bankes’ erasure—of the labour which maintains the Ramsay home combined with her sanitisation of Tansley’s political bitterness functions as an intervention in post-General Strike public discourse ‘without taking sides [...] against *both* the excesses and short-sightedness of Britain’s political class *and* the “narrow” sectionalism of the workers’ movement’ (Ferrall and McNeill 2015: 62, original emphasis). “Acknowledgement” and

“recognition” of interwar Britain’s class differences are, in Woolf’s novel, ultimately strategies for circumventing class antagonism.

A similar circumvention of antagonism is evident in DH Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928), in which the upper-class Connie Chatterley begins an affair with Mellors, her husband’s gamekeeper, entering into a passionate and sexually liberated world<sup>7</sup>. However, contrary to Woolf’s acknowledgement of class difference at the expense of class antagonism, the existence of class antagonism has a prominent position in Lawrence’s narrative, no doubt influenced by his observations upon his return to the Midlands mining villages of the ‘misery’ and ‘families living on bread and margarine and potatoes – nothing more’ during the post-Strike lockout (Lawrence 1989: 536). Thus, Lawrence is scathing of industrial capitalism as ‘a world of iron and coal, the cruelty of iron and the smoke of coal, and that endless, endless greed that drove it all’ (2007: 124-125) while the impotence of Lady Chatterley’s husband Clifford is itself a comment on the class he symbolises, his virility returning only in sublimated form through bursts of productivity while administering his mines (128). By contrast, Connie’s affair with Mellors, the gamekeeper, represents part of what Hubble describes as Lawrence’s ‘utopian imagination’ of an ‘implicitly classless and not-sexually-repressed future’ (2017: 88).

One moment in which the possibility of such a future is glimpsed is in a passage where Connie mimics Mellors’ use of dialect:

“Sholl ter?” she echoed, teasing.

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<sup>7</sup> It would be amiss not to point out, however, the phallogocentric nature of Lawrence’s ‘sexual liberation’, highlighted in numerous critiques from feminist scholars. See Chapter 5 of Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) for the earliest such engagement.

He smiled.

“Ay, sholl ter?” he repeated.

“Ay!” she said, imitating the dialect sound.

“Yi!” he said.

“Yi!” she repeated.

[...]

He laughed at her quickly.

“Nay, tha canna,” he protested.

“Why canna I?” she said.

He laughed. Her attempts at the dialect were so ludicrous (2007: 155)

In Bakhtinian terms, such an exchange would usually serve to reinforce the centripetal forces within the national language (and the class hierarchy thus implied). However, the amiable tone (exemplified in Mellors’ ‘smiling’ and ‘laughing’) and reciprocity of gentle mockery (Connie is ‘teasing’ but Mellors laughs at her ‘ludicrous’ attempts), while not collapsing class distinctions, nonetheless undermine and transform their usual hierarchical distinction into one of simple difference, allowing for a relationship based on tenderness rather than exploitation and antagonism.

Despite his ‘utopian imagination’, however, Lawrence’s attitude towards social antagonism is deeply ambivalent. Thus, a local colliers’ strike, rather than offering any kind of radical promise, is instead ‘the bruise of the war that had been in abeyance, slowly rising to the surface and creating the great ache of unrest, and stupor of discontent’ (2007: 41). This characterisation of unrest through the language of injury creates a parallel with Clifford’s own debilitation, positioning both sides of the class antagonism as equivalents within the

same passionless inhumanity. This theme of universal implication in the alienating social processes of capitalism pervades the text: from Connie's comment that the only class now in existence was the 'moneyboy and the moneygirl, the only difference was how much you'd got, and how much you wanted' (89) or Mellors' lamenting the lack of 'men to fight side by side with' as all were 'outside there, glorying in the Thing, triumphing or being trodden down in the rush of mechanised greed' (103). Blame for the 'endless greed' that drives this 'world of iron and coal' is therefore shared amongst everyone, both those 'triumphing' and those 'trodden down', all moneyboys and moneygirls participating in the 'rush of mechanised greed'.

Against such a framework, Lawrence therefore reconfigures class struggle into the syntactically similar, though conceptually diminished, 'wage-squabble' with 'no solution. The only thing was not to care, not to care about the wages' (2007: 123). Yet a conspicuous silence abounds around Connie's financial means upon which the viability of her romance with Mellors (post-separation from Clifford) is secured—and which, ironically, keeps them both in significantly more comfort than any of the "moneyboy" colliers engaged in the 'wage-squabble'. Raymond Williams captures well the issue with Lawrence that he 'again and again rejects [...] the idea and the practice of social agencies of change' (1973: 268). Williams, like Hubble, underlines how Lawrence 'stresses the future much more than the past, and the change is to be absolute, root and branch' (268); but Williams also notes how Lawrence ultimately sees 'revolutionary movements as simply fights about property' (268). Despite his critique of the 'world of iron and coal' and radical utopian vision, Lawrence ultimately refuses partisanship in social antagonism. Rather, the express desire of his novel is that those 'trodden down' and those doing the treading put aside their 'wage-squabble' and

choose simply ‘not to care’, not only about poverty and inequality but also the fundamentally conflictual relationships which underpin class society.

To an extent, the destinations of Woolf’s and Lawrence’s novels differ significantly: *To the Lighthouse* seeks greater accommodation of the working class within a reformed—but ultimately preserved—class hierarchy while *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* intimates the radical utopianism of an entirely classless future, albeit while eschewing ‘the real movement which abolishes the present state of things’ (Marx 1932). However, the intention of these readings is not merely to show that modernists responded to the post-1926 social antagonisms, but rather to acknowledge that avant-gardism does not—in and of itself—necessarily challenge or rupture working-class political representation or the class society on which it is predicated. Both novels certainly contain aspects of a politics abjuring such practices (for instance, around gendered interiorities and interpersonal relationships). However, the technical innovations of these novels, while performing that function outlined by Auerbach—of revealing the ‘wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment’ concerning ‘the elementary things which men in general have in common’—apply them to the ends of circumventing class antagonism and so find themselves contained within either the moderate limits of a reformed class hierarchy or an eschewal of the very class militancy with the potential to make its utopian imagination a reality. The radical potentiality of these novels’ respective forms are dislocated from the conflictual class contents of their period and consequently the possibility of rupture with the logic of working-class political representation is defused.

Representing the class “as it is”: Greenwood, Brierley and Wilkinson

With this in mind, it becomes relevant to discuss those working-class texts which, in contrast to Woolf's and Lawrence's modernist aesthetics, use realist formal practices to depict the collective experience of working-class life but which nevertheless remain 'oppositional strategies' or *parole* within a class *langue*. Following the romances of two young working-class couples as economic crisis hits the fictional northern industrial community of Hanky Park, Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) is arguably the most famous working-class novel of the period, reissued ten times between 1934 and 1937 (Todd 2015: 79). It recounts the working-class experience of the Great Depression with startling accuracy: the aforementioned dismissal of apprentices just as they qualify for adult wages is depicted in Harry Hardcastle's narrative arc, forewarned by socialist activist (and suitor to Harry's sister, Sally) Larry Meath: 'All Marlowe's want is cheap labour; and the apprentice racket is one of their ways of getting it' (Greenwood 1993: 47). Meanwhile, the emotional toll of unemployment on Harry and his relationship with Helen is recounted, leaving them with 'nothing to discuss save their own misery [and] to discuss this was to play with fire, to invite a quarrel' (176) while the occasional deployment of a general 'you' within the narration underlines the collective nature of the malaise: 'You fell into the habit of slouching, of putting your hands in your pockets and keeping them there; of glancing at people, furtively, ashamed of your secret, until you fancied that everybody eye you with suspicion' (169). Socialist activism also features in the novel, largely through the central romantic figure of Larry, culminating in an unemployed demonstration violently repressed by police—among whom is Sally's spurned admirer, Ned—and during which Larry is fatally injured.

Given this, it seems peculiar for Snee to describe *Love on the Dole* as a 'curiously unpolitical' (1979: 172) novel whose romance plot 'confuses and mystifies the nature of personal relations' (173). This exemplifies Fox's comment regarding Marxist critics'

tendency to view romance as a “distraction” from the “real” politics rather than a means by which the terrain of politics can be expanded. Indeed, Snee’s accusation seems to misidentify the role which romance plays within Greenwood’s novel. Certainly, on the surface, Larry and Sally seem to function as archetypal romantic leads, but their romance is ultimately stifled by social conditions as Larry is made redundant (due in significant part to his socialist activism). Doubting whether they should marry now that he is unemployed, Larry—rationally grasping society’s economic underpinnings—exclaims ‘Forty-five bob a week. What a wage to build a future on’ (Greenwood 1993: 151), to which Sally, representing the romantic drive to be together regardless of circumstance, replies ‘D’y’ love me?’ (151) before declaring ‘It aint where y’ live, it’s who y’ live with’ (152).

Ultimately, Larry is proven correct, killed by the class society which makes their romance impossible. When Larry dies, so too does Sally’s belief in romance, replaced with a pragmatic realism that sees her decide to become the mistress of wealthy bookmaker, Sam Grundy. While viewed by some critics, such as Webster (1984), as purely a representation of how capitalism debases the working class, Hubble points out how Sally’s decision also ‘embodies a powerful rejection of traditional working-class values’ (2017: 107) which sees her resist aggressive opposition from her family (during which she is physically assaulted by her father). But her decision comes from a realistic appraisal of what working-class life has to offer and a desire to struggle for more: ‘It’s sick Ah am o’ codgin owld clothes t’ mek’em luk summat like. An’ sick Ah am o’ workin’ week after week an’ seein’ nowt for it’ (Greenwood 1993: 246). Sally’s pragmatism not only undermines the bourgeois idealism that “love conquers all” but also how notions of respectability—both gender and class—are as ideological as romantic fiction itself. Sally’s father asks himself despairingly, ‘What had he done for his children? [...] What had he been *able* to do other than what had been done? [...]

He'd worked all his life; he had given all he had to give' (248) while her mother declares 'We've allus bin respectable' (253) underscoring the aforementioned realisation during the Great Depression of the porous division between "respectable" and "rough". Seen this way, Sally's relationship with Grundy becomes a rejection of "respectably" accepting one's lot and a pursuance of class struggle within the sphere of interpersonal relations. 'Ah knows what money means, now', Sally tells Mrs Bull, 'he's got it an' by God Ah'll mek him pay' (245). As such, romance is validated within the narrative, becoming 'part and parcel of the text's socialist vision [...] The failure of romance in working-class lives becomes a measure of its value, something that could be accessible under a different social system' (Fox 1994: 185). Socialism's necessity is affirmed by the novel's romance plot, while romance's death at the hands of class society becomes an opportunity for the critique of capitalist rationality and its ideological justifications.

The desire for romance in working-class lives is therefore reaffirmed at the moment in which the romantic novel is subverted towards social realist ends. Yet this subversion is not without its contradictions; for while Sally undermines gender norms in her relationship with Sam Grundy (and with a degree of agency rather than as a helpless victim), the narrative arc of the novel as a whole suggests a yearning for a society in which such a subversion would be unnecessary. For example, when Harry and Helen enjoy their holiday by the sea, this 'emerges as the novel's primary utopian scenario' with them 'playing husband and wife' (186). Similarly, in the passage regarding Larry's doubts about marriage while Sally works and he claims dole, a 'humiliating picture of himself living under such an arrangement flashed through his mind. It stank: it smacked of Hanky Park at its worst' (1993: 192). The two passages thus juxtaposed form obverse reflections of each other: the former, a utopian future of working-class material comfort and stabilised gender roles, while the latter,

contemporary reality, is defined by mass unemployment and poverty driving those roles' 'humiliating' destabilisation.

As Haywood argues, the passage between Larry and Sally evinces 'Larry's deep-seated conservatism about gender roles in marriage – beneath his bohemian exterior, he aspires to be the breadwinner' (1997: 55). Yet it also reveals another neglected aspect of Larry's function within the narrative to contain working-class desires. In the example above, such containment of desire is primarily emotional; however, in others, its overtly political nature is more explicit. For example, during an unemployed demonstration at which a fiery speaker 'passionately inveighed against the government and urged all to resist' (Greenwood 1993: 198), Larry's subsequent speech 'began with a repudiation of the previous speaker; urged his audience to appreciate the preparations, in the way of attendant police, which had been made in anticipation of any disorderliness' (198). Indeed, his entire participation in the demonstration is defined by a resistance to militancy, responding to police obstruction with 'We'd better do as we're told' (202) and, more instructively, becoming fearful for 'the outcome of this demonstration' as the 'crowd was [sic] become enormous' (203); that is, it is the crowd's increasing size and potential uncontrollability which forms the primary source of his concern.

Larry is both the novel's hero and most prominent socialist yet his function in the novel is ultimately to contain working-class radicalism. Indeed, his containment of both emotional and political desires are fused during the marriage argument when Sally cries, 'Why don't them Labour Councillors as're allus makin' a mug out o' y' find a job for y'? They're all right, they are; don't care a damn for us. They've all landed good jobs for 'emselves' (193). As with why they cannot live together on Sally's wages while he is unemployed, no real

response is given. Instead, Sally apologises for the outburst: to her romantic revolt against the patriarchal capitalist order—her demand for the impossible—Larry responds (or, rather, does not) with a request for the realistic. In the final instance it is Larry's position, rather than Sally's, which is borne out in the narrative.

Such containment of working-class desires is reinforced in Greenwood's juxtaposition of vernacular and Standard English with most characters—Larry excluded—speaking in vernacular contrasted with a Standard English narrative voice to create what Colin MacCabe describes, in his discussion of the 'classic realist text', as 'a hierarchy amongst the discourses which compose the text' with that hierarchy being around who or what in the text is able to possess and control 'the empirical notion of truth' (1985: 34). For MacCabe, this hierarchy of discourses manifests in the function of the narrative prose as 'a metalanguage' which, paralleling Spivak, is 'transparent' in that it is 'not regarded as material' but rather lets 'the identity of things shine through the window of words' (35). Thus, it

can state all the truths in the object language – those words held in inverted commas – and can also explain the relation of this object to the real. The metalanguage can thereby explain the relation of this object language to the world and the strange methods by which the object languages attempt to express truths which are straightforwardly explained in the metalanguage. (35)

This hierarchy of discourses between narrative prose and characters' speech is reinforced by the juxtaposition of Standard and non-Standard English. Indeed, narration may shift from an omniscient, heterodiegetic perspective to free indirect discourse yet—regardless of perspective—it remains in Standard English, contrasting (sometimes sharply) with the

novel's vernacular dialogues. In one passage, Harry expresses himself saying, "'Ah can please meself, can't Ah? Ah knows what Ah'm doin'". The impudence; the manner of her assumption!' (1993: 45-46). Greenwood conveys Harry's thoughts using language the character would not himself use, made more conspicuous by its positioning immediately after an utterance replete with regional pronunciation and non-standard grammatical structures. For Webster, the 'range of contradictory linguistic registers ascribed to characters and the world beyond' is a way of 'indicating the nature of their imprisonment within a bourgeois and bourgeois-literary ideology. It is one of the ways in which the text can be seen to question its own realism' (1984: 53). However, this ignores the ways in which the text uses Standard English to privilege some subjectivities, particularly Larry's, over others. As Fox explains, 'Larry's polite manners and standard dialect are [...] a "reflection" of his enlightened class perspective', pointing out Sally's self-consciousness at the 'loose way' of her speech (1994: 82). Furthermore, Haywood shows how the intellectual gap between Larry and Sally is 'cruelly highlighted by the narrator' when Sally tells her family about the 'discussions of "Marks", "Bark" and "Baytoven"' during her day out with Larry (1997: 54). In this instance, the joke is Greenwood's, shared with the educated reader at Sally's expense, another strategy in undermining her subjectivity (and so the validity of her desires) with respect to Larry's.

Rather than undermining, as Webster suggests, bourgeois literary values, the use of vernacular is in fact part of a wider pattern mediating the novel's inherently oppositional politics with those bourgeois literary values; or otherwise: it is a *parole* in a class *langue*, but one seeking rapprochement with its antagonistic *langue*. It is towards this end that Larry is the only character to share a Standard English vernacular with the largely omniscient, heterodiegetic narration while also promoting a form of working-class politics which eschews

militancy. Indeed, as Snee argues, for a text whose action spans the period from 1923 to 1931, it is curious that no mention is made of the General Strike (1979: 172). Thus, while the text's application of conventions common to both the romantic novel and social realism to the struggles of 1930s working-class life creates a productive tension from which the novel's oppositional politics emerge, the novel's formal strategies nonetheless serve to restrict the radical potentiality of those politics.

Similar issues surface in Walter Brierley's *Means-Test Man* (1935), describing a week in the life of Jack Cook, an unemployed Derbyshire miner, as he and his wife await the arrival of the eponymous "means-test man" to authorise their claim for public assistance. The furtive glancing and shame described in *Love on the Dole* returns as Jack fears the judgement of 'idleness' (Brierley 1983: 79) from others in his pit village: 'he could never be at ease about Wingrove streets; he wasn't a normal villager, something was lacking in him' (80).

Moreover, like Helen and Harry's constant existence on the cusp of an argument, the strain of unemployment manifests similarly on Jack's relationship with his wife, Jane, where 'a moment's weakness might lead to the very core of domestic accord being poisoned or ripped away' (66). In keeping with the motifs of working-class writing, the Cooks' economic privation is palpable with each outing cross-examined for possible expenditure: whether or not John's son will pay a penny to watch a cricket match (25), whether or not to spend half a penny for a snack (32), whether or not unforeseen events will take place—such as their son falling ill—meaning the weekly budget 'would be completely disorganised' (16). Such tensions explode into a state of unmitigated crisis when Jack loses three pennies from a hole in his pocket before accidentally breaking a cup, his wife shouting, 'I've never seen such a fumbling fool in my life' (182).

Significantly, while the suffocating stress and shame of unemployment dominate the action of the novel, the means-test man himself hardly features at all aside from in a short section towards the novel's end. Certainly, that section is arguably the novel's most unsparing, mirroring historical accounts of humiliation as the means-test man enters the house with a 'faint swagger' (257), engaging in a litany of questions which leaves Jane 'sick, full of misery and shame, as if she were standing naked before decent men and women' (261). Yet, emotionally trying as the encounter is, the briefness—relative to the novel as a whole—of the means-test man's appearance in a text named after him serves as testament to how fully he dominates the Cooks' lives even in his absence and, therefore, how the government policy for which he is symbolic so utterly dominates the lives of the unemployed.

Snee is marginally more charitable to *Means-Test Man* than she is to *Love on the Dole*, describing Brierley as having 'no conscious ideological project, other than the traditional realist impulse to "tell things as they are"'. [The novel's] empirical observations of life on the dole cause him to challenge and refute the then current misconceptions and commonsense notions about the unemployed' (1979: 177). Meanwhile, Fox argues its 'immediate and dramatic commercial success was attributed to its non-threatening message and decidedly bourgeois literary trappings' (1994: 135), adding that its 'non-tendentious form and fatalistic theme brought praise from mainstream reviewers [...] and condemnation from such quarters as the *Daily Worker*' (136). Indeed, the novel does seem directed primarily towards the perspective of public discourse in its construction of a helpless working-class protagonist: in contrast to Larry Meath, Jack Cook is almost entirely devoid of any class politics, the local church being a far larger part of his social network than his trade union. This is enhanced by his archetypally Christian temperament, described at one point as 'by nature quiet [...] eager to conform to every moral and social law which the tribe of which he was an ordinary

member imposed' (Brierley 1983: 98). Jack also eschews militant action, feeling, instead of 'breaking shop windows for their sakes or chivying Members of Parliament [...] just a sorrow, just a sadness because things were as they were' (67). Given the context of sometimes violent unemployed demonstrations, such a statement must be construed as an implicit repudiation, reinforced through the portrayal of Jane's anger where—mirroring the bitterness of contemporary accounts of unemployment discussed above—she 'hated her fellow-beings, her husband included, and hate now tainted her whole being' (67). Fox cites a contrast in 'political sensibilities' (1994: 141) between Jack and Jane, whereby Jack hates systems while Jane hates individuals. Yet this downplays the political nature of Jane's hatred: reading a newspaper report about a new unemployment law, Jane sees 'a picture of a cabinet minister on the beach at Brighton. In that moment she had felt near her enemy somehow [...] behind her hate and anger was a strong activity reaching out towards something definite' (Brierley 1983: 102) while later in the novel she contemplates doing 'something' to draw attention to her suffering: 'Shoot a Cabinet minister or an archbishop [...] just to make people listen for a while' (196). Jane's anger, directionless as it is hopeless, nonetheless performs the novel's political function of mitigating against association with militant working-class politics: John is the novel's hero, the meek, deserving and respectable working man made unemployed through no fault of his own and whose situation is in need of amelioration lest it incubate the sort of rage embodied by Jane, archetypally feminine in its "irrationality" and "uncontrollability" but nonetheless 'reaching out towards something definite'.

The explicit political strategy of the novel remains that of appealing for social reform through depicting unemployment's deleterious effects on the working class while articulating them primarily through the more respectable discourses of family, religion and nation and deemphasising the decidedly unrespectable discourse of class. Thus, unemployment is

frequently associated with emasculation, with Jack going about his domestic chores with ‘the gentleness of a woman’ (9). Moreover, the egregious humiliation at the hands of the means-test man is expressed in terms stabilising gender roles and the nuclear family: under the weight of increasingly invasive questioning, Jack and Jane are described with tragic irony as the ‘master and mistress of a household – the two heads of a home – husband and wife in their castle – English. And this man sat here at a table where grace used to be said’ (263). The tragedy of this passage lies in the means test’s assault on the family home, an invasion into the proverbial Englishman’s castle and the subsequent detrimental effects on the family’s participation in the religious life of the nation. The book’s “message” is then explained following the means-test man’s departure, as Jack embraces his emotionally-shattered wife, telling her ‘If all the women in England could feel for a minute what you’ve gone through this morning, there’d be no more of it’ (267), the novel’s stark plot serving to develop the national empathy necessary to ensure such an outcome.

Yet underlying the novel’s explicit appeals to benevolent social reform (and promotion of John’s conciliatory outlook against Jane’s overtly antagonistic one) is Jane’s unacknowledged existence as the very social “threat” which—though the narrative attempts to silence it as irrational or unsympathetic—nonetheless remains integral to what makes John’s meekness so politically attractive. Haywood argues that the ‘political unconscious of the Cooks’ story is the previous century of working-class struggle for emancipation and decent living standards’ (1997: 68). As with *Love on the Dole*, the General Strike and trade unionism (particularly significant given the prominent position of the miners’ union within pit villages) are almost completely erased in favour of a diffident or submissive request for benevolence. Yet despite the text’s attempts to expunge antagonism from within its boundaries, the novel’s unstated—and unstateable—subtext, its *impensé* or *non-dit*, comes

from the threat posed by its very inability to expunge it completely: that concealed—from itself as much as anything—beneath its appeal to benevolence, is the reality that society must deal with the causes of John’s sorrows, or else deal with the consequences of Jane’s anger, lest it reach out towards something more definite.

While both *Love on the Dole* and *Means-Test Man* omit or openly disavow explicit reference to class conflict, Ellen Wilkinson’s *Clash* (1929) centres the 1926 General Strike in its narrative as trade union organiser, Joan Craig, finds herself entangled in a “love triangle” during the dispute. In contrast to *Love on the Dole*, however, rather than expanding the terrain of politics, Wilkinson’s novel, shies away from affording romance the same integrated position within its political vision. Rather, the resolution of Joan’s dilemma is accomplished through ‘combining an authentic working-class identity with a stable gender identity (a “good” working-class woman rebel)’ (Fox 1994: 175), choosing a life with Gerry Blain and dedication to the workers’ movement rather than pursuing her passionate affair with Bloomsbury intellectual Tony Dacre. Though Wilkinson does have Joan develop an affection for Gerry, it appears almost as a last-minute afterthought in literally the final sentence of the novel, ‘And then she saw Blain’s eyes’ (Wilkinson 1989: 306), paling in comparison to the persistent and deep-rooted passion expressed for Tony throughout. As Fox explains, this ‘separation of the romantic and the erotic, ultimately complies with another dominant ideal for women, limiting the expanse of their desire’ (1994: 176). It is significant that Wilkinson’s text is only able to afford Joan independence on the basis of an identity more amenable to working-class political representation (that is, the “good” working-class woman rebel’) rather than her more troublesome gender and sexual identities, which prove harder to integrate into traditional representational political practices.

Similar limiting tendencies exhibit themselves in the class politics of the novel. Wilkinson walks a political tightrope of ‘left-wing, militant reformism’ (Ferrall and McNeill 2015: 158), criticising moderate labour leaders and their unions for being ‘as much part of the capitalist system as the employers’ associations’ while nonetheless reaffirming them as ‘excellent organisers [who] wanted to help the miners, but they were as anxious as the Government could possibly be to get the whole thing over with as little trouble as possible’ (Wilkinson 1989: 58). On the other hand, Wilkinson also sympathises with—though, as shown below, not excessively—the ‘revolutionary germ’ among the ‘younger set’ with ‘a wider vision than their own trades, who felt the grinding of the wheels of a giant Capitalism’ (58). This tightrope is perhaps most easily perceived through the character of William Royd—leader of the union Joan works for and her mentor within the labour movement—described as part of ‘a body of cautious and ageing men’ though with the caveat that he is the ‘youngest’ (8) of them and ‘seldom worried’ about rules (9).

Meanwhile, exemplifying Jameson’s earlier point regarding the realist novel’s ‘satiric hostility’ to those with ‘the flimsiest relationship with the solid ontology of what exists’, Wilkinson is far freer with her repudiation of the CPGB. Tony, carried away by the excitement of the Strike, tells Joan enthusiastically of his stimulating encounter with two Communist activists. Unimpressed, Joan warns that one of the Communists is notorious as ‘a dangerous persuader’ (125). Tony accepts the warning, excusing himself saying ‘I don’t know enough of the Labour Movement to wander along by-paths of my own finding’, though he defends the Communists as at least having ‘worked out the ideas’ to which Joan replies it is ‘easy enough to be logical if you don’t worry how far ahead of your followers you go, or even whether you have any followers’ (125). This type of repudiation seems odd not so much for diminishing CPGB influence (which except for a few areas remained limited) but rather,

given the aforementioned rank-and-file response to the strike call, the idea that the Communists were too 'far ahead' of the workers. Indeed, this line of repudiation seems to sit uneasily with Gerry's elation as he describes towns 'run by sheer soviets' (133) while the narrative nonetheless continues to denounce the very party which would be promoting them as being too 'far ahead' of the workers.

Without straying too far into biographical readings, Wilkinson's background perhaps make such repudiation less surprising: a Labour MP and union organiser, Wilkinson was also a founding member of the CPGB who left when Labour banned dual membership in 1924 citing the Party's 'dictatorial methods which make impossible the formation of a real left wing among the progressives of the Trade Unions and the Labour Party' (Vernon 1982: 64). Consequently, Wilkinson's tightrope walk between an overly cautious TUC establishment and a CPGB outside the realms of reasonable discourse leads inextricably to a solution rooted in reshuffling trade union officials to include more from the 'younger set' and leaders like Royd who are the 'youngest' of 'ageing men' where "youth" functions as a euphemism for militancy. As such, more assertive leadership is needed though still within the boundaries of the mainstream labour movement.

This boundary setting for the labour movement manifests clearly in passages explaining the Strike's collapse. Royd explains to Joan that the Strike's failure was because it 'needed brains and planning and a central headquarters with power and a disciplined movement and all the things we never get in England' (233-234). Yet such an account of the Strike's defeat runs counter to the historical record: rather than lacking a 'central headquarters with power', the problem, as Cole and Symons both highlight, was precisely a central headquarters with too much power using outright subterfuge and rather than rank-and-file ill-discipline, it was rank-

and-file self-organisation which accounted for the Strike's success far beyond the leadership's expectations. Yet this representative-oriented perspective—aided by an omniscient, heterodiegetic narrator—dominates the novel; the text embodies Jameson's comments on how Marx figures ideology in the "Eighteenth Brumaire" as allowing 'what can be thought to seem internally coherent in its own terms, while repressing the unthinkable' (2002: 38), with the social democratic representative taking the place of Marx's petit-bourgeois intellectual. For someone as integrated into the representative organs of social democracy as Wilkinson, it would perhaps seem easier to explain the Strike's failure in this way rather than the "unthinkable" that problems arose from those social democratic institutions themselves.

This "representative-eye-view" results in contradictions which it is ultimately unable to resolve, particularly regarding the relationship between union officialdom and the rank and file. In fact, this distinction is blurred throughout the text with Joan, attending the crucial meeting in which the General Strike vote takes place, reflecting on how the men in the hall 'were in the centre of a crisis in which actually they, working men, were being consulted [...]' Joan's gaze travelled to the platform, where a group of well-known Labour leaders, members of the General Council of the Trade Union Congress, and others were chatting' (Wilkinson 1989: 57). While many (even most) of the union leaders in the hall undoubtedly started their lives as 'working men', as per the discussion in the introduction, their roles as leaders of some of the country's biggest membership organisations separate them from rank-and-file members, a fact acknowledged by Wilkinson in her own description of them being 'as much part of the capitalist system as the employers' associations'. Their description here, then, as unproblematically 'working men' elides as much as it describes and, specifically, elides precisely their function as representatives.

Yet it is through Joan that this contradiction is exacerbated—arguably more so than in either of the previous texts—with the novel’s realist form centring its narrative around a trade union official moving in a narrative world dominated by mass working-class struggle. As the plot advances, Joan is described as ‘unconsciously on the path of those who draw a distinction between “we” and “they”’ (250); however, this distinction is put down to her increasing affiliation with London’s intelligentsia rather than being a defining characteristic of her relationship to the working class from the novel’s inception. For instance, Joan’s ‘daily work organising factory girls in grim industrial towns’ is described early on as ‘so gruelling that she lived to the brim the moments of escape to London’ (33); yet, such escape is only possible precisely because there already *is* a distinction between “we” (Joan and other union officials) and “they” (the workers she represents). As such, Wilkinson’s narrative centre around a trade union official—and union officialdom more generally—sees the almost total erasure of working-class agency and subjectivity from the novel. While critics such as Ferrall and McNeill claim the novel ‘places proletarian experience at the centre of the story world’ (2015: 159), in reality, the proletarian experience is in fact constrained to its periphery for the vast majority of the novel. Only once Joan begins doing relief work for miners during the lockout—that is, after the defeat of the Strike—are working-class people not in official union roles introduced into the narrative as individuals with their own subjectivities (though still peripheral in relation to the representative, Joan, who remains the principal narrative figure). During the Strike, aside from Harry Browne (who himself has little to say or said about him), the working class is largely referred to in plural nouns and as part of crowds: ‘The engineers called out, “Why not us, too? Let’s have a right scrap and finish it.” “Why don’t they call out the lot,” men shouted’ (Wilkinson 1989: 79), while later Joan’s announcement is ‘received with cheers’ (137). The working class of the General Strike are pushed to the narrative’s

margins, displaced by (political) representatives who are presumed sufficient to (symbolically) represent them in their absence. In a moment of unintended irony, Gerry criticises union officials who ‘can’t see the wood because your noses are stuck in the Forestry reports’ wishing instead that they ‘could see the lads’ (135), a sentiment arguably shared by *Clash*’s readers themselves, for whom ‘the lads’ themselves are almost nowhere to be seen.

Ultimately, such an oversight is in significant part the result of the novel’s central character being a trade union official: Joan represents her class in the dual sense of the word (and with all the ambiguity that verbal slippage entails). Firstly, she symbolises the militant working class, standing ‘like a living red flag, the spirit of revolution’ (80). But in her union role, Joan also represents workers in the political sense, “speaking for them” in their disputes with employers. To apply Spivak’s terminology, by running these two forms of ‘representation’ together the text presents Joan in her representational role as ‘transparent’ and, in doing so, silences the voices of ordinary workers exactly at the point at which it claims to allow them to “speak for themselves”. This manifests in the textual contradiction whereby the working class is notionally “present” through its representation (by/through Joan), yet its agency and subjectivity is confined to the margins, to anonymous ‘men’ and ‘engineers’ cheering from the sidelines, precisely because of its presence through representation.

Such a focalisation through the subjectivity of union officials reaches its apotheosis in a post-Strike dispute at Shireport carried out entirely via the backroom machinations of Gerry and Joan. When the dispute is won ‘the strikers were a little astonished at the sudden change in their fortunes, for Joan obviously could explain nothing beyond the fact that negotiations had been successful’ (219). Further opportunity for repudiation of Communists is not missed, here for being ‘too intelligent’ and ‘personally attack[ing] Joan’ which ‘roused the ire of the

men. They were to go back to their jobs – what did he want to worry for?’ (219). Again, the workers are reduced to plural nouns (‘strikers’, ‘men’) whose dispute is won almost entirely in their absence; indeed, the Shireport victory can be read as vindicating Royd’s earlier (erroneous) assessment on the General Strike’s defeat due to its lack of centralised power and disciplined movement. Thus, by focalising the narrative through the perspective of the workers’ representative, the rank-and-file perspective is, by definition, diminished in narrative terms. Meanwhile, in its top-down organisation and repudiation of Communists, *Clash*’s Shireport strike embodies Mond-Turnerism in political terms, albeit viewed from the perspective of union officials themselves, which allows for such representational ‘transparency’ to seem ‘internally coherent in its own terms, while repressing the unthinkable’: that the representative’s supposed transparency itself marks a ‘place of “interest”’.

The argument here is not that *Clash*’s realist form necessitates a lead character who is also a union representative; indeed, similar novels have been written about mass working-class action in which the lead character is a rank-and-file worker (most famously Zola’s *Germinal*). The argument, rather, is that the archetypally realist formal components of focalisation through a single central character, ‘detailism’ to ‘lessen the sense of manipulation’ via the universalising meta-language of an omniscient, heterodiegetic narrator (among others) necessarily create a ‘hierarchy amongst the discourses which compose the text’ (MacCabe 1985: 35). This is not only between character speech and narrative prose but also between the protagonist and supporting/peripheral characters, thus diminishing the voices of the great mass of participants in the narrative’s events. It is this top-down formal structure which lends itself readily to—or, to draw on Rancière’s terminology, is readily appropriated by—a similarly top-down political practice of working-class representation. Thus, a novel such as

*Clash*, so fundamentally wedded to the institutions and practices of working-class political representation, appropriates the aesthetic form which replicates the form of its politics. Its literary form lends itself to—or is appropriated by—a political form whose memory of the Strike is based upon a repression of the “unthinkable”. Working along similar lines, Ferrall and McNeill describe the ‘Complex modes of forgetting’ which ‘stuck to the Strike from the very beginning’ (2015: 5), citing as examples both the shifting Communist line on the Strike (as per the needs of Soviet foreign policy) as well as those of future Labour ministers, such as Aneurin Bevan, for whom ‘it needed to be “an anti-climax”, its answers found in his subsequent political trajectory’ (5). Wilkinson’s text can therefore be read as a similarly ‘Complex mode of forgetting’: its monologic focalisation diminishing the agency and activity of the mass of workers—barely finding time to attribute names to rank-and-file workers as a result—making it an aesthetic technique well-suited to the top-down representational politics espoused in the text. Just as Wilkinson’s text limits the expanse of Joan’s romantic desires, so too does its formal organisation limit the scope for working-class agency, subjectivity and political desire, lending itself readily to—and exacerbated by—a narrative based around a protagonist whose function is to represent the working class (in both senses of the word).

All three novels in this section put realism at the heart of their textual strategies alongside their working-class content as part of their ‘oppositional strategies’ against class society. They are all unequivocally examples of *parole* in a counter-hegemonic working-class *langue*: whether the candid depictions of unemployment in *Love on the Dole* and *Means-Test Man* or the sympathetic depiction of mass working-class action in *Clash*. Yet while these novels all operate as instances of working-class opposition within bourgeois society, their realist aesthetics nonetheless function towards similar ends: the ‘specific weight’ of their various components functioning to privilege the subjectivities of characters who function to contain

excessively strident working-class desires (Larry Meath, Jack Cook and Joan Craig), reaffirming the ‘density and solidity of what is’ and demarcating the limits of political radicalism through its ‘satiric hostility’ to troublemakers. They remain literary and political oppositional strategies, but without transforming the structural boundaries of the forms.

## An uneasy avant-garde: Upward, Barke and Sommerfield

It thus becomes of interest to analyse the texts of writers aligned to a tradition within the workers’ movement which did attempt to transform the structural boundaries of social democratic political forms—that is, to Communism in its Marxist-Leninist variety—and whose activists performed a dual (sometimes contradictory) function as rank-and-file agitators challenging working-class political representation while also aspiring to be an alternative source of representation themselves.

While the Popular Front period—and Soviet Writers’ Congress’ anti-modernist pronouncements, in particular—are often assumed to have ushered in an era of Socialist Realist literary austerity and reaction against experiment in Britain, literary output—even from committed Communists—was in reality often more heterogeneous, as radical progressive authors wrestled with producing traditional realist representations in a period when traditional political representation was in crisis. The result was, as Croft explains, a Popular Front culture that was ‘massive, various, lively and influential [...] prompted, encouraged, at times even sustained by the Communist Party, but it was never reducible to the Communist Party’ (1994: 9). This should not be taken to suggest realism or resistance to avant-gardism was not a significant—or even dominant—aspect of far-left literary culture; the aforementioned comments from Caudwell and Slater would certainly suggest otherwise, as would the novels of writers such as Patrick Hamilton, whose trilogy *20,000 Streets Under*

*the Sky* are considered archetypally monologic realist texts (McKenna 1996). However, it does show there was no uniform aversion within the milieu to formal experimentation, even among those most closely associated with the CPGB. The result was a body of work very much in line with Denning's conception of 'social modernism' fusing modernist aesthetics with the desire for radical social transformation. Furthermore, the engagement of these authors with avant-gardism was deeply inflected with the tensions within Communist approach(es) to representation—both literary and political—manifesting in highly productive formal tensions both *within* as well as *between* texts as a recurrent feature of the fiction produced within the Communist-aligned literary milieu.

One writer embodying this phenomenon is Edward Upward. Described by fellow author Stephen Spender as the English heir to Kafka (1935: 243), Upward also had a reputation as a highly doctrinaire Communist, these two facets of his intellectual life coexisting increasingly fractiously as the 1930s progressed. The fractiousness between Upward's avant-gardism and his doctrinaire Marxism is evident in his 1938 novella, *Journey to the Border*, about a young, left-leaning intellectual, 'a little-concealed *Doppelgänger* of Upward himself' (Kohlmann 2014: 189), known only as the tutor, whose anxieties about a world hurtling towards fascist dystopia lead to monstrous hallucinations as he teeters on the edge (or 'border') of either putting his socialist convictions into practice or collapsing into complete mental breakdown.

The tutor's hallucinations thus form the basis for Upward's allegorical method whereby British fascism is shown not to be an extraneous object intruding upon the national body politic, but one in which all aspects of British class society—from colonialism to the petit and big bourgeoisies—are complicit. As these hallucinations reach fever pitch, a voice intervenes, engaging the tutor in quasi-Socratic questioning after which he decides to go 'the way of the

workers' (Upward 1969: 197). He resolves to contact the workers' movement that evening and, in a minor act of defiance, refuses Parkin's request that they return home together.

Drawing on Upward's biography, Samuel Hynes suggests that in this finale, the voice in the tutor's ear is 'Upward the doctrinaire Marxist conversing with Upward the author' (1976: 320). Hynes argues Upward explicitly repudiates 'his own gift' for allegory and surrealism in favour of Socialist Realism (317). *Journey to the Border*, then, represents a surrealist writer explaining his renunciation of surrealism in favour of a rigid Marxism-Leninism, a 'veiled autobiography of a gifted man who traded his gift for the security of a cause, and wrote his only imaginative book to describe how and why he abandoned his imagination' (321). This is particularly paradoxical given how successfully Upward mobilises surrealism to produce a quasi-Lukácsian 'novel of education' (Adorno et al. 1980: 42) as preparation for Popular Frontism (despite, obviously, undermining Lukácsian aesthetics). Kohlmann argues similarly when he discusses the novel's 'quasi-catechistical exchange' (2014: 190) noting that while Upward nearly endorses 'the presence of fantasy in his writing' (191), ultimately, the 'view of fantasy which emerges in *Journey to the Border* remains ambivalent' (192). Indeed, the tutor, concerned that involvement with the workers' movement would leave 'no time for thinking or feeling' (Upward 1969: 201), is reassured by the voice that there will emerge a 'new thinking and feeling' (201):

They will bear a certain hereditary resemblance to the earlier thoughts and feelings from which they were descended. But at the same time they will be different, entirely new. [...] They will be more vigorous, more normally human, less tortured and introspective. They will be concerned more with the world outside you than with yourself. (201)

Such statements strongly resemble not merely Lukács' aforementioned admonitions of modernism but also the 'new forms' which Lehmann predicted would emerge from the Soviet Union. Upward's ambivalence around form—simultaneously deploying surrealist methods while admonishing its retreat from reality—reveals some of the tensions in existence between 1930s Marxism-Leninism and avant-gardism. That Upward would not write creatively again until 1962 suggests a particularly acute example of this tension, yet his work nonetheless highlights the unease which existed within the CPGB-aligned avant-garde of the 1930s.

This uneasy coexistence between realist and experimental formal techniques forms one of the central features of James Barke's Glasgow-set *Major Operation* (1936), in which bankrupt businessman George Anderson encounters Communist shipyard worker Jim MacKelvie in hospital and, like Upward's tutor, "goes over" to the workers. A typical proletarian novel of its era, it contains many of the recurring motifs of the period: long-term unemployment due to the Depression, unemployed movement activism and its violent repression while the rise of fascism remains ever-present on the novel's horizon.

Perhaps owing to Barke's own self-description as 'a hopelessly intolerant doctrinaire' (quoted in Taylor 2018: 151), much has been made of his overt uses of frowned-upon formal techniques often associated with James Joyce. Like Upward, such avant-gardism is deployed in particular to critique various aspects of capitalist society. Keith Williams highlights how 'the mischievous editorial interpolations in 'Aeolus' inspired the basic narrative form of *Major Operation*' (1991: 183) citing its headlined sections, such as 'GAFFER'S CHAFF' or 'GRETA GARBO AND FLORA MACDONALD', as casting 'satirical or surreal lights on

the action' (183). The 'RED MUSIC IN THE SECOND CITY' section, however, has often been singled out for discussion for its application of Joycean stream of consciousness, depicting the passing of time and deepening economic crisis in a collective voice that becomes increasingly fragmented and desperate: 'When the hell is it going to end? I'll be shrieking in a minute. [...] Where's the entrance out? Stop crowding, can't you? Take your bloody elbow out of my face, damn you. Another blind alley. Sally in our alley. Put a sock in her' (Barke 1970: 125). Joycean stream of consciousness is thus used as part of Barke's critique of capitalism, portraying the sense of confusion ('Where's the entrance out?'), confinement ('Stop crowding') and sense of political directionlessness ('Another blind alley') arising from the 1930s economic crisis.

Barke's use of free indirect discourse also suggests modernist influence, often recalling Woolf's pivoting between the subjectivities of his middle-class characters. For example, one passage reminiscent of *To the Lighthouse*'s dinner table passages in emphasising the simultaneity of its characters' subjective functions, Barke enters—in quick succession—the consciousnesses of Sadie Greenhorn, her husband Tom and George Anderson. Yet, in contrast to Woolf, Barke's strategy is not merely to emphasise his characters' interiorities but also to reveal their confinement within bourgeois ideology: from Sadie's desire that life be 'like the pictures' (101) to Tom's conclusion that 'the chap who hadn't the wherewithal or who didn't know how to enjoy himself ... well, that was his pigeon' (102). Meanwhile, Labour Party representative Bailie Pink is similarly undermined: due to speak at an unemployed rally alongside more radical activists he ponders 'how he could work in a quotation from Karl Marx. He was certain a good strong quotation from Old Charlie would put him right with the Reds. Trouble was he didn't know anything about Marx' (478). Mopping his brow 'with a blue silk handkerchief' (478), the increasing militancy forces

Bailie Pink to don a veneer of radicalism in order to reaffirm his own representative position. Free indirect discourse functions to undermine this claim to radicalism, unmasking the ulterior motive for quoting ‘Old Charlie’ despite his ignorance on the subject. Alongside the symbolism of the blue silk handkerchief—blue the colour of conservatism, silk a luxury inaccessible to the Depression-era working class—and, indeed, the name ‘Pink’ itself (denoting a pale red), free indirect discourse thus functions here to undermine the working-class representational establishment depicted through a textual challenge to traditional realist representation.

Yet it would be an oversimplification to read *Major Operation* as a straightforwardly modernist text with Taylor warning—in her criticism of Cunningham’s tendency to do so—critics not to overlook ‘the relationship between this experimental section and the novel as a whole’ (2018: 157). Taylor then underlines how the ‘collective voice is shown to be a surface phenomenon which is fractured by the crisis at the section’s conclusion. The novel must therefore look elsewhere for its means of popular representation’ (158). Indeed, the common thread linking Barke’s contraction and distension of temporalities or his working with distance and contemporaneousness (as evidenced in his ‘RED MUSIC’ section or the aforementioned passage with Sadie, Tom and George), is that such experimental techniques are applied to portray a lack of clarity emanating from bourgeois ideology, whether that of middle-class conservatism, social democracy or a working-class adrift in a crisis. For instance, the Joycean ‘RED MUSIC’ section flows immediately into Anderson’s internal monologue—another typically Joycean technique—as he verges on bankruptcy while flirting with fascism and anti-Semitism: ‘Moderates mediocre. Labour Party just as bad though. Need a dictator: Mussolini. Not Hitler. Ignorant, dangerous type Hitler. Shoots pals [...] Jews rotten. Still, old Sam a Jew: not bad fellow. Control finance’ (Barke 1970: 126-127). Once

again, modernist techniques provide access into the—increasingly fractured—subjectivity of the petit-bourgeois. At this point, however, Anderson’s stream of consciousness is blocked—quite literally—by an unemployed demonstration, the symbolism of his drift towards fascism halted by a working-class demonstration heightened by his subsequent introduction to MacKelvie who then oversees Anderson’s conversion to Marxism-Leninism.

During his encounter with the working classes while in hospital, Barke depicts Anderson opining on his newfound admiration for the proletariat, viewing them as ‘in every way superior to his class’ (1970: 316), though concluding regretfully ‘I’ll never get the chance to be a worker’ (393). The latter quotation—read charitably—could be interpreted as an expression of hopelessness at ever finding employment; yet it also bears a striking similarity to Alec Brown’s earlier comment regarding the middle-class individual ‘proletarianising’ themselves, reinforcing the social category of the proletarian as a positive identity rather than as the ‘negative side of the antithesis’. The recurrent tendency of Barke’s novel towards this reaffirmation of class as a positive identity results in what Keith Williams describes as a ‘displaced pastoral of “proletcult”, making bourgeois individuals morally inferior in some *essential*, dehistoricised way, rather than exposing the historical contingency of *all* class categories’ (1991: 184, original emphasis). These issues reach their peak in the character of MacKelvie himself who is denied ‘the convincing subjectivity of Anderson’s Bloomian internal monologues, where he flounders in the contradictions of bourgeois individualist consciousness while descending into bankruptcy’ (184). Klaus concurs, describing Anderson as ‘by far the better executed of the two principal characters [...] allowed to have his doubts, his worries, and his tragedy, qualities that are completely absent’ in MacKelvie who ‘by contrast, remains a static and bloodless figure throughout the book, devoid of any inner struggle or contradiction’ (1985: 121-122). In contrast to *Love on the Dole*, *Means-Test Man*

and, indeed, contemporary and historical accounts of the Depression, MacKelvie remains ‘unperturbed’ by ‘long spells of unemployment. [...] Nor does MacKelvie’s relationship with his wife seem to suffer in the least’ (122). Meanwhile, Anderson does suffer greatly because of his long-term unemployment; yet this seems only to underline the weakness of his “bourgeois constitution”, reaffirming the essential superiority of the proletariat with little heed to the destruction which unemployment did in fact reap among working-class individuals and their communities.

Discussing Klaus’ criticisms of MacKelvie’s characterisation, Hubble explains that Klaus is drawing attention to how ‘substituting a positive socialist hero for the problematic hero of the bourgeois liberal novel does not really solve the problem of negotiating the relationship of the individual to the collective within the traditionally individualistic form of the novel’ (2017: 25). Indeed, MacKelvie’s proletarian “superhero” status is important for contextualising the experimental techniques discussed previously, particularly with regards to how—and why—they are not applied to MacKelvie himself. In contrast to the internal monologues, free indirect discourse and collective stream of consciousness for the inconsistent or otherwise flawed perspectives of various characters, Taylor notes ‘MacKelvie’s function in stabilising language and providing an authoritative discourse [something] overlooked by critics anxious to emphasise the novel’s modernist credentials’ (2018: 159). While in a hospital ward with Anderson and heavy-drinking, free-thinking vagabond, Charles Duff, MacKelvie is uniquely able to ‘switch linguistic codes and mediate between these variously incomplete discourses’ (159). For example, MacKelvie is able, on the one hand, to summarise a group discussion in a five-page essay-speech referencing the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the influence on Nazism of pre-Christian Paganism (Barke 1970: 304-309) while, on the other, translating ‘Sweet Fanny Adam’ (300) for the benefit of Anderson’s middle-class naïveté. ‘This ability

ensures that MacKelvie's discourse is apparently total and without fractures' (Taylor 2018: 159), placing him (and, by extension, the Communist Party) as the legitimate representatives of the working class, able to take the inchoate cries of the masses and form them into a consistent linguistic code. Avant-gardism is thus used to depict crisis and ideological thinking, but realist techniques are deployed to establish the Communist Party in their historic role as political vanguard.

This preoccupation with leadership runs throughout Barke's novel: MacKelvie becomes a leading figure in the NUWM while Anderson's turn towards Marxism-Leninism leads to the study of 'How the workers were being led: the quality of that leadership: the importance of this could not be overstressed' (Barke 1970: 385). During the build up to the novel's climactic end of an unprecedentedly huge unemployed demonstration in Glasgow, MacKelvie concentrates

on his immediate task. As leader he never knew at moment attempts might be made to disorganise the march. This was the greatest, most constant worry of a leader. [...] To lead a march called for iron nerve and alert mind, quick, cool and decisive judgement. MacKelvie had all these qualities (486-487).

Such a fixation with leadership can be seen as Barke's fictionalisation of Lenin's dictum that the working class 'by its own effort, is able only to develop trade union consciousness' (2008). This is reaffirmed by Duff's reappearance in the novel (following a period of absence after his discharge from hospital) at the demonstration 'wearing on his arm the red band of a marshal' (Barke 1970: 488); the implication being that MacKelvie's intervention pushed him beyond the 'trade union consciousness' of the free-thinking vagrant to the revolutionary

socialism of a Party activist. Duff is not permitted to remain outside the Party as an unaligned working-class radical; rather, all radicalism must be integrated into the logic of representation for which there can be no legitimate space “outside”.

Interestingly, despite their political differences, parallels abound between *Major Operation* and Wilkinson’s *Clash*, both ostensibly being about mass working-class movements but focusing heavily on leadership and representation to the detriment of depicting those movements themselves. Though *Major Operation* is more successful—MacKelvie excluded—in depicting well-rounded working-class characters, depiction of struggle in both novels is focalised almost entirely through the perspectives of their representatives. While in *Clash* this is through the character of Joan and her various encounters with proletarian plural nouns, in *Major Operation* this is done through MacKelvie and his responsibilities as ‘leader’, especially in the presence of ‘Trotskyite and provocateur elements’ (Barke 1970: 453), reasserting the representative’s ambivalent attitude towards uncontrollable working-class militancy.

Parallels with *Clash* are reaffirmed in the last line of the novel when a friend of Anderson’s, after listening to MacKelvie’s eulogy at Anderson’s funeral, watches MacKelvie, ‘proud that George Anderson had given his life for such a man: for the movement such a man represented’ (495). In this line, *Major Operation* makes explicit what *Clash* leaves implicit in the symbolism of its leading radical protagonist. As in *Clash*, Barke’s novel attempts to unproblematically run these two meanings of ‘represented’ together. Like Joan, MacKelvie symbolises the spirit of the militant working-class movement; yet, again, in his role as a leading CPGB and NUWM figure, he equally represents the class in the political sense as well. *Major Operation*, like *Clash*, runs these two meanings together and, in so doing,

conflates representatives with those being represented, political leadership with the inherently far more heterogeneous base (simultaneously recognised and dismissed as ‘Trotskyite and provocateur elements’), as if interchangeable. Barke’s novel, then, perhaps more than any other, captures the CPGB’s dual—and to an extent contradictory—position during the 1930s as potential alternative representatives, utilising literary experimentation to depict the crisis of capitalism and undermine the role of traditional social democratic representatives of the working class while using realist techniques in order to stabilise language and establish Communism as its legitimate alternative.

Like *Journey to the Border*, while it uses the textual strategies commonly associated with the avant-garde, *Major Operation* is conspicuously uneasy with applying those same strategies in pursuit of its Marxist-Leninist political objectives, opting instead to restabilise language and its narrative centre using methods traditionally associated with realism. Yet these techniques are not neutral but rather, as Macherey explains, have their ‘peculiar weight’ meaning that ‘even when they are used and blended into a totality they retain a certain autonomy’ (2006: 47). In the case of *Major Operation*, the autonomy of realist techniques despite integration into the narrative totality results in a reaffirmation of phenomena predicated on the existence of class society—the proletariat as positive category, working-class representation, etc—and, by extension, class society itself. Barke’s artistic practice can therefore be understood as an antagonistic intervention in the distribution of the sensible, as ‘the system of self-evident facts of sense perception’, in that it thinks through political dissensuality with regards to what is visible/sayable vis-à-vis bourgeois ideology. But in its formal strategies it again reaffirms the distribution of the sensible, through its relationship to conventional modes of being and forms of visibility, evident in Barke’s use of realist formal practices to reaffirm the political

practices of working-class representation and, by extension, to reaffirm the self-evident nature of the social world within which such representation operates as well.

One novel from a Communist-aligned author which is more strident in its avant-gardism is John Sommerfield's *May Day* (1936), depicting intensifying labour unrest in London on 'an average year between 1930-40' (Sommerfield 2010: 21) reaching its apogee in a May 1st general strike. Furthermore, it arguably captures more accurately than in any other novel from the period how the quotidian experience of the labour process leads directly to the possibility for industrial unrest. Indeed, Sommerfield is so successful in this respect that he almost prophesises the events of the London Omnibus strike (which took place a year after *May Day*'s publication), his fictional bus union leader, Albert Raggett, 'composing an anti-Communist encyclical to be issued as a last-minute appeal to the busmen' (141) to call off their strike, in almost exact similitude to the events themselves. Similarly, workers' militancy around the Langfier's factory—one of the narrative's central nodes of action—contain strong parallels with the experience of the Leicester Wolsey strike, with its young female workforce, hired for low wages and dismissed when older to avoid wage increases, replacing them with 'a fresh batch of school girls' (49). As in the Wolsey dispute, the young women of Langfier's form the catalyst for a resurgent labour movement—and, indeed, much of *May Day*'s narrative progress—with one of the key grievances being the exhausting nature of piecework and the 'bloody speedup' (157), causing one worker, Daisy, to be 'so dead beat she fainted at her job [...] and hurt herself on the machine' (159) while another, Mabel, actually dies as a result.

Like many proletarian novels of the time, *May Day* makes mention of the general strike—alongside criticism of its social democratic leadership—and the wider working-class

experience of long-term unemployment. Of particular interest, however, is how Sommerfield—in contrast to Barke’s combination of realist and avant-garde formal techniques in order to alternately destabilise ideology and advance his Marxist-Leninist alternative—pursues his Marxism-Leninism precisely *through* the application of avant-gardism. As Hubble explains, *May Day*’s overall logic is fundamentally

in accordance with the Marxist idea that it is proletarian subjectivity and experience which generates the agency that makes the transformation of society possible for the benefit of all. However, what distinguishes the novel is Sommerfield’s understanding of not only how Woolfian techniques make it possible to show the interaction of different subjectivities across society, but also how widespread people’s desire for a different kind of time is. (2017: 148)

Indeed, as intimated by Hubble, perhaps the most immediately perceptible formal influence on the novel is Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, with its decentred narrative form functioning similarly in terms of its working with contemporaneousness and distance as its characters interact (or do not) with each other (and London itself). Sommerfield’s decentred narrative contrasts with those discussed thus far and is particularly noticeable in comparison with Wilkinson’s and Barke’s novels, despite similar setting around mass working-class struggle. *May Day*, instead, has ‘no single hero or small group of characters’ (Laing 1980: 147), its real protagonist being, through the depiction of almost one hundred characters, ‘the London working class’ (147). However, where Woolf uses her decentred form and focus on internal subjectivities to emphasise individual alienation in a city of peculiar and often random connections, Sommerfield applies Woolfian techniques to show how such connections are not so random in order to ‘achieve his political objective of showing everything and everyone to

be connected' (Hubble 2012: 140). As critic Philip Henderson wrote shortly after its publication, Sommerfield 'makes a synthesis of the apparently chaotic life of London by relating its many-sidedness to the unifying principle of the class struggle', presenting individuals 'with whose personal lives we can sympathise, while still seeing them in their true social perspective' (1936: 271). Moreover, the array of 'news items, tracts and handbills circulating through *Ulysses*' (Williams, K. 1991: 183) similarly find their counterparts in *May Day* through various newspaper headlines, whitewashed slogans and leaflets which connect strangers who 'remembered the chalked slogans on walls and pavements. The slogans, the rain of leaflets [...] echoed in a million minds' (Sommerfield 2010: 67). They also forge unfamiliar connections between intimates, such as John Seton noticing his anti-strike wife, has brought home 'one of the May Day leaflets [...] How had Martine got hold of it?' (180). Marxism and modernism here are not in opposition; rather, the novel's Marxism is realised *through* its modernist aesthetic.

As Taylor points out, Sommerfield's technique sees his narrative move not only 'between different individuals, but also between different styles and genres' with 'this montage principle [being] the means by which Sommerfield attempts an expression of the social totality' (2018: 62). For instance, in his passage depicting the city's typists, Sommerfield describes the

Thousands of fingers – long, short, manicured, nail bitten, fat, slender, ringed, fresh, withered, tender or cruel [...]

A million tapping keys beat out a tremendous rhythm, spattering a record of life –

Dear Sir Madam Sir Dear Comrade Yours faithfully truly fraternally Thanking you in anticipation Requesting immediate settlement of your account Taking pleasure in

enclosing Being instructed to inform you that unless The honour of your custom  
Hoping for your order in this matter (2010: 135)

Here, montage is used to capture—in both the wide array of fingers and cross-section of texts being typed—not only the wide-ranging sense of contemporaneousness typical of the mass nature of modernity, but also the alienation of the vast majority of those typing from that which they type: the ‘fingers’ abstracted from their bodies function almost metonymically as “hand” for manual labourers, while the formal linguistic codes and formulaic language constituting the passage themselves imply an externally-imposed alienated labour.

Meanwhile, the embedding in this passage of words commonly associated with the workers’ movement (‘Comrade’, ‘fraternally’) suggests that this society, underpinned though it is by the widespread phenomenon of alienated labour, nonetheless contains within itself the germ of its own transformation.

Another technique deployed by Sommerfield is how he works with contemporaneousness and distance in his occasional interludes, cinematically “zooming out” to depict the social forces at work beneath the *‘seething confusion in which can be vaguely discerned, in certain districts, at certain times, inchoate driftings, gatherings and dispersals’* (175, original emphasis). Continuing, he describes

*In the morning the factories are magnetic points attracting vast converging streams that, taken over a large area at any given instant, will seem to be moving quite motivelessly. In the evening they are centres of dispersal, from which pour hundreds of thousands of men and women in great tides that are quickly scattered [...]*

*Only the mathematics of class struggle can make order and design out of this seething chaos of matter in motion. (175-176)*

Yet these cinematic interludes do not function to demonstrate the invincibility of omnipresent social forces dictating the lives of individuals. Rather, they embody the Karl Marx quote paraphrased in the novel's epigraph: 'Men make history – but not as they please' (7). Thus, the mass of humanity, '*quivering shreds of flesh amidst so much concrete and steel [...] weave patterns of movement in and out of the jaws and tentacles of machinery [...] forces are at work creating history. These fragile shreds of flesh are protagonists of a battle*' (25-26, original emphasis). The use of contemporaneousness and distance in Sommerfield's cinematic interludes become yet another vessel for his Marxism: 'concrete and steel' may form the structures within which 'shreds of flesh' weave their patterns, but it is those 'shreds of flesh' which are the protagonists, making history, but not under the conditions of their own choosing.

Yet Sommerfield avoids the tendency in such a generalised overview to anonymise—manifest in both *Clash* and *Major Operation*—by “zooming in” to individual factories (in this case, the aforementioned Langfier's) and then yet further to the individuals within those factories. For example, Sommerfield writes

two hundred and forty girls in ugly grey overalls and caps live, breathe and think, their fragile flesh confused with the greasy embraces of steel tentacles [...]  
Everything moves meaninglessly, repetitively – wheels, axles, shaftings, belts and drills spinning and hurrying, rods, pistons and punches shuttling a savagely exact rhythm [...] Unfortunately these girls are not power-driven automata; they also go

home in the evening, have lives of their own, preoccupations with love and hate, laughter and amusement, which cannot be integrated with the machines. They have minds that strive to carry on with their private functionings while spinning with the wheels (2010: 48).

This particular passage segues into a description of one of the workers, Communist activist Ivy Cutford, while others continue into portraits of the lives and subjectivities of any of the novel's dozens of working-class characters. Such "zooming in" is typical of *May Day*, providing concrete—though fictional—examples of the overview advanced in its interludes. What in the interlude remains at the level of abstract framework, here becomes the 'fragile flesh' of these *particular* women, juxtaposed with these *particular* 'steel tentacles' whose 'greasy embraces' are reminiscent of unwanted sexual advances, itself highlighting the gendered nature of class exploitation (evident also in the Wolsey factory dispute). These embraces represent capital's attempt to absorb its human resources into the automated production process but, as Sommerfield points out, the girls are not automata, the ironic 'Unfortunately' satirising the logic of capital for its anti-human impulses. Moreover, it is precisely because these girls are not automata that makes them 'protagonists of a battle': even in the above passage—with no mention yet of individuals—more space is given for antagonistic working-class subjectivity than in either *Clash* or *Major Operation*. It is their 'love and hate, laughter and amusement' while they 'strive to carry on with their private functionings' that actually gives the women their agency vis-à-vis capital: the driving force for the novel's entire plot is not the conflict between revolutionary and reformist representatives, or between unions and government; rather, it is the irreducible antagonism between workers and capital based on their refusal of the alienated labour process itself, depicted using the avant-garde literary techniques discussed above.

Hubble argues that such ‘overt use of modernist techniques has to be seen as a deliberate act of defiance’ (2012: 140) of Radek’s anti-modernist denunciations two years previously. Yet it would be presumptuous to suggest that Sommerfield’s engagement with “unorthodox” aesthetic principles suggests an unorthodox approach to Marxism-Leninism. In reality, Sommerfield deploys modernist techniques in such a way as to imply adherence to, rather than departure from, Marxist political orthodoxy. For instance, though Laing notes cogently that ‘there is always a clear form of perceptible connection between one section and the next, but never a direct narrative link and very rarely, if at all, a connection that the novel’s characters are themselves in a position to perceive’ (1980: 149), what Laing does not discuss is the *hierarchy* of perception among the novel’s working-class characters.

Ultimately, in ways similar to Barke—though perhaps not as crudely—it is the Communist characters who are able to comprehend most fully the political situation and strategise accordingly. For example, Hubble describes one passage in which the youthful female workforce find ‘their class leaders within themselves’ (2017: 152). Following Daisy’s near-fatal workplace injury, it is Molly Davis—an unaffiliated worker—who calls her workmates to action before accompanying Ivy Cutford to solicit support from the male workers. While largely correct, Hubble neglects the fact that it is Communist Ivy Cutford who is singularly instrumental in turning the women’s anger into action. Though Molly calls on her colleagues, they immediately begin ‘talking again at once in an angry babble of voices’ (Sommerfield 2010: 157). Instead, it is Ivy whose ‘moment had come’ thinking ‘of Lenin, of Dimitrov in the Nazi courtroom, of the heroes of her class who had not flinched before anything when their moment came [...] “I must get up, I must get up,” she was saying to herself, and suddenly she sprang up and stood on the form. “Girls,” she said, “listen to me a minute”’

(157). Thus, while it is indisputable that Sommerfield's workers find 'their class leaders within themselves', this does not negate his privileging the subjectivities of Communist characters over unaligned ones. It is imperative that Ivy 'get up' and speak—and that her colleagues listen—lest the directionless 'babble' of anger dissipate into nothing. Ivy judges the mood impeccably—"That's right," they shouted. "Good old Ivy" (157)—and the dispute is able to move onto its next phase. Molly's anger and that of the wider workforce is essential in creating the possibility for movement, yet it nonetheless remains paramount that the Communist activist intervenes to ensure success: thus it is Ivy who puts forward specific demands—"We want proper guards on the machines and no more bloody speed-up" (157)—imploping they '*do something now*' (157), finally suggesting they approach the male workers to set up a works committee (158). This agreed, Molly and Daisy join Ivy in their deputation to the men and, as such, both dispute and narrative are able to progress. Yet this plot structure is not wholly dissimilar from Cunningham's point regarding the reliance of many proletarian novels on their Communist characters "winning their arguments". Indeed, as much is said in the novel itself: after the aforementioned passage regarding the 'two hundred and forty girls in ugly grey overalls', Sommerfield describes them as the 'raw material of history', elucidating that revolution is the result of working-class discontent 'taking form in the words of their class leaders' (2010: 50). This explained, Sommerfield continues: 'Amongst these two hundred and forty there is a Communist. Her name is Ivy Cutford' (50). Taken together, then, this is the traditional Marxist-Leninist conception of party and class: Molly, certainly expresses her class' discontent; but that discontent only takes form in the words of class leader, Ivy Cutford.

Yet, while expressing an approach to working-class political representation not dissimilar to Barke, Sommerfield's novel expresses an ease with avant-garde literary representation absent

in his contemporary. This can be attributed to a number of factors: as Keith Williams points out, the ‘class-against-class, “Forward to a Soviet Britain” policy broadcast in *May Day* was being superseded by the Popular Front Against Fascism, and the two novels [*May Day* and *Major Operation*], therefore, fall either side of this divide’ (1991: 185). Sommerfield’s novel is, therefore, arguably more focused on the possibilities for social rupture emanating from the class struggle than saving democracy from fascism. Even more significantly perhaps, is that while *Major Operation*’s narrative strategy revolves around the role of the Communist Party as an alternative to social democracy for leadership of the workers’ movement, *May Day* focuses on the importance of Communists as rank-and-file agitators. Ivy, though depicted as necessarily indispensable in leading her colleagues, is nonetheless unmistakably one of them, unquestionably an example of what Hubble describes as workers finding ‘their class leaders within themselves’ and certainly sharing none of MacKelvie’s superhuman leadership qualities. Thus, where *Major Operation* focuses on the urgency of the Popular Front and the Communist challenge to social democratic leadership of the workers’ movement, its narrative strategy sees the destabilisation of bourgeois ideology through avant-gardism balanced with the deployment of realist literary techniques to establish and stabilise the position of the Communist Party as working-class political representatives within class society. Conversely, *May Day*’s focus on the fundamental antagonism of class society thus lends itself more readily not merely to a challenge of traditional forms of working-class political representation and class society, but also to a collapsing of the all-too-common binary between committed and autonomous art by applying Woolfian strategies to the content and ambitions of the social epic. In so doing, Sommerfield’s antagonistic intervention in the distribution of the sensible thinks through political dissensuality more completely than Barke’s, extending beyond the latter’s perturbation of bourgeois ideology’s visible/sayable to challenge also the modes of being within an alienated modernity to undermine the solidity of the social world

which presents itself as self-evident. In the shared stakes of art and politics, then, Sommerfield's avant-gardism compliments—rather than negates—his Marxism to create a kind of literary “Leninism-from-below”. Sommerfield's unease with his avant-gardism therefore differs from Upward and Barke not so much at the level of the text itself, but in the fact that the tension underpinning his radical representational practices would resolve itself in never making use of such overt avant-gardism again.

## Rupturing representations: Hanley and Gibbon

Contrary to the authors discussed in the previous section, two writers displaying no such discomfort in their association with avant-gardism are James Hanley and Lewis Grassie Gibbon. Two self-identifying modernists active around Britain's 1930s proletarian literary formation, their texts—like those of Upward, Barke and Sommerfield discussed above—could similarly be defined as ‘social modernist’ but go further in radically subverting working-class political representation than any of the others discussed thus far. Hanley's novel, *The Furys* (1935), covering the fractious coexistences of the working-class Fury family—Fanny, her husband Dennis, and their children Desmond (the eldest), Maureen and youngest Peter as well as Anthony and John, both absent from the narrative—in Gelton (Hanley's fictionalised Liverpool) in the run up to a temporally indeterminate general strike, encapsulates this approach, fusing radical textual methodologies with a critical eye on the structures of working-class political representation.

Like many of the Fury family in his novel, Hanley was himself a Liverpool-Irish seaman and is described by Ferrall and McNeill as ‘the great lost figure from Irish modernism’ whose novel proceeds ‘through dialogue and modernist extended free indirect discourse’ creating a narrative polyphony offering only ‘a “sickly illumination” in which representation and light

“create rather than obliterate the darkness” (2015: 152). The ‘sickly illumination’ and ‘creation of darkness’ quotes come from Hanley’s novel itself (Hanley 1983: 87) and encapsulate perfectly the experimental strategies used by Hanley in order to create ‘the world of the novel, where nothing, it seems, can be relied on, and certainly not people’ (Williams, P. 2007: 47). Making a similar point, Dentith argues that *The Furies*—in typically modernist fashion—gives ‘narrative subjectivity priority over the objectivising claims of traditional realism’ (2003: 43). As such, the novel is ‘written in a “subjective” manner that is premised on the absence of any overarching narrator who could, in the manner urged by Lukács, direct and control the story (43), evidenced in the multiple, contradictory theories—none of which are confirmed—expounded throughout the novel regarding the Fury family’s fractiousness: Maureen believes it originates from Peter being sent to Ireland to train as a priest while for Dennis it began when Peter was born whereas Father Moynihan locates it in Desmond’s marriage outside the Catholic Church with Hanley’s use of free indirect style moving ‘from consciousness to consciousness without the intervention of any explicit narrative voice’ (46) even within a single passage. As Dentith explains, Hanley’s technique is neither to relativise nor ridicule his characters’ subjectivities by playing them against one another; rather the effect is ‘cumulative’ (46), an attempt to use the novel to convey the life of the collective working-class subject. As such, similarly to Auerbach’s comments on Woolf, ‘the novel provides no perspectival vanishing-point from which all of its parts cohere to give a sense of the totality of Gelton’ (48); indeed, one of the few assertions to such “objective” coherence comes when Peter and the eccentric anthropologist Professor Titmouse climb a statue to observe the riot: Dentith highlights the tradition within realism of ‘such catascopic writing’ with Hanley using ‘a familiar realist trope when providing an overarching perspective on his predominantly subjectivist novel’ (51). Yet, significantly, such top-down “objectivity” is explicitly framed as the perspective of two characters within the narrative world—as opposed

to a heterodiegetic narrator standing above/outside it—a fact made clear by the highly subjective value judgements on looting made by Titmouse to Peter from his “objective” position, declaring it ‘Immoral force. But is it fair? Is it honest? Is this a peaceful gathering? Is it a fair protest against brutality? You are laughing at me’ (Hanley 1983: 245). The realist trope subverted, “objectivity” is unmasked as merely another subject position within the narrative whose assumption of ‘transparency’ marks its own place of interest (Peter’s laugh undermining the authority of supposedly objective social scientific observations).

Dentith also mentions—though does not discuss—how Hanley’s textual strategies sit within a tradition of modernism ‘in which the fragmentariness and discontinuities of modern life become the central focus’ (2003: 43). One such strategy used throughout *The Furys*—and which itself becomes highly significant politically with regards to the general strike—is (in Rancière’s terminology) its contraction of temporalities and use of contemporaneousness and distance to undermine the solidity of space and time. Thus, the reader (and Hanley’s characters) are frequently surprised by unexpected passages of time or changes in surroundings; for example, in one passage, Dennis sits

on the edge of the bed. He noticed that the bed-clothes were ruffled. ‘She must have been up here just before I came in,’ he was saying to himself. Outside the barrel-organ suddenly changed its tune. The wild cries of the children continued, but the dog had ceased to bark. Then a voice called up the stairs:

‘Dinner’s ready, Denny.’

The man jumped with fright. How long had he been sitting on the bed? He must have dozed off to sleep. (Hanley 1983: 18)

Something similar occurs when Dennis—engrossed in a letter from his son Anthony, recently injured while working at sea—abruptly realises ‘that he was alone in the kitchen’ (41) or later when an argument between Dennis and Fanny lasting little over a paragraph is described as having begun ‘hours ago’ (224). This undermining of the solidity of space and time—which Watt describes as the underlying principles of the realist novel and, indeed, the basic categories through which Enlightenment philosophers argue reality is experienced—is integral to Hanley’s modernism, creating the sense of discontinuity with and estrangement from modernity which he uses to serve political—as well as aesthetic—ends. For example, when Fanny attempts to navigate the disorientingly byzantine shipping company offices to find information about Anthony’s injury:

She raised her head suddenly. Somebody was coming down the stairs. A middle-aged man, a clerk perhaps. [...] He conducted the woman to the lift. The lift attendant looked curiously at the ill-assorted pair. Which floor did she want to go to? This was different, she thought. The tone of the man’s voice, everything was different. She looked round. The kind gentleman had already disappeared. (9-10)

This cumulative destabilisation of space and time is part of Hanley’s depiction of class experience as ‘an expression of the non-identical: a negation of the affirmative ideology of bourgeois society, expressing what is essentially outside itself’ (Fordham 2002: 79). It conveys working-class dissociation from a bourgeois society within which they exist but cannot be assimilated, an estrangement from a reality which, as Adorno puts it, ‘veils its own

essence'. As Fordham explains, Hanley's 'representations of reality do not in any sense reaffirm the primacy of "realism", but constitute a point at which, in the struggle to articulate working-class consciousness, "the Real" itself is both problematised and redefined' (Fordham 2002: 134); his contraction of temporalities and estrangement of characters from their surroundings become a strategy to puncture the ideology of surface-level appearances. Indeed, that society is "not what it seems" forms a central plank of Hanley's social critique, though not in the 'characteristic monological structure of the conventional committed political novel' but rather as 'an example of how art "indicts by refraining from express indictment"' (130), embodied in Mr Lake, a 'kind-looking gentleman' (Hanley 1983: 12) who Fanny encounters on her multiple journeys to the shipping company offices. Comparing Mr Lake to her own life in Gelton's Hatfields area, she experiences him to be from 'a different world. Quiet, peaceful, inhabited by men with clean faces, grey suits, and white collars' (292). Yet Mr Lake's world of apparent civility is the same one in which he refuses to pay Anthony's compensation for his workplace injury on account of its happening while carrying out tasks which were 'purely voluntary' (215). Moreover, when Fanny presses Mr Lake on the matter, his manner changes to 'that of a gentleman upon whom time is pressing, and who desires to bring the matter in hand to a close as soon as possible' (293), becoming 'cold, indifferent. He only wanted [Fanny] to go' (294). In this way, Mr Lake's moniker not only alludes to his distance from the tumultuous seas associated with the Fury family—both in terms of emotional disposition and upon which their livelihoods are founded—but also the dangers which lakes can conceal "beneath the surface" despite their outwardly calm appearance.

A similar strategy of 'indicting without express indictment', is directed against the world of work which, in contrast to *May Day*, hardly features explicitly at all in Hanley's novel but

nonetheless ‘functions as a kind of “absent cause”, determining the actions, the presence or absences of characters, organizing their lives, and to that extent, arguably ever-present’ (Williams, P. 2007: 48-49). Indeed, the absences of two Fury brothers for the entirety of the novel are the direct result of work—Anthony’s aforementioned injury as well as another brother, John, killed at work before the novel begins—while in one of the few passages portraying labour in action, Peter climbs into the railway sheds at which his brother Desmond is employed and almost immediately witnesses another almost fatal workplace accident (Hanley 1983: 159), itself entirely inconsequential to the rest of the plot. Life-threatening workplace injuries are therefore not depicted—as Cunningham argues was common in proletarian writing—as melodramatic cataclysm but rather a brutal mundanity of working-class life. This brutality of the labour process is returned to in the melee of the general strike with Hanley describing the policeman’s baton as ‘the symbol of authority [...] Its song had assumed control. It had taken the place of hooter and whistle, of all the concourse of sounds that usually came from out the industrial ant-heap’ (201-202). Hanley thus indicates—without indicting—the inherent violence in the extraction of surplus value, the baton’s ‘song’ during a strike replacing the function of the hooter and whistle of the normal workday in the disciplining of labour by capital.

Another motif common to the texts of the 1930s proletarian literary formation which features significantly in Hanley’s novel is that of mass working-class action, specifically in the form of a general strike and its resultant clashes with police. Yet Hanley’s strike has itself been the subject of much debate with critics undecided as to its precise temporal location: Haywood, for instance, states unequivocally that the novel is ‘set in 1926, the year of the General Strike’ (1997: 77) while Ferrall and McNeill cite at least half a dozen theories of the novel being set variously in 1911 (the year of the Liverpool general transport strike), 1921-22 (years of

significant unemployed unrest in Liverpool) *as well as* 1926 (156). Placed within the context of the five-part series of which *The Furies* is the first instalment, then the novel is unquestionably set in 1911; however, this does not mean that the strike in *The Furies* is “really” the 1911 Liverpool transport strike. Rather, Hanley deliberately confuses temporality within the novel, peppering it with frequent allusions to *both* 1911 *and* 1926. For instance, during the strike, reports are made of a ‘young man shot dead by the soldiers last night’ (Hanley 1983: 297), referencing events which happened in 1911 but *not* in 1926. Yet the frequent mentions of miners throughout *The Furies* are definite allusions to 1926, both because miners were not involved in the 1911 strike and the lack of coal mines in Gelton/Liverpool suggests that the stoppage in support of the miners is both national—and general—rather than local. These deliberate historical contradictions serve as ‘temporal inconsistencies [...] creating a radical uncertainty as to any precise temporal location’ (Fordham 2002: 10). Similar to how his destabilisation of space and time undermines the solidity of bourgeois reality as experienced by the working class, so too do Hanley’s ‘fragmentary asides about the miners’ produce ‘representations of the [1926] Strike that link it to 1911 [...] Hanley’s complex temporality novel exists in “the twin abysses of past and present” and draws them usefully into relation’ (Ferrall and McNeill 2015: 157), thereby imploring readers to draw not only similarities and differences between the two historical events but, above all, their continuities and interrelations. As such, contrary to Rancière’s implied binary between the Woolfian and the Zolian, Hanley writes his democratic history precisely by fusing the social epic with the contraction and distension of temporalities, contemporaneousness and distance more typical of modernism in order to think through specifically working-class forms of political dissensus.

Hanley's challenge to realist modes of aesthetic representation works in symbiosis with his challenge to traditional working-class political representation, evident in part through his novel being utterly bereft of heroes. As a rail worker and union activist, Desmond would perhaps be assumed to occupy that role yet while he is the 'character apparently most committed to the working-class struggle [he] is revealed as both self-seeking and contemptuous of the people on whose behalf he is organising' with the strike 'principally an opportunity for advancement' (Williams, P. 2007: 50). Moreover, while 'Desmond and his comrades may seem crudely contemptuous, there is no alternative or more positive image of mass action, or of the mass of the people to be found in the book', the similarity between Professor Titmouse's comments on working-class violence and those of Desmond's union leader colleagues seeming 'to bear out that assessment' (50). However, Williams' assessment assumes that the convergence of opinion between Titmouse and union officialdom serves to confirm those ideas rather than call them into question. Another fruitful reading draws out that the implication of Hanley's paralleling these opinions is that he situates both as extraneous to the crowd/class they are making observations about. As such, Hanley undermines the representative function by highlighting its distinction from the class it represents while equally associating it with the aforementioned "objective" perspective which in fact masks its own distinct subject position.

Moreover, though Desmond's unsympathetic portrayal is connected with his ambitions to climb up the union hierarchy, this is not a disavowal of working-class collective action in general. When Williams argues that 'no alternative or more positive image of mass action' is given in the novel, he ignores that there are also significant passages in which the reader *is* encouraged to sympathise with the unruly crowd, whether out of antipathy towards state violence—as in the aforementioned 'baton' passage—or in moments of almost comic

surrealism, such as when Fanny witnesses ‘a scuffle between half a dozen beshawled women and two policemen’ during which ‘One of the women struck a policeman with a ham’ (Hanley 1983: 217). Moreover, in contrast to Desmond’s bureaucratic aspirations, the novel also includes the—deliberately understated—action of rank-and-file workers who observe the strike, such as the Furies’ much derided son-in-law Joe Kilkey, who ends the novel with a completely unexpected act of ‘extraordinary and unlooked-for generosity’ (Williams, P. 2007: 47) and is also depicted—with little fanfare—as being ‘out since half-past ten this morning at the Moreston Dock, doing picket duty’ (Hanley 1983: 319). Similar can be said of the Furies’ neighbour, Andrew Postlethwaite, who sits ‘enraptured in the back row of the Mechanic’s Hall listening to a fiery speech from one of the Union delegates’ (147); ‘paid his subscriptions regularly to the Federation’ (191); and is eventually severely injured protecting another demonstrator from police (201). The significance of Kilkey and Postlethwaite as exemplars of rank-and-file activism with no regard for self-advancement into union officialdom is augmented by the fact that Kilkey is Catholic and Postlethwaite Protestant, indicating not merely the possibility for class loyalties to prevail—as during the 1911 strike—in communities riven with sectarian division, but also to show that working-class individuals are constituted by complex—even contradictory—identities while nonetheless having the potential for social transformation.

The lack of central, heroic proletarian figures in the novel is therefore categorically *not* a disavowal of proletarian politics; rather, it is born of ‘an impulse to emancipate the working class, to show its members as people of complex, sophisticated and progressive motivations’ (Fordham 2002: 21). This complexity is depicted by Hanley through his aforementioned use of free indirect discourse creating a polyphonic text wherein characters’ perspectives and internal worlds clash against each other and even within themselves. Dennis Fury is notably

fickle in his attitude towards the strike, changing from supportive to antagonistic—and back again—numerous times throughout the text. Fanny, meanwhile, disavows the strike but nonetheless shows determination to walk the length of the city in order to wrench money owed her by the shipping company, and the aforementioned Joe Kilkey and Andrew Postlethwaite similarly wrestle with their dual class and sectarian loyalties. As Fordham explains, Hanley’s polyphonic narrative might destabilise his political ‘commitment’ but ‘this should not preclude a sympathetically committed political interpretation. Hanley’s text is not so much an express act of political allegiance [...] but an articulation of a contradictory and complex class experience, since Hanley’s strength is that “he understands the men and women who will make the next revolution”’ (20-21). Rather than undermining its commitment, Hanley’s polyphonic form, must be read as a challenge to the two-dimensional proletarian identity posited by Barke’s characterisation of MacKelvie or, similarly, Alec Brown’s valorisation of “proletarianness”. Hanley’s application of narrative polyphony serves his intervention in the distribution of the sensible, unsettling bourgeois (and even many proletarian) literary conceptions of legitimate political claims and artistic subjects through its emphasis on inconsistent and flawed—but nonetheless potentially socially transformative—working-class subjectivities. This construction of Hanley’s narrative unsettles the conventional top-down representational relationship (both aesthetic and political) by undermining common simplistic perceptions of working-class interiority while simultaneously unsettling the solidity of the social world upon which working-class political representation is predicated. Like Sommerfield, Hanley collapses the binary between commitment and the avant-garde, fusing them in his writing of democratic history; but unlike Sommerfield, Hanley’s narrative bears no hallmarks of Leninism, diminishing the need for working-class political representatives (Communist or otherwise) to “win their arguments”

and so reasserts the primacy of the working class—with all its internal contradictions and complexities—as the agent for social transformation.

Avant-gardism is used for similar political ends in Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*, held by many to be the stand-out achievement of the interwar proletarian literary milieu. The son of a crofter, Gibbon described himself as being of 'peasant stock' (quoted in Hubble 2017: 113) and the first two novels of his trilogy, *Sunset Song* (1932) and *Cloud Howe* (1933), very much revolve around the patterns of semi-feudal Scottish rural life in the first thirty years of the twentieth century while the third, *Grey Granite* (1934), is set for the contemporary reader in the present of the mid-thirties in the fictional industrial city of Duncairn. Read as a whole, the trilogy is in many ways the embodiment of the Lukácsian historical novel, narrating the social forces which produce the processes of historical change, shaping consciousness and creating the grounds for working-class rebellion. However, Gibbon's historical narrative is constructed very much in the mould of formal principles Lukács would likely not have approved of: McCulloch describes *A Scots Quair* as marrying 'modernist fictional form with a Marxist exploration of contemporary and historical force' (2003: 29) while Ferrall and McNeill concur, arguing '*A Scots Quair* combines a modernist commitment to formal inventiveness and linguistic experimentation with the traditional ambitions of the historical novel' (2015: 134).

The importance of history is underlined from the beginning of *Sunset Song*, which opens with a folk history of Kinraddie, the rural hamlet in which the first novel is set. The narrative voice recounts the events of the early nineteenth century, 'an ill time for the Scots gentry, for the poison of the French Revolution came over the seas' (Gibbon 2006: 13) during which time 'the crofters marched on Kinraddie Castle in a body and bashed in the winders of it, they

thought equality should begin at home' (14). Later, Chris, the trilogy's lead protagonist, is at Dunnottar Castle where, in 1685, 'the Covenanting folk had screamed and died while the gentry dined and danced in their lithe, warm halls' (128). Chris draws on this history to form her own class identity: 'hatred of rulers and gentry a flame in her heart, [her father] John Guthrie's hate. Her folk and his they had been' (128). This sense of a connection to Kinraddie's history of revolt informs not only Chris' connection to the past but also how her class loyalties manifest in the present: when, in *Cloud Howe*, mill owner Stephen Mowat calls for 'Discipline, order, hierarchy' (369), explicitly invoking Italy's nascent fascist regime in his response to intensifying class antagonisms leading up to the General Strike, Chris draws on her identification with the Covenanters saying '*I've been to Dunnottar Castle and seen there the ways that the gentry once liked to keep order. If it came to the push between you and the spinners I think I would give the spinners my vote*' (370, original emphasis).

Yet the importance of history in *A Scots Quair* goes beyond Chris' identification with local histories of revolt. As Hubble notes, there is a sense of history as a process yet to be concluded made 'particularly acute' in the trilogy as 'the human history of social development from the land via small towns to the industrial city is effectively compressed into a period of a little less than a quarter of a century across the three books' (2017: 117). This process is hinted at in Long Rob's lamenting to Mr Gordon the disappearance of the Scots language: '*You tell me, man, what's the English for sotter, or greip, or smore, or pleiter, gloaming or glunching or well-kenspeckled? And if you said gloaming was sunset you'd fair be a liar*' (Gibbon 2006: 157). Mr Gordon responds: '*You can't help it, Rob. If folk are to get on in the world nowadays, away from the ploughshafts and out of the pleiter, they must use the English* (157). It is of particular relevance to note that many of the Scots words mentioned are related directly to agricultural life ('greip' being a farm building drain;

‘gloaming’ the half-light of dusk or dawn; ‘pleiter’ meaning to struggle through, usually in the context of mud or similar). This passage can therefore be read as Gibbon positing a classically Marxist base-superstructure relationship with the shift away from the Scots language (superstructure) the result of its declining relevance as the economic base shifts from the rural semi-feudal mode of production to enclosure and an increasingly capitalist one.

The sweeping aside of Scotland’s crofting economy in *Sunset Song* is accelerated by World War One, evidenced in the leveling of Blawearie woods for war purposes and, perhaps more significantly, by the deaths of Long Rob, Chae Strachan and Chris’ first husband Ewan Tavendale—the characters symbolic of “old Kinraddie”—while serving in it. In Long Rob, particularly, Kinraddie loses not merely his defence of the increasingly archaic Scots language but also his singing of old Scottish songs which ‘Hardly anybody left in Kinraddie sang’ (227). Meanwhile Chae, upon being told the felled forest will be replanted after the war, responds sarcastically that it would be useful ‘if he’d the chance of living two hundred years and seeing the woods grow up as some shelter for beast and man’ (201), indicating the historic pre-capitalist connections of the woods and their necessity for local livelihoods. Following their deaths, comes enclosure as ‘the Trustees were to sell up Kinraddie at last; and the farmers that wanted them could buy their own places’ (242). The symbolic death of “old Kinraddie” and subsequent advance of capitalist progress into rural Scotland is explicated in the elegy of new Reverend—and Chris’ husband in the subsequent novel, *Cloud Howe*—Robert Colquhoun:

*With them we may say there died a thing older than themselves, these were the Last of the Peasants, the last of the Old Scots folk. [...] we are told that great machines come soon to till the land, and the great herds come to feed on it, the crofter is gone, the*

*man with the house and the steading of his own and the land closer to his heart than the flesh of his body” (254, original emphasis)*

Arriving at the end of *Sunset Song*, Robert becomes a central figure in *Cloud Howe* both as Reverend of the larger village of Segget and Chris’ second husband. *Cloud Howe* represents an increasingly secularised and proletarianised population: where Kinraddie formed a Weberian “organic community”, its politicised characters existing as individuals, Segget begins the process of developing a more complex society with the increasing formation of class blocs depicted in the existence of the textile spinners who Chris is told are ‘*not Segget folk, the spinners, at all*’ (297). As such, Gibbon constructs a social world increasingly divided by class: the spinners, despite living in Segget, are nonetheless not considered ‘Segget folk’, the subsequent ‘at all’ underlining their exclusion from a communal body politic defined in decidedly bourgeois/petit-bourgeois terms. However, in contrast to *Clash*, the spinners do not remain the anonymous plural nouns of Wilkinson’s novel but rather are given individual subjectivities alongside their construction as a collective class formation. The Cronins, for instance, are described as ‘The worst of the lot’, their father, ‘old Cronin’, having been a foreman until ‘he got his hand mashed up in machinery. He’d fair gone bitter with that, they told, and took to the reading of the daftest-like books, about Labour, Socialism, and such-like stite’ (328). Others, like Jock and Dod Cronin, are similarly afforded narrative arcs and subplots absent in Wilkinson’s novel.

These class blocs clash during a commemoration for those who died during the war, outlining the social cleavage between the middle classes commemorating a war they had not fought in while excluding the working classes who had. The confrontation acts as a precursor in miniature for the later depiction of the General Strike, its collapse and Chris’ miscarriage,

with Ferrall and McNeill suggesting that the synchronicity of the two events (the miscarriage and the strike's collapse) indicates 'parallels with the ill-prepared and premature confrontation of the Strike' (138). The defeat of the Strike is followed by an anger and bewilderment mirroring the aforementioned historical accounts and—in stark contrast with *Clash*—places blame squarely with a union leadership who Robert says 'had sold the Strike to save their skins' (Gibbon 2006: 416) while the spinners and rail workers 'wouldn't believe it when the news came through that the Strike was ended' (417). Furthermore, the dramatic irony of Segget's bourgeoisie announcing the Strike's defeat would see 'a gey change for the good, no more unions to cripple folks' trade, and peace and prosperity returning again' (421) would have been clearly apparent to the 1930s reader living through an era of economic crisis and ascendent international fascist movements; this becomes evermore so with the successive bankruptcy of mill owner Mr Mowat, the introduction of the Means Test and the death of Old Cronin left with 'no firewood for days, and nothing but a pot of potatoes to eat' (459). The Depression's horrifying effects reach their climax when an evicted family, seeking refuge in Segget's abandoned pig sties, awake to the screams of their baby whom 'rats in the night had gnawed off its thumb' (462). In response to this last event, Robert gives his final sermon,

*there is no hope for the world at all – as i, the least of his followers see – except it forget the dream of the christ, forget the creeds that they forged in his shadow [...] and seek with unclouded eyes, [...] a stark, sure creed that will cut like a knife, a surgeon's knife through the doubt and disease (471)*

Where *Sunset Song* concludes with the arrival of capitalism, *Cloud Howe* concludes with the arrival of its crisis, the quick succession of bankruptcy, means testing and death through poverty creating a sensation of building towards a cataclysmic crescendo. Robert's final

sermon paves the way for *Grey Granite*'s world of a fully developed industrial capitalism and working-class struggles in a context of mass unemployment which readers would recognise as the present day. The trilogy's final novel thus presents the opportunity for novelistic meditation on radical workers' politics—that '*stark, sure creed that will cut like a knife*' mentioned by Robert—and the indication of utopian post-capitalist possibilities.

The discussion hitherto, then, shows how Gibbon fulfils the function of the Lukácsian historical novel; however, it is important to underline how significantly Gibbon departs from Lukácsian principles in his deployment of modernist formal techniques. These techniques are most immediately apparent in his use of regional dialect not merely in dialogues—as in other novels of this chapter—but also the narrative voice, itself inflected via free indirect style with the accents and attitudes of other characters (both named and unnamed) in a strategy simultaneously subverting what MacCabe calls the 'hierarchy of discourses' by undermining narrative authority and legitimising the speech of Gibbon's lower-class dialect speakers. For example, in one passage from *Sunset Song*, Chris' subjectivity takes on the narrative voice, looking disdainfully at her village's 'yokels and clowns' (91) until Chae and Long Rob intelligent interjections cause to her to be 'shamed as she thought – Chae and Long Rob they were, the poorest folk in Kinraddie!' (91-92). Gibbon's use of free indirect style serves similar ends to Hanley's in *The Furies*: despite being the novel's principal protagonist, Chris' subjectivity is not given a privileged position when it assumes the narrative voice in terms of being given superior—let alone omniscient—insight vis-à-vis the novel's action. Yet neither does such a strategy diminish her subjectivity; rather, in refusing the 'hierarchy of discourses', Gibbon produces a fictional world in which Chris can exist as an intelligent working-class woman alongside other intelligent working-class people, of whom none are expected—like MacKelvie—to provide a complete perspective on all the questions raised

within the narrative. Rather, as is evident with Chris in the ‘yokels and clowns’ passage, the reader shares in the moments of learning or limitation experienced by all characters.

Narrative authority is also undermined by its shifts to particular—sometimes unnamed—characters who are then depicted variously as gossips, hypocrites or in some other way wildly flawed in their assumptions. The aforementioned passage describing the Cronins as the ‘worst of the lot’, reading ‘the daftest-like books’ on socialism is one such example of the narrative voice being satirised by the self-professed ‘revolutionary writer’ (Gibbon 1935: 179). Meanwhile, other examples include the spreading around Seggett of Hairy Hogg’s rumour that Robert had cast out his maid as a result of an affair, to which local joiner, Ake Ogilvie, responds ‘*what has the business to do with old Hogg? He himself, it seems, has done a bit more than just lie down by the side of his wife*’ at which point the narrator explains ‘That was just like Ake Ogilvie, to speak coarse like that, trying to blacken the character of a man that wasn’t there to defend himself’ (Gibbon 2006: 395). The irony here is the hypocrisy of the narrator addressing the reader in Ake’s absence for the express purpose of “blackening” his character as part of his defence of Hairy Hogg’s right—and, indeed, the right of a large section of Seggett’s population—to “blacken” Robert’s name while neither are present to defend themselves.

Thus, as in *The Furies*, free indirect style weaves a narrative devoid of reliability with Gibbon inviting the reader to actively contradict his narrative voice. This manifests in the peculiar use of ‘you’ in the novel’s narration, such as in the following passage after the Seggett Show where teacher Miss Jeannie Grant is seen with socialist railway porter Jock Cronin:

Socialists with queans – well, you knew what they did, they didn't believe in homes or in bairns [...] the coarse brutes said that marriage was daft – that fair made a body right wild to read that, what was coarse about marriage you would like to know? ... And you'd stop from your reading and say to the wife, *For God's sake, woman, keep the bairns quiet. Do you think I want to live in a menagerie?* And she'd answer you back, *By your face I aye thought that was where you came from,* and start off again about *her* having no peace [...] And you'd get in a rage and stride out of the house, and finish the paper down at the Arms (332-333)

Rancière's conception of working with distance and the contraction and distension of temporalities is clearly evident: the passage, beginning at the Segget Show with Miss Jeannie Grant and Jock Cronin, moves seamlessly in space and time into the narrator's home, now revealed as an unnamed married man reading about socialists in the newspaper who subsequently argues with his wife and storms out to finish his reading at the pub. In this context, Gibbon's use of 'you' seems at first to engage the reader in an understanding of a particular experience as collectively shared or understood; yet this function is undermined by the narrator's unreliability exemplified in his comical misunderstanding of socialism ('they didn't believe in homes or in bairns') and lack of self-awareness depicted in the shift from unitalicised free indirect style asking 'what was coarse about marriage' followed by the italicised reported speech '*For God's sake, woman, keep the bairns quiet*' suggesting that what is supposedly collectively understood is itself open to challenge. As such, the appearance of this unreliably expressed but supposedly generalisable 'you' in *Cloud Howe* signifies the increasing confrontation between contradictory perspectives in an increasingly complex society moving further away from the organic community of *Sunset Song*'s Kinraddie. Again collapsing the binary between commitment and avant-gardism, it is

precisely Gibbon's formal innovativeness in undermining the hierarchy of discourses and abjuring traditional narrative temporalities which serve his trilogy's quasi-Lukácsian depiction of the forces of historical progress.

The passage also works as a satire of the nuclear family indicating a critique of capitalism encompassing not just its class character but also its dependence on the patriarchal social order. Indeed, while many proletarian novels from the period give space for discussion of capitalism's gendered nature, none foreground women's experiences to the degree Gibbon does. Burton, for example, argues that the trilogy contains 'topics, attitudes, and techniques of representation that would, characteristically, dominate in other works of modern fiction written to be read as consciously feminist texts' (1984: 35). Meanwhile, Fox notes how the novels 'focus on women's labour, openly celebrate private emotion, and valorise the body (both male and female). Furthermore, the sexual, the romantic, the political, and the domestic all surprisingly merge' (1994: 195). Indeed, such a distinct focus on gender and the romantic/sexual aspect of existence allow, as Fox explains, the expansion of the political terrain of the proletarian novel.

This expansion to include resistance to patriarchy is suggested even in Chris' name, responding to Ewan calling her 'Chrissie' by insisting '*my name's Chris, Ewan*' (Gibbon 2006: 131). In fact, her name is Christine (121), but in opting for the traditionally masculine 'Chris', she poses a challenge to perceived gender norms, reaffirmed in her reflection that 'If only she'd been born a boy she'd never had such hatings vex her, she'd have ploughed up parks and seen to their draining, lived and lived' (143), an acknowledgement of freedoms afforded to men which are withheld from women. This desire to resist gender roles is part of Chris' attempts to navigate the vulnerability she experiences in patriarchal society. For

example, during a passage in which Chris is sitting at home in her undergarments, causing her mother to declare she would “*make a fine lad*” (67), her father’s anger at seeing her is suggested to be the ‘caged beast’ (68) of repressed sexual desire. Her mother’s response, when Chris approaches her about it the following day, only reaffirms her vulnerability: ‘*I cannot tell you a thing or advise you a thing, my quean. You’ll have to face men for yourself when the time comes, there’s none can stand and help you*’ (68). Indeed, Chris navigates three unwanted sexual advances in *Sunset Song*: one from her own father (112) and two from her husband Ewan Tavendale (96; 221), exemplifying Fox’s argument regarding the expansion of political terrain, in this instance to include the politics of sexual consent and underlining how working-class women’s experiences are defined as much by the threat posed by oppressive gender relations with male members of their own class as exploitative class relations under capitalism. As such, Gibbon ‘strongly implies in his writing [that] only an intersectional approach is capable of challenging capitalist power relations’ (Hubble 2017: 115). In introducing the political framework of the interpersonal and sexual autonomy, Gibbon makes visible/sayable in the arena of legitimate working-class political claims concepts that would only be popularised decades later with the advent of the women’s liberation movement, a movement which—as discussed in Chapter Three—similarly challenged the traditional institutions of working-class political representation. Therefore, as Burton explains, though the novels of *A Scots Quair* ‘clearly describe the nature and extent of the oppression of the working class, they also do not suggest that the mobilised Left have anything like an adequate vision with which to transform existing power relations’ (1984: 40). Gibbon’s trilogy thus functions as an intersectional working-class challenge to the institutions of the workers’ movement.

This becomes particularly evident in the trilogy's politicised characters who—no differently from the relatively apolitical Chris, but distinct from Cunningham's conceptualisation of Communists in proletarian fiction—are depicted as significantly flawed in various ways. Chae, for instance, enthusiastically enlists to fight in World War One imagining it 'would end the armies and fighting forever, the day of socialism at last would dawn' (Gibbon 2006: 205). Jock Cronin, meanwhile, follows a narrative arc not dissimilar to that desired by Desmond Fury, with Jock getting

a job on a union there and went lecturing here and went blethering there, in a fine new suit and a bowler hat [...] And he'd married Miss Grant, a three weeks back, and they had a fine house on the Glasgow hills; and wherever he went Jock Cronin would preach alliance between all employers and employed, and say to folk that came to hear him that they shouldn't strike, but depend on their leaders – like himself (435).

Indeed, Jock's transition from working-class militant to social democratic representative seems a comment on the Mond-Turnerist shift in industrial relations in his preaching an 'alliance between all employers and employed' while his discouragement of strike action in favour of listening to leaders 'like himself' parallel the labour movement's post-General Strike swing towards top-down organisationalism. Indeed, Jock's integration into bourgeois society finds its confirmation in his marriage to Jeannie Grant, a significant shift from when 'Socialists with queans' argued 'marriage was daft', further suggesting Gibbon's radical intersectionalism whereby the containment of class politics within the structures of bourgeois society is conceived as working in conjunction with a gender politics contained within the patriarchal social order.

Arguably, however, Gibbon's criticisms of Chae and Jock are consistent with wider tendencies within proletarian writing of critiquing social democracy (such as Bailie Pink in *Major Operation* or Albert Raggett in *May Day*). But it is with Chris' son Ewan in *Grey Granite* that the critique of political militants is extended to the radical left of which Gibbon himself was also a part. By contrast, however, Ewan's political development is similar to MacKelvie's—as well as what would become the archetypal socialist realist hero more generally—but 'in a novel that is unlike a socialist realist novel' (Hubble 2017: 130). Moreover, unlike MacKelvie, Ewan's character is riddled with flaws, ending the novel a vaguely tragic figure in his interpersonal relationships, if not necessarily his political ones.

*Grey Granite* completes Gibbon's historical journey from the old crofting society of Kinraddie to arrive at the advanced capitalist metropolis home to the industrial proletariat. *Grey Granite*'s Duncairn is Gibbon's fictionalised Aberdeen, a city he had previously described as built from 'one of the most enduring and indestructible and appalling building-materials in use on our planet – grey granite' (2001: 111), and the narrative is consistent with the motifs of other city-based proletarian novels in its portrayals of strikes, unemployed demonstrations and similar phenomena. Ewan, now a young adult, turns towards socialism, inspired by his romance with Ellen, a socialist boarding at Chris' lodging house. Ewan's politics are initially infused with a libertine spirit, declaring at a dance organised by his non-partisan socialist group that '*every one should have a decent life and time for dancing and enjoying oneself, and a decent house to go to at night, decent food, decent beds*' (Gibbon 2006: 581), with 'dancing and enjoying oneself' mentioned ahead of more traditional demands around food and shelter. But during his arrest—and subsequent torture and rape by police—Ewan undergoes a transformation as he

lay still with a strange mist boiling, blinding his eyes, not Ewan Tavendale at all any more but lost and be-bloodied in a hundred broken and tortured bodies all over the world, in Scotland, in England, in the torture-dens of the Nazis in Germany, in the torment-pits of the Polish Ukraine (609)

This passage can be read as indicating Ewan drawing strength from the global struggle against capitalism, and his redoubling of commitment to the workers' movement upon release would seem to suggest this. Yet, as Fox argues, the 'strange mist', 'blinding his eyes' negates his individuality in favour of a depersonalised political identity that blinds him 'to the healing possibilities of private relationships' (1994: 198) culminating in his separation from Ellen. Following his harrowing experiences in the police cells, the libertine spirit in Ewan's socialism is expunged in favour of a more orthodox Communism: he joins the Communist Party and begins reading the 'driest stuff, economics' (Gibbon 2006: 640), accompanied by an increasingly distant private realm as Ellen looks at his 'cold, blank and grey, horrible eyes [...] like the glint on the houses in Royal Mile, the glint of grey granite' (640).

The simultaneous hardening of Ewan's political world and decay of his emotional one, culminates in the much-discussed passage of his separation from Ellen: as Ewan stares at her, his face 'a stone, [...] carved in a silver of grey granite' (663), Ellen explains that her employer has pressured her into renouncing her party membership, adding that, regardless, she was '*sick of being without decent clothes, without the money I earn myself, pretty things that are mine, that I've worked for*' (663) before suggesting they join the Labour Party (664). Ewan's response sees his ever-hardening politics and deteriorating emotional realm combine: '*Go to them then [...] your Labour Party and your comfortable flat. But what are you doing out here with me? I can get a prostitute anywhere*' (664). While Gibbon does not share

Ellen's change of political allegiance—as the example of Jock Cronin suggests—the severity and outright misogyny of Ewan's outburst directs sympathy towards her. As Hubble explains, while Ellen's political realignment and desire for personal advancement suggest hypocrisy, it is 'a recognisably human hypocrisy' whereas Ewan's comment is 'clearly meant to be experienced as brutal and shocking by the reader' (2017: 129). Meanwhile, the repeated connections of Ewan to the 'grey granite' of Aberdeen/Duncairn serve as a metaphor for the interconnection between his political and emotional being: as a political actor, Ewan certainly becomes more 'enduring and indestructible', yet in his personal relationships he equally becomes more 'appalling'. Though Ewan's narrative arc closes with him heroically leading a march to London, the unsparing failure of his relationship subverts the archetypal narrative closure of the Gladkovian proto-socialist realist hero, suggesting the need for a politics beyond that offered by the soon-to-be codified socialist realism.

Ewan's characterisation and the ambiguity of precisely where revolutionaries are intended to place their allegiances in this passage, led to a number of criticisms and questions regarding their implications for a revolutionary politics. Taylor cites how 'Ewan's ruthlessness caused consternation' amongst contemporary left-wing critics, Lehmann describing him as 'too humourless' while the *Daily Worker* took issue with the 'representation of Communists as "figures of unbending steel which never smile"' (2018: 153). Meanwhile, McCulloch finds it difficult 'to gauge the author's attitude towards his "hero"'. Ewan may be at the heart of the revolutionary struggle but his presentation does not encourage belief that the resolution of that struggle and its social ills lies with his impersonal ideology', suggesting that Gibbon's desire was to create a protagonist 'free from the human emotions and indecisions which so often get in the way of taking pragmatic action, a protagonist who would put the fight for a new order of society before individual needs' (2009: 143). However, McCulloch neglects the

extent to which, as shown by Fox and Hubble, the reader is encouraged to be appalled by Ewan's development, not least by Gibbon's intersectional approach to revolutionary politics. Furthermore, the politics behind Ewan's characterisation necessitates its situation within the structure and form of the trilogy as a whole not to mention an understanding of working-class politics within a political metric not merely concerned with linear notions of 'centre' and 'far-left' but also the function of representation, with all its concomitant implications for working-class agency and social transformation discussed previously.

Remaining within *Grey Granite*, such tensions are evident throughout, such as when the narrative voice shifts to an unnamed observer of an unemployed demonstration who reluctantly admits 'Communionists [...] might blether damned stite but they tried to win you your rights for you' (Gibbon 2006: 533). Superficially, this passage seems to accept political representation due to 'Communionists' winning rights on behalf of the class; however, the use of free indirect style from the perspective of an anonymous worker creates a bottom-up view of the representational relationship, undermining the substitutionism evident in *Clash* and *Major Operation* whereby the representative—whether Labour or CPGB—stands synecdochically for those they represent. This conceptual distinction is magnified as the passage progresses with the demonstration itself—depicted via the continued use of free indirect style—viewed from within/below, with the anonymous worker singing the *Internationale*: 'you'd never sung so before, all your mates about you, marching as one, you forgot all the chav and trauchle of things, the sting of your feet, nothing could stop you' (534). The unnamed observer is thus turned into a participant, afforded a subjectivity entirely absent from the demonstrations or mass meetings of either Wilkinson's or Barke's novel. Even more significantly, perhaps, is the demonstration's eruption into open rebellion—now observed by a freshly-politicised Ewan—describing how 'the bobbies charged the Broo men

went mad though their leader tried to wave them back' (535). In contrast to *Major Operation*'s warnings about 'provocateurs' or *Love on the Dole*'s repudiation of militant words and action, Gibbon depicts working-class militancy *despite* the attempts of representatives—significantly, in this instance, Communists—to contain it. After their leader fails to 'wave them back', Ewan relishes seeing 'the Broo folk in action' (535). Moreover, though the scene depicts acts of violence on both sides, the fact 'bobbies charged' precedes 'the Broo men went mad' suggests Gibbon's sympathy remains with the demonstrators reacting to unprovoked police violence rather than the police, while Ewan's youthful, pre-Communist orthodoxy exuberance —'well done, well done!' (535)—encourages support for the demonstrators rather than their hapless leaders.

Yet the undermining of the representative function is most fully perceived when analysed as part of the text's anti-dogmatic—though undoubtedly revolutionary—politics, expressed not merely in explicit statements from Chris that 'nothing in the world she'd believed in but change' (579) but also her role as the central narrative subject over the entire trilogy. In contrast to the privileged subject positions of politicised characters in *Love on the Dole* (Larry Meath), *Clash* (Joan Craig), *Major Operation* (Jock MacKelvie) and *May Day* (Ivy Cutford and numerous other Communist characters not discussed in this chapter), *A Scots Quair* centres and legitimises the experience of a non-politicised character, thus foregrounding the agency of the working class in societal transformation rather than the ideologies or organisations of political representatives. Chris certainly maintains a conspicuous class consciousness throughout the trilogy, whether her assertion in *Grey Granite* to being "awfully common myself" (530), her intuitive siding with the spinners against Mowat during the General Strike in *Cloud Howe*, or the hatred of the gentry inherited from her father and linking her to centuries of rebellion via the Covenanters and the crofters'

attack on Kinraddie Castle in *Sunset Song*. However, it is precisely her non-adherence to any political doctrine that allows this sense of class consciousness and shared history of struggle to be a capacity latent within the class as a whole rather than an exceptional quality to be guarded jealously by monastic orders.

This rejection of doctrinaire revolutionary politics—without rejecting revolution—allows Gibbon to open up the revolutionary subject position beyond the political representatives of those uneasy avant-gardists closer to the CPGB. The result is that Ewan can exist as neither exalted proletarian subject nor rejected outright, while non-revolutionary characters such as Alick Watson—whose information leads to Ewan’s arrest and horrific treatment by police—can later be found (after absconding to the army to avoid confronting the ramifications of his actions) encouraging fellow soldiers ‘to organise and stick up for their rights’ (657). As Burton explains, Gibbon refuses ‘the possibility of simplifying human actions, morals, ethics’ (1984: 44), in a manner not dissimilar to Hanley in fact. This allows him to conceive of communism not in its rigid, party-political sense, but rather more fluidly, as the heterogeneous ‘real movement which abolishes the present state of things’, where internal contradictions form productive tensions rather than inconsistencies to be ironed out by party doctrine.

## Conclusion

In keeping with Jameson’s theorisation, the novels of the post-General Strike proletarian literary formation were exemplars of *parole* in a working-class *langue* in dialogical opposition to the dominant *langue* of bourgeois society. They were, as Fox explains, “oppositional strategies” in themselves, ‘contesting the dominant culture through language’. Yet while all the texts of the proletarian literary formation may be conceived as oppositional

strategies, this opposition manifested differently and, as explained by Snee, was sometimes subject to structural limitations it was unable to transform.

Thus, the most consistently realist of the proletarian novels discussed in this chapter—*Love on the Dole*, *Means-Test Man* and *Clash*—while promoting a working-class subject position in conflict with class society, nonetheless all serve to contain the discontent inherent in such a subject position within boundaries amenable to the overarching structures of political representation *within* class society. This political function is intimately linked with these novels' adherence to realist formal principles, such as their distinct hierarchy of discourses between the narrator and the characters as well as between the characters themselves, and their commitment to the solidity of the external world through its depiction "as it is". The social relationships implied in such aesthetic representational practices make them readily appropriable by traditional approaches to political representational practices, manifest in, for example, the privileging of moderating influences within the text such as Larry Meath or Jack Cook, or in *Clash*'s centring of a narrative about mass working-class action around an individual union representative who comes to symbolise the mass she represents while diminishing the agency that mass itself.

The contradiction at the heart of the CPGB's dual role in public life as both rank-and-file rabble-rousers and alternative representational institution finds its manifestation in avant-garde texts which at times express unease with their own avant-gardism. *Major Operation*, in particular, utilises overtly modernist techniques in order to displace ideological thinking (in both bourgeois and social democratic expressions) only to then back away from such techniques when advancing its Marxist-Leninist alternative, restabilising its narrative through establishing its proletarian substitute for the typical hero of the bourgeois novel. By contrast,

*May Day* finds itself more at ease with its own experimentalism, though this notably coincides with its increased focus, contra *Major Operation*, on the Communist Party's rank-and-file function rather than as an alternative institution of political representation.

Finally, however, there are those writers who most clearly rupture with representation in both senses, highlighting the 'shared stakes of artistic and political representation' which Brant notes in Rancière's work. Hanley's removal of central, heroic proletarian figures to produce a polyphonic narrative of complex working-class characters, like Gibbon's range of modernist techniques to centre the subjectivity of a working-class woman adhering to no ideology but nonetheless maintaining a radical class consciousness, functions to remove transformative social agency from political representatives, locating it instead as a capacity existent within the class as a whole. However, this is not to suggest the primacy of avant-gardism in and of itself: as the readings of *To the Lighthouse* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* demonstrate, experimental literary techniques detached from the collective experience of class antagonism also find themselves limited by the structural boundaries of their form. It is by fusing avant-garde aesthetics with the content of class antagonism—collapsing the "commitment-versus-experimentalism" binary to produce the 'social modernism' described by Denning—that working-class avant-gardism is able to become 'a galvanic force' in its writing of democratic history, tendencies evident in both *The Furys* and *A Scots Quair*.

The political tumult following the General Strike created a proletarian literary formation far more experimental and heterogeneous than critics such as Cunningham often assumed. Regardless of their varying degrees of ease or discomfort with it, that such experimentalism took place cannot be disputed. However, the experimental tendency in working-class writing—and its concomitant challenge to working-class political representation—dissipates

somewhat in the political settlement of the postwar years. Yet the roots of that dissipation are not merely in the reconfiguration of the postwar politics but, in fact, reach back into the 1930s themselves, the inevitability of another world war and the gradual replacement of class conflict with social consensus.

## Chapter Two: Literature in an Age of Consensus

### Consensus and its discontents

Following the Second World War, working-class communities were transformed to an extent almost unrecognisable from the suffering which had blighted them for much of the interwar period. As Todd outlines, working-class people's lives greatly improved following Labour's 1945 election victory as the party 'took power committed to maintaining full employment and collective bargaining, and to introduce cradle-to-grave welfare provision' (2015: 152). Those years thus 'witnessed the rapid development of a more comprehensive welfare state than Britain had ever known providing free access to healthcare and secondary education, and offered an important safety net to those who could not benefit from full employment' (164). Such provision was part of Labour's "social contract" with the people. The government would guarantee the workers' welfare in return for their labour. To ensure that workers' needs were met at work as well as at home, the trade unions were assured a seat at the national negotiation table' (158). By the 1950s, welfare capitalism had created an era of 'working-class prosperity' in Britain with a 'hitherto unknown array of consumer goods: televisions and three-piece suites, fridges, cookers and convenience foods' (200). As Prime Minister Harold Macmillan would put it in 1957, the British people had 'never had it so good' (quoted in Todd 2015: 199).

Todd's account stresses the importance of Labour's election victory for the construction of the welfare state, noting the ways in which the Conservatives would undermine Labour's advances in the 1950s through their commitment to the free market, specifying particularly their gradual removal of price controls and expansion of credit (203). However, Panitch problematises this thesis, outlining how the three decades following Labour's victory were

defined by ‘an overriding consensus between the two major parties on what the national interest in fact entailed’ (1976: 2) with both seeking to integrate working-class organisations into a system of ‘managing a predominantly private enterprise economy’ (3). This consensus around increased state involvement in the economy and public welfare can be seen in the commitment of consecutive Labour and Tory governments to full employment and formalised consultation with the trade unions, not to mention Churchill’s own proclamations during the war that he and the Conservatives were ‘strong partisans of national compulsory insurance for all classes for all purposes from the cradle to the grave’ as well as the ‘broadening field for State ownership and enterprise’ (Addison 1993: 369). The point here is not that Churchill or the Conservatives were suddenly champions of working-class living standards (they most certainly were not); rather, it is to highlight the growing convergence in thinking around the necessity for state involvement in the management of capitalism following an economic crisis and world war which had brought the entire world-system to the brink of collapse.

The result of this new consensus, however, was that the British working class found itself in a ‘new position of strength’ (Todd 2015: 121). In part, this was a result of, to use sociologist Beverly Silver’s terminology, their increased ‘marketplace bargaining power’ (2005: 13), emerging from full employment and the heightened need for their labour which emerged during the war and would continue for some time after it. This increased power ushered in a new era, both cultural and political, in which the working class were no longer

caricatured as enemies of the state – as in the General Strike of 1926 – or viewed as helpless victims, like the dole claimants of the 1930s. They were now recognised by politicians and the press as being the backbone of the nation, on whose labour Britain

depended. Their interests became synonymous with those of the country. (Todd 2015: 121)

However, it is precisely at this point that the limits of the postwar consensus over the administration of welfare capitalism become evident as to conflate working-class interests with those of the nation is simultaneously to conflate the interests of labour with those of national capital. Virdee describes this process as the unprecedented ‘horizontal integration into the imagined national community [...] the apex of an incremental but relentless process of working-class integration into the nation’ (2014: 101), whose origins lie in World War Two and the 1940 national unity government. Indeed, the collaboration of Churchill and Bevin, two veterans—from opposing sides—of the 1926 General Strike, within the national unity government ‘came to symbolise this cross-class alliance in the public imagination’ (101). One aspect of this alliance was Bevin’s Order 1305, which made strikes illegal; while Bevin argued that ‘every industry must institute collective bargaining between employers and trade unions’ to grant ‘the latter a new and permanent form of power’ (Todd 2015: 125), he also called on trade unions to ‘place yourselves at the disposal of the state. We are Socialists and this is the test of our Socialism’ (quoted in Todd 2015: 125). To draw on the previous discussion of Erik Wright from the introduction, Bevin’s top-down socialism can be conceived of as reinforcing the power of working-class associations—in this instance, the trade unions—through collective bargaining, but at the expense of working-class associational power (by making collective action illegal). Indeed, it is interesting to note Todd’s very deliberate wording in describing the social contract: to ensure the needs of *workers* were met, it is their *representatives*—the trade unions—who are assured a seat at the national negotiating table. Thus, while unions were granted power through collective bargaining, such power was at the expense of the rank and file, whose participation was

limited not only by the issues discussed in chapter one regarding the bureaucratic distinction between union hierarchy and its base, but also by the necessity that the unions place themselves entirely ‘at the disposal of the state’ (as a test of their socialism, no less) thereby exacerbating that bureaucratic distinction through the prohibition of rank-and-file collective action.

Certainly, an argument can be made for the exceptionalism of Order 1305’s wartime context; yet it also forms a curious consistency both with Bevin’s prewar actions during the 1937 Omnibus strike discussed in the previous chapter—when he unilaterally terminated a rank-and-file bus strike and negotiated a deal without consultation—as well as with the maintenance of Order 1305 by the postwar Attlee administration (Smith, JD. 1990: 4). Yet this new arrangement of collective bargaining in exchange for acquiescence ‘relied on trade unionists accepting the economic system of which they found themselves a part. They might bargain for more wages; they couldn’t bargain for a different way of organising work and wealth’ (Todd 2015: 126). The days of the general strike ‘when many grassroots trade unionists had argued that the capitalist system of industry was inequitable, seemed very long ago’ (126).

Nonetheless, despite legal proscription, industrial unrest did take place both during and after the war, with ‘the coalmining industry [seeing] the largest number of unofficial strikes’ after 1945 while the docks ‘saw a smaller number of very large and damaging unofficial strikes which caused severe economic dislocation’ (Smith, JD. 1990: 4). As Todd explains, in striking, these workers

asserted their right to have more say over their working life than Labour's reforms allowed them. Workers found that their union officials were granted a seat at the negotiating table, where they frequently became management's spokesmen, especially in the nationalised industries that were supposedly run in the interests of "the country". Miners and steelworkers who had cheered nationalisation were dismayed to find that the rigid managerial hierarchy of pre-war days was retained – often with the same faces in charge. (2015: 159)

Just as during the war, such hierarchy was entirely dependent on the cooperation of the trade unions in putting themselves at the state's 'disposal'. Nowhere is this more evident than in the TUC's support for the Attlee government's wage restraint policy whose 1948 White Paper 'declared that there was "no justification for any general increase of individual money incomes unless accompanied by a substantial increase in production"' (Panitch 1976: 22). Continuing, Panitch argues that though wage restraint had been introduced into a Britain 'still divided by class and with an economy where private enterprise, profit and the market mechanism (combined with a considerable degree of state intervention)', its justifications still came from within the labour movement, but merely 'different premises' (28). The first was that 'redistribution of income had gone as far as it could [...] and that any further increase in its reward had to come from productivity growth' (28) while the second emanated from Labour's 'changing conception of the role of private enterprise and entrepreneurial profits' whereby 'unnecessary interference with their ways of production would be harmful to production in a mixed economy' (29). Thus, it was Labour, rather than the Tories, who began the process of price deregulation, introducing in November 1948 'its "bonfire of controls" initiating the removal of a massive range of commodities from price control, and the gradual disengagement from rationing and utility schemes' (29), thereby reaffirming the idea of

postwar politics as a bipartisan consensus over the stewardship of welfare capitalism. Moreover, it shows the degree to which social democratic representational politics functioned to limit working-class demands, here in the form of a wage restraint policy predicated on the idea that the limits of income redistribution had already been reached. This policy was preserved through the ‘unflinching support of the trade union leadership’ (30), breaking down only as a result of ‘the threat to the stability of the trade unions themselves’ (38), both in the form of declining union membership in the years immediately following the wage restraint policy (38) as well as the aforementioned illegal strikes by miners, dockers and others.

Yet while the institutions of social democratic representation reinforced postwar hierarchies between classes, they equally reinforced hierarchies between working-class people as well. Todd notes how the gap between skilled and unskilled workers grew in the early 1950s with ‘trade unions representing skilled workers jealously protect[ing] their members’ rights to higher wages and security’ (2015: 205). The result was that many ‘unskilled and semi-skilled workers resented their skilled workmates’ (206), at least in part due to the fact that workers’ organisations such as the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) excluded them from membership until the late 1950s.

The distinction between skilled and unskilled was also laden with a heavy gender bias, with Todd noting how union officials often colluded with employers to designate ‘staffing the assembly lines as “women’s work” and were happy for it to be defined as low-skilled and low-paid’ (284). The Labour Party itself displayed similar biases with regards to gender, refusing ‘to address the needs of women workers both because of potential expense and because of their short-sighted belief that most working women would eventually be replaced by men’ (162). Black and Brooke concur, arguing that similar issues dogged Labour

movement thinking out of government, citing the TUC's 1953 refusal, supported by the Labour NEC, 'to launch a study of the social effects of employment on married women' (1997: 433). While Labour certainly espoused a vision of the welfare state, 'only particular kinds of women were recognised—traditional mothers and wives, not modern anomalies such as married women workers' (433). This was hardly a solitary incident; rather it was one manifestation of a masculinist tendency running through the social democratic imagination of its working-class constituency of the period:

Labour party pamphlets defined women exclusively in their domestic capacity.

Between 1950 and 1966, not a single pamphlet made reference to the single or married working woman, despite the demographic growth in the latter. This mirrored the TUC's obliviousness to the task of organising the new loci of women's employment, such as light industry and the retail trades. (441)

Moreover, the tensions within the scope of welfare capitalism with regards to gender were also replicated around race and conceptions of national belonging, forming one of the most visible fractures in the postwar consensus both in terms of who was—or was not—included as well as the issue's ability to mobilise overt social conflict. As Virdee explains, though 'the two decades immediately following the Second World War are almost uniformly heralded as one of unprecedented working class advancement' (2014: 98), when analysed through the lens of anti-racism, it is evident 'that such undoubted gains for one section of the working class were accompanied by systematic racism and discrimination against another section' (98); the 'golden age of welfare capitalism and the social democratic settlement was also the golden age of white supremacy' (98-99). The construction of a cross-class national identity symbolised during the war in the unity of Churchill and Bevin laid the groundwork for a

postwar national identity integrative of a particular representation of class identity in which the working class were often 'active participants in the project of reconstructing a national identity built on the twin principles of a common citizenship and the welfare compromise' as 'British workers and their trade unions in this period enforced racist and discriminatory practices against [migrant] workers on the grounds that they were not white, and thus not British' (99). This manifested in the numerous 'colour-bars' enforced jointly by trade unions at major workplaces such as Ford Dagenham or Tate & Lyle (102) as well as transport disputes in West Brom and Wolverhampton and union resolutions passed by the TGWU or COHSE in opposition to the employment of black workers (102-103). Indeed, such attitudes were present not only in individual unions but even the TUC itself, whose 1955 conference Ramdin describes as 'instructive' for the fact that while 'it condemned racial discrimination or colour prejudice, it nevertheless "implicitly accepted" that the "problem" was not the expression of prejudice or discriminatory practice by white employers and workers, but was attributable to the very presence of immigrants' (1987: 345). This attitude would continue into the mid-1960s, with concern expressed at the 1965 conference that migrant numbers would become 'large enough to constitute an extension of [the migrants'] previous environments' (349). As such, the point underlined repeatedly by both Virdee and Ramdin is that though 'the majority of the working class secured important gains as part of this [postwar] bipartisan settlement helping to cement their position as active citizens in the nation, another component – that of the newly arrived migrants – found themselves excluded from it' (Virdee 2014: 101).

However, such exclusion from the postwar settlement was not accepted passively and a full understanding of what might be termed the period's proletarian literary formation can only be achieved through an appreciation of the contemporary development of the period's migrant

class fraction. This fraction had to organise itself amidst a profusion of racial discourse. One common trope revolved around the threat of black male sexuality, leading Collins to contend that ‘the prominence of West Indian men was more than merely numerical. It was cultural, stemming from the fascination-cum-revulsion of whites who customarily regarded them as vicious, indolent, violent, licentious, and antifamilial’ (2001: 391). Meanwhile, Gilroy specifies that it was miscegenation which ‘captured the descent of white womanhood and recast it as a signifier of the social problems associated with the black presence’ (2002: 97) while Ellis argues that ‘concerns for the safety of white women (always an aspect of colonial discourse) were retained and recycled into tales of pimps and prostitution and combined with issues more specific to postwar Britain’ (2001: 218).

Housing was one such issue, forming another central pillar of racial anxieties in the 1950s. In the midst of a housing crisis adversely affecting all working-class people and exacerbated by the 1957 Rent Act’s removal of rent control obligations from private landlords, Britain’s recently-arrived migrants experienced a class exploitation articulated with their specific exploitation as a disadvantaged ethnic group. Infamous slumlord Peter Rachman provides an illuminating case study in his utilisation of the Rent Act, whereby he

evicted white tenants, kept the accommodation empty in order to have rent controls removed, and then took recent immigrants as new tenants. At a time when black migrants found it hard to get housing, Rachman was able to charge them exorbitant rents for overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. (Todd 2015: 188)

Not only did Caribbean migrants struggle to obtain housing due to widespread racism but those who would rent to them used that difficulty as an opportunity for intensified

exploitation, giving credence to Nikolanikos' theorisation of racism as resulting from 'competition between fractions of labour, which is structured by fractions of capital in their attempt to lower the cost of variable capital' (quoted in Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1996: 67<sup>8</sup>). As such, class-based anxieties around increasingly insecure housing tenure were often sublimated into a racial politics whose fusion with popular narratives of predatory black male sexuality fomented racial violence, culminating in the 1958 violence in Nottingham and Notting Hill. Macphee explains how

tensions around housing and sexual relations between black men and white women came to a head in 1958 [...] crowds of whites, instigated by fascist groups and armed with homemade weapons, attacked the local West Indian population, who in the absence of effective police protection organised collectively to defend themselves (2011: 45).

However, the 1958 race riots, rather than being an anomaly or aberration in the British body politic, can perhaps best be understood as the logical conclusion of the integration of a highly gendered and racialised representation of the working class into a welfare capitalism unable to negate the class antagonism upon which it is based: as white working-class males attacked—for the most part, though by no means only—black working-class males over perceived “competition” for women and housing, they expressed a form of class identity steeped in masculinist and racial assumptions not altogether removed from the period's prevailing politics and, indeed, promoted by the predominant working-class representational organisations of the time.

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<sup>8</sup> Though Nikolanikos is discussing racism directed towards migrant workers for the downward pressure their hyper-exploitation causes on wages, the trend is analogous to that of housing in late-1950s London in that black migrants' vulnerability was exploited to the detriment of both black and white working-class populations while white working-class resentment was directed at their black neighbours rather than white landlords.

That the politics motivating the 1958 racial violence was not far-removed from that of the mainstream was confirmed by the state's collusion with racial discourse, subsequently cemented in the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. An act 'not designed to engage with British racism, so much as to confirm it' (Ellis 2001: 217), the implication was that 'in order to eliminate racism in Britain, it is necessary to practise it at the point of entry' (217). The 1962 Act and future immigration legislation would therefore see an increasing tendency towards bringing 'the legal or state-based definition of citizenship into line with the initially unspoken assumptions of ethno-national identity' (MacPhee 2011: 42).

However, the Caribbean community<sup>9</sup> in Britain organised themselves variously in response to these multifarious political threats with informal community self-organisation arising 'through meetings held in rooms, in basements, street corners, markets, cafes and barber shops. The barber shops, in particular, served as community centres where West Indian newspapers were read and discussed, where all the latest news was heard' (Ramdin 1987: 222-223). These strong yet informal community bases were largely separate from the formal Caribbean political organisations of the 1950s and early 1960s, which Ramdin describes as being largely 'tolerant and accommodationist' (371). For instance, the West Indian Standing Conference, a top-down effort founded in the aftermath of the 1958 race riots by the High Commission of the West Indies Federation, under the proviso that it 'pursue no policies which might be embarrassing to the Commission' (Shukra 2008: 12), was one such example. Its activity focused largely on discussion groups, research and social events with the High

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<sup>9</sup> While the Caribbean community were not the only Commonwealth migrants in postwar Britain, they were among the earliest to arrive following the 1948 British Nationality Act, with South Asians only beginning to arrive in significant numbers towards the end of the 1950s/early 1960s. Thus, this chapter's discussion of class and race in fiction will focus primarily on works by Caribbean writers who depicted the earlier waves of postwar migration.

Commission wanting ‘to ensure that the work of the Caribbean establishment would not be compromised by events in Britain’ (13). Another example was the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), who excluded working-class migrant organisations—such as the Indian Workers’ Association—and preferring a legalistic route of lobbying and petitions (Ramdin 1987: 420-421). As founder member, Marion Glean argued, it ‘lasted only until its founding convention’ having ‘no base in the immigrant communities from which [it] could either speak or try to bargain’ (1973: 15).

Anti-colonialism formed another important aspect of the postwar black community’s political culture, bringing great inspiration to diaspora communities in Britain as anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle began to ‘break down island and ethnic affiliations and associations and to re-form them in terms of the immediate realities of social and racial relations, engendering in the process strong community bases for the shop floor battles to come’ (Sivanandan 1981: 96). Indeed, it was in these anti-colonial unities that the initial seeds of ‘political blackness’ were sown, an identity confined not merely to the African diaspora but ‘taken to extend to the racialised in general’ (Lentin 2004: 139) and taking form in solidarities expressed across ethnic boundaries, such as that shown by the largely West Indian Racial Action Adjustment Society (RAAS; the acronym being an expletive originating from Jamaican Creole vernacular) for Asian strikers at Preston’s Red Scar Mills in 1965, or later in the predominantly Asian membership of the United Black Youth League in Bradford. From the mid- to late-1960s, a black liberation politics based on political blackness thus came to represent an attempt at anti-racist identity formation which went beyond the politics of representation and respectability of the more liberal anti-racist communal bodies which had preceded it and the often nativist working-class organisations of the postwar period. Thus, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the issue of political representation and its concomitant

tendencies towards containment discussed in relation to the postwar white working class, return as issues affecting the black working class, though somewhat altered under the articulated pressures of race as well as class.

Indeed, the necessity for black liberation to transcend the limits of postwar white-dominated working-class organisations was true also of its relationship to the CPGB. Virdee notes that while Communists strongly supported Jewish racialised outsiders before the war, its insistence in the postwar years ‘on locating its socialist project on the terrain of the nation created difficulties for the CPGB when it came to effectively challenging the racism directed at Asian and black workers’ (Virdee 2014: 104). Such problems can be seen as emanating from the party’s prewar Popular Frontism ‘which inspired this strategy of socialist nationalism [and] created the hope among many CPGB members that the quest for socialism could be aligned with the existing British nation-state’ (104). For instance, such socialist nationalism was apparent in the Party’s manifesto, *The British Road to Socialism*, which called ‘for the unity of all true patriots to defend British national interests’ (CPGB 1951: 10) while its anti-racist policy was reduced to a single sentence under the heading ‘For Colonial Freedom’: ‘It [the British labour movement] needs to fight against the color bar and racial discrimination, and for the full social, economic and political equality of colonial people in Britain’ (16). The unaddressed disjuncture between ‘British national interests’ and ‘colonial freedom’ aside, historian Evan Smith argues that the designation of anti-racism under such a heading only reinforced the issue’s “foreignness”, subordinating it to a narrowly economic class struggle and demonstrating a ‘reductionist thrust’ in the Party’s theory of race (Smith, E. 2008: 469). Looking at the work of Virdee and Smith, then, it is evident that not only was the postwar integration of working-class organisations into the ‘imagined national community’ inclusive also of the radical left, but also that such socialist nationalism—

regardless of its radicalism—shared similar blind-spots as to the composition of its class constituency as its social democratic contemporaries.

The integration of the British working class into the nation via a generalised consensus around the management of welfare capitalism was therefore also the integration of a particular representation of that class subject, imagined primarily as the white male breadwinner and trade unionist and, secondarily, his (white) wife and mother of their children. Such a limited construction of the class subject was, however, at the expense of other subjectivities, erasing the particular interests of subordinate or emergent working-class fractions falling outside the dominant representation. However, the limited nature of such class representation—both in terms of the imagined class constituency and the demands its organisations would entertain—meant that consensus politics, though attempting to erase class antagonism, was nonetheless built on fragile foundations. While the postwar consensus transformed the terrain upon which class antagonism manifested, it could not eradicate class antagonism entirely; as such, any consensus could only be temporary with the various limitations and erasures imposed on its constituency returning later on as loci of social rupture.

## The aesthetics of consensus

While postwar Britain saw rapid social transformation, the period was nonetheless relatively tranquil by twentieth-century standards. Against such a backdrop of relative social peace, a distinct tendency can be discerned of a retreat from the avant-gardism of the interwar years with traditional critical accounts of the period highlighting a general “reaction against experiment”. As Rabinovitz explains, while novelists from the time ‘wrote about contemporary social problems, few of them experimented with the form and style of their

novels. [...] Most of the postwar writers conscientiously rejected experimental techniques in their fiction as well as in their critical writings, and turned instead to older novelists for inspiration' (1967: 2). Indeed, Rabinovitz quotes Raymond Williams arguing along similar lines that the period saw a 'return to older forms, and to specifically English forms, especially by comparison with the most widely discussed work of the 1920s and 1930s, which was largely experimental in form and cosmopolitan in spirit' (quoted in Rabinovitz 1967: 9-10).

Rabinovitz here restates the now-familiar binary between, on the one hand, realist social commentary and, on the other, formal experimentation. However, given the previous chapter's discussion of avant-gardism within Britain's 1930s proletarian literary formation, this binary becomes untenable. Moreover, Bentley contends that 'the dominant critical reading of fifties English literature as anti-modernist, anti-experimental and representing a return to traditional or conventional realist forms is a distortion of the actual heterogeneous nature of the novel produced during this period' (2007: 16), making a compelling case for the period as one far more varied in literary output than is often imagined, with a particular emphasis on how 'radical fictions' attempted 'to produce empowering discourses for marginalised groups' (16). Yet this does not necessarily negate the dominant critical narrative of postwar writing so much as add much needed nuance to it. Though more writers in Britain certainly did engage with literary experimentation than is often supposed, they nonetheless did so in a context of a renewed interest in classical works of literary realism: Rabinovitz cites a 1948 article on the postwar 'Victorian Revival' which argued that while 'in the period between the two wars the literature of the Victorian age was a theme of attack in Great Britain [...] The Victorian Age has come into its own again' (quoted in Rabinovitz 1967: 12). To this end, the piece points to the BBC beginning a programme dramatising excerpts from popular Victorian novels, film adaptations of novels such as *Great Expectations* and *Nicholas*

*Nickleby* as well as the staging of various Victorian plays for the London theatre (12). Furthermore, Rabinovitz also notes a renewed critical appreciation of Victorian literature with ‘New editions, biographies, and critical works dealing with almost every important Victorian writer’ appearing from the late-1940s and throughout the 1950s (12) with a rise in scholarly articles on Victorian authors disproportionate to the increasingly established institutions of English literature as an academic discipline (13). Finally, it is worth restating that Bentley’s reappraisal of 1950s literary experimentation highlights how much of the period’s formal innovativeness often emerged from the desire to ‘articulate the concerns of marginalised groups within Britain’ (2007: 16). Thus, while experimentation in postwar British fiction was more significant than is often credited, such fiction remained—to use Williams’ terminology—an emergent counter-hegemonic tendency existing within and in dialogue with a dominant literary culture inclined more towards literary realism.

This inclination towards realism was also evident in the prevailing working-class literary culture of the postwar period, which saw widespread interest in and was itself centred around a heavily gendered and racialised class subject not dissimilar from that discussed earlier in this chapter. Moreover, Rabinovitz argues that this postwar British working-class writing was ‘rarely as politically committed as the American working-class novel of the 1930s, striv[ing] instead to present a realistic picture of working-class life’ (1967: 23). Stevenson expresses similar attitudes, arguing many 1950s novels examined ‘new relations between social classes, and the opportunities for mobility within them’ but that the heroes of such novels often exemplify a ‘disposition towards reconciliation with society’ (1993: 95). Perhaps more harshly, Stevenson also highlights how novelists grouped around the “Angry Young Men” label displayed an anger that was ‘largely self-indulgent rather than – as was sometimes supposed in the fifties – genuinely politically motivated’ (95).

The uncertainties expressed by Rabinovitz and Stevenson around the politics of the Angry Young Men are not entirely without foundation—though it is curious that Rabinovitz feels the need to travel to America in search of politically committed 1930s working-class novels—yet they remain only partial in their analyses of postwar working-class fiction as a social phenomenon. Firstly, the extent to which the Angry Young Men can be conceived as what Denning calls a ‘proletarian literary formation’ is certainly much looser than that of 1930s British (and American) proletarian writing. For example, Ferrebe highlights the origins of the “Angry Young Men” label back to ‘the Press Office of the Royal Court Theatre to promote John Osborne’s first play, *Look Back in Anger*’ noting ‘its frenzied application to a thoroughly disparate grouping of writers and their characters, crossing and recrossing another journalistic invention for the literary scene – the Movement’ (2012: 39), with writers such as John Wain and Kingsley Amis often traversing these milieus’ ill-defined boundaries. Nonetheless, despite the incoherence and artificial nature of such categorisation, the Angry Young Men—and the Movement, from which it, at least in part, emerged—can nonetheless be understood as a distinct literary formation, growing—as Denning might have put it—out of the particular social formations of Britain’s postwar working class to produce particular kinds of genres, forms and formulas to recount that class experience. A degree of common institutionality can equally be discerned, such as Wain’s radio programme *First Readings*, first broadcast in 1953 and playing ‘a key role in forming the sense of a Movement amongst emerging writers, and begun with a long extract from the still-unpublished *Lucky Jim*’ (Ferrebe 2012: 196). Similar can be said of collective works such as the *New Lines* poetry anthology (1956) and *Declaration* (1957), a collection of “Angry” literary criticism, though Ferrebe notes that the publication of the latter ultimately served as ‘inarguable proof [...] that

any intellectual cohesion of the Angry literary phenomenon was to a large extent the product of media hype' (195).

Crowley concurs with this sentiment, arguing that the "Angry Young Men" label should be 'treated with caution' due to its 'inauthentic, opportunistic, journalistic and commercially driven nature' (2018: 57). However, Crowley also notes that the Angry Young Men nonetheless created 'the cultural and commercial conditions from which a "working-class moment" can emerge' (57). This 'working-class moment' is alluded to by Todd in her discussion of the upwardly-mobile writers, actors and other performers who 'brought working-class heroes of the post-war generation to an audience of thousands, and at times millions, of ordinary people' (2015: 236). The Angry Young Men personified 'a very modern dilemma: whether to use new postwar opportunities to pursue wealth and social status, or to reject these in favour of the community and solidarity that working-class life could offer' (236-237). Though often remaining unresolved, the focus on working-class people's lives invested them with an inherent worth as well as asserting that 'working-class people possessed values – a strong sense of community, loyalty, creativity and sincerity – that social mobility or slum clearance might threaten' (239). As such, the Angry Young Men, as a proletarian literary formation, thus grew out of—and responded to—the social formation of Britain's postwar working class.

Todd also discusses the Angry Young Men in relation to comments by Brian Epstein, manager of The Beatles and Cilla Black, that 'working-class people possessed an authenticity derived from their daily experience of struggle' (242). Yet such claims around working-class "values" and "authenticity" found themselves expressed not only within popular culture but also academia, such as Young and Willmott's 1957 study of kinship ties in Bethnal Green

and how, as Todd puts it, ‘working-class people could teach the rest of the country a thing or two about community’ (175). However, Todd’s critique of the study is insightful, noting how through the focus

on single neighbourhoods, and the relations between people on a single street, the researchers of the 1950s implied that working-class life took place in hermetically sealed neighbourhoods that were entirely shaped by the virtues or otherwise of those who lived in them. [...] But they paid scant attention to the ways in which employers, landlords and policymakers shaped the quality of life in all neighbourhoods, new or old. [...] They missed what really made people working class: the fact that they lacked power. (176)

There are numerous parallels here between Epstein’s and Young and Willmott’s formulations and the previous chapter’s discussion of positive working-class identity construction by Marxist-Leninists. Thus, while the working class may be revered for their ‘authenticity derived from their daily experience of struggle’, such reverence of a positive identity forged in the struggle to survive *within* class society presupposes both the continued existence of class society itself as well as the subordinate position of the working class within it (so as to preserve their ‘authenticity’). Moreover, the mainstreaming of this identity around discussions of ‘values’ and ‘authenticity’ underlines the degree to which the working class—or, rather, a particular representation (in both senses) of it—had been integrated into British welfare capitalism as well as evidencing the criticism in the previous chapter regarding how comfortably that working-class identity constructed by prewar Marxist-Leninists was absorbed into what Panzieri called the continuation of ‘capitalist forms in the relations of

production both at the factory level and at the level of overall social production' (1976: 22), in Britain as much as the Soviet Union.

Moreover, it is at this point that the homologies between postwar working-class literary and political representation become apparent: firstly, in how both forms of representation functioned to limit the terrain of working-class politics within the limits of class society, and, secondly, in the limited way in which both constructed a narrow version of the class subject. Richard Hoggart typifies this outlook in many ways, self-consciously attempting to resist temptations towards nostalgia and essentialisation, but nonetheless building his image of working-class family around a traditionalist framework with 'our Mam' (1958: 36) as 'the pivot of the home, as it is practically the whole of her world' (40). The community, meanwhile, revolves around 'an extremely local life' whose inhabitants know intimate details of each others' supposed indiscretions, such as 'those who have a daughter who went wrong' or 'the young woman [who] had her black child after the annual visit of the circus' (60). Thus, for all the value which Hoggart's text invests in working-class life, such value is based on a limited vision of the class subject based on recognisable—at times moralistic and conventional—tropes. Todd unintentionally connects these issues regarding the postwar imagination of class in her description of the period's 'new wave of writing' depicting 'a generation of young, northern, working-class men and women (but usually men) who wanted to get on in life without losing their roots' (2015: 238). Todd thus highlights how the class subject in this postwar wave of working-class writing was thus represented as primarily male and certainly white (under the euphemism 'northern') whose desires and conflicts are confined within the limits of class society's dilemma between "getting on" and "not losing your roots", rather than, as was more common in prewar working-class literature, the transformation of society itself.

Crowley draws out some of these limitations in the portrayal of the class subject in his discussion of the reemergence of the ‘brute-hero’ in Angry Young Men novels, reflecting ‘issues of class-mobility in which the dominance of a particular type of masculinity surges forward in an act of class-transition’ (2018: 58). Thus, for Crowley, the marketability of postwar working-class writing indicated the ‘incorporation of an oppositional cultural form by the market [as well as] the commodification of a specific mode of masculinity and its concomitant forms of representation’ (58). Yet while Crowley certainly captures the commodification of a narrow representation of class experience, he nonetheless neglects the extent to which such incorporation of oppositional cultural forms and the commodification of working-class masculinity were themselves expressions of the limits of the era’s prevailing male-centred social democratic consensus. When placed within a wider historical/cultural perspective, then, their texts come to contrast even more starkly with Hubble’s discussion of prewar working-class literature in the previous chapter as defined by a ‘more intersectional set of cultural values which subsequently underpinned social change outside the patriarchal hierarchy’ (2017: 40) as well as what Fox indicates as the use of romance and gender in 1930s proletarian novels to expand ‘the political terrain of the proletarian novel’ (1994: 151). By removing this longer historical trajectory from discussions of working-class literature, what is sometimes neglected in discussions of postwar working-class fiction—both in Crowley’s description of Angry Young Men as the commodification of ‘an oppositional cultural form’ and Rabinovitz’s and Stevenson’s characterisation of their apoliticism—is the extent to which they actually embodied the politics of their time: that is, the incorporation of a narrowly-defined working class into welfare capitalism as the new dominant ideology in Britain’s shifting class relations.

To this end, it is certainly interesting to note Rabinovitz's point about postwar working-class texts that 'what resemblance there is to socialist realism is probably unconscious' (1967: 29); indeed, that the construction of a narrowly-defined class identity was coincident with a tendency towards realism in working-class writing most probably was unconscious, but certainly no coincidence. Rabinovitz's comment is particularly illuminating when contrasted with Lehmann's from the previous chapter, that 'new forms' would shortly arise from within the Soviet Union: rather than 'new forms', these comments show the persistence of old forms in two societies defined by the integration of the working class but nonetheless based upon the continuation of 'capitalist forms in the relations of production' noted by Panzieri. Moreover, an interesting parallel can be made between Lehmann's optimism and that of writers—such as Orwell and Woolf during the war—about the aesthetic possibilities which the advent of a postwar 'classless' society would bring (Orwell 1968: 42; Woolf 1948: 151). However, what becomes clear when comparing the predictions of Lehmann, Orwell and Woolf with Rabinovitz's post factum observation is that realism in working-class writing emerges as the aesthetic form par excellence of working-class political representation. The aesthetics of the Angry Young Men, then, can be considered a particular intervention in the postwar distribution of the sensible, linking art and politics in terms of delineating "legitimate" political demands and "proper" artistic subjects: the recurring formal and thematic tropes of the Angry Young Men—centring the experiences of white, working-class men through their autodiegetic narration as they navigate the dilemmas of postwar welfare capitalism around affluence and social mobility while also reaffirming the stability of the social world through their realist formal strategies to depict working-class life "as it is"—must therefore be understood (in Rancièrian terms) as specific 'ways of doing and making' that maintain relationships 'to modes of being and forms of visibility'. As interventions in the distribution of the sensible, then, the Angry Young Men can be understood as a literary

moment legitimising working-class experience both in terms of its political demands and artistic value while nonetheless remaining confined within the limits of the postwar social compact in how it imagined class politics and the class subject. The reality of postwar Britain was of continued capitalist forms in the relations of production, albeit while integrating (a gendered, racialised section of) its working class into the nation through strengthened representational mechanisms; the working-class fiction of the period most closely adhering to this construction of its class subject, embodies this state of affairs both in the scope of its political content and its strategies of literary form.

It is necessary at this point to underline that such argumentation is not to denigrate the value of postwar working-class writing, but rather to mark its departure from that of the interwar working class. The shift in class relations does not negate the nature of texts emerging from the postwar proletarian literary formation as oppositional strategies or *parole* in a class *langue* but, rather, reconfigures them in light of the increased working-class power and integration of their period. Indeed, their continued existence as oppositional strategies is evident in the obstinate resistance they often faced from sections of the literary world: Sinfield notes how reviewers attacked Jimmy Porter—John Osborne’s working-class protagonist from his 1956 play, *Look Back in Anger*—with distinctly class-inscribed insults, variously describing him as an ‘uncouth, cheaply vulgar’ ‘oaf’ deserving to be ‘sentenced to a lifetime cleaning latrines’ (quoted in 1997: 233). As such, this chapter questions neither the quality of postwar working-class writing, nor its social importance in investing working-class lives with literary value. Nor is their essential character as oppositional strategies under question; rather, it is the form which such opposition took which this chapter deals with as well as the forces which informed its formal and political tendencies. To indicate the limitations imposed on postwar working-class texts no more denigrates those texts than

indicating the limits of the postwar settlement denigrates its achievements in raising living standards to levels unthinkable before the war. The value of both postwar working-class writing and the welfare state is therefore unassailable; however, this should not preclude discussions of the structural limitations of their homologous forms in representing working-class experience.

## John Sommerfield: emblem of a paradigm shift

With that in mind, it is now necessary to discuss how postwar working-class realism functioned practically as the aesthetic form of working-class representational politics. In this, John Sommerfield's 1960 novel, *North West Five*, forms an interesting starting point, not because it is particularly significant in terms of the Angry Young Men or postwar writing more generally—it was not, on either count—but rather because the transformation perceptible in Sommerfield's writing since *May Day* is broadly paradigmatic of the transformation which occurred in working-class writing as a whole.

Revolving around the narrative of two young lovers navigating the postwar housing crisis, *North West Five* depicts Dan, a carpenter, and Liz, a librarian, as they attempt to escape their stifling home environments. Though Dan represents a more traditional manual working class, Liz has achieved a degree of social mobility as a librarian through the increased educational opportunities following the 1944 Education Act. However, in keeping with Todd's comments regarding the transformed social status of working-class people following the war, Dan and Liz's relationship remains culturally feasible due to the combination of their 'shared working-class background and the collective values of postwar British society' (Hubble 2016: 204), something Liz herself expresses when she rebuts her mother's snobbery, declaring the days

‘shopkeeping people could think themselves a cut above their neighbours [...] over and done with’ (Sommerfield 1960: 39).

Yet while class retains its significance within the narrative, *North West Five* contrasts with Sommerfield’s earlier novel with regards to its acute sense of antagonism with a class system teetering on the brink of collapse. For example, *May Day*’s Depression-era backdrop for John Seton’s relief at the ‘blessed slavery’ which rescues him from the ‘miserable months of unemployment’ (Sommerfield 2010: 32) contrasts starkly with Dan’s acknowledgement of postwar Britain’s high level of organisation ‘to protect people’ (Sommerfield 1960: 153). The relationship to politics and the politicised also differs significantly between the two novels, perhaps in part because in the intervening period Sommerfield had left the CPGB—along with thousands of others, including prominent writers and intellectuals such as Doris Lessing and EP Thompson—following the 1956 Hungarian uprising. Thus, George, Dan’s father—and therefore the character most symbolising *May Day*-era politics—comes across as faintly ridiculous, responding to Dan’s housing troubles by relating them ‘to the class struggle and the world political situation’ to which Dan responds ‘Maybe you’re right. I don’t know and it doesn’t matter because there’s times when being right’s a waste of time’ (162), marking a significant shift from Ivy Cutford and *May Day*, where ‘being right’ was far from ‘a waste of time’ but actually essential to the advancement of both plot and struggle.

However, this suggests neither a complete eschewal of class struggle within Sommerfield’s postwar novel, nor a vision of postwar Britain as working-class utopia. George remains sympathetic and Dan concedes he is ‘right in a lot of what he says’ (163), suggesting Sommerfield sees merit in some degree of continuity between pre- and postwar political cultures. Furthermore, its emplotment around the housing crisis, the extent of which is

represented in Dan's being 'Number nine thousand, seven hundred and eighty-two on the list' yet still more fortunate than the 'fifteen hundred families living in places that have been condemned' (159), itself suggests an awareness of the continued relevance of class inequality in postwar Britain. Similarly, the alienation of the worker from their labour also returns in Sommerfield's postwar novel, this time—significantly—with a focus on the worker's alienation from the end product rather than from the labour process itself as an exasperated Dan decries his situation of 'Working on flats I'll never be able to afford to live in as long as I live' (161). This problem is framed not as one pertaining to the caprices of individual landlords but rather the housing market itself, against which Dan feels he is 'trying to fight something which had no face, that was invisible' (161) thus remaining consistent with *May Day*'s structural analysis of capitalism and class inequality.

*North West Five* also retains much of *May Day*'s optimism (though in a less cataclysmic, 'Forward to Soviet Britain' guise). Dan's passion for science-fiction, particularly about 'ordinary people in the future' (34), exhibits this sentiment as does his comment to Liz that their parents have 'had their future, it's ours that counts now' (134), suggesting a confidence in the future of postwar British youth. Dan's view is vindicated by the novel's conclusion 'with a defiant vision of Kentish Town on a wet Sunday afternoon that is linked to the protagonist's happiness' (Hubble 2016: 203), though one Hubble qualifies by arguing that while Sommerfield believes postwar Britain could meet working-class needs, this does not negate class struggle 'but rather suggests that this struggle can be won to enable continued progress' (203). However, the transformative content of such a struggle changes significantly between *May Day* and *North West Five* and such significant change is evidenced not only in the politics expressed by the novels' characters but also in Sommerfield's move away from overtly modernist formal practices to ones far more in keeping with postwar Britain's

increasingly dominant social realism. The result is that while both novels project a vision of class politics and a more egalitarian future, the texture of the novels are completely different: the dizzying effects of *May Day*'s dozens of interconnected characters depicting a mass workers' movement in conflict with the alienated labour process which underpins the social totality is replaced, in *North West Five*, with the depiction of a social world rendered stable through a return to the traditional conventions of realist form.

Moreover, it is here that the significance of the shift away from portraying workers' alienation from the labour process to their alienation from that which they produce becomes evident: while no aspect of Dan's labour is free from alienation, that which Sommerfield foregrounds is to do with the conversion of his labour into a commodity and its assignment of an exchange value beyond the financial means of the worker whose labour created that commodity (hence, 'Working on flats I'll never be able to afford to live in as long as I live'). This focus, however, positions struggle on the terrain of an increased share in the profit created from alienated labour rather than, as in *May Day*, an irreducible antagonism with the alienated labour process—and therefore class society—itsself. In *North West Five*, then, content and form combine to embody the logic of a capitalism recently restabilised by postwar welfare consensus, marking a conspicuous break with the more radical demands of *May Day* and, in many instances, of interwar working-class fiction more generally.

## Angry young representations: Barstow and Braine

Similarities with *North West Five* are observable in numerous texts emerging from the "Angry Young Men" milieu with regards to their deployment of realist form in their depictions of a newly stabilised social world. One such example is Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* (1960), which, like *North West Five*, tells the story of a young working-class couple

and their attempts to escape the confines of the family home. In yet another parallel between the two texts, Barstow's principal protagonist, Vic Brown, is also somewhat atypical of the classic Angry Young Man: 'neither macho nor a rebel' (Haywood 1997: 107), he is a naive romantic seeking 'everything you want in a girl: talking, laughing, sharing, making love' (Barstow 2010: 13) and, initially at least, finds such a girl in Ingrid who he only wants 'to like me and [for her to] let me be good to her' (59).

The transformed social position of the postwar British working class seen in *North West Five* is observable again in Barstow's novel: young workers such as eighteen-year-old Phoebe, who 'wouldn't care a hoot if she got the sack tomorrow' (102) or Vic's colleague, Conroy, who verbally assaults his manager declaring 'I'm not one of your frightened little time-servers cowering over his board every time he hears the boss's voice. [...] there's plenty of firms crying out for blokes who can think jobs out on their own' (143), symbolise the newfound working-class confidence arising from the combination of full employment, increased union power and comprehensive welfare. The transformation with regards to the prewar situation is evidenced in Mr Van, Vic's Saturday-job employer at a record shop, asking whether Vic believes he will be moved from the apprentice rate he currently earns to the union rate he will be entitled to when older. In contrast to the 'apprentice racket' in *Love on the Dole*, where apprentices are routinely made redundant as they become entitled to adult rates, Vic believes his rate will be improved as his workplace has 'a pretty strong union [...] and all the older chaps get the rate' (198), representing a situation for the British working class much changed from the prewar years.

However, Barstow's depiction of a shift in power relations between classes nonetheless exists within a narrow conception of working-class identity and a politics entirely contained within

the limits of postwar consensus. Vic's family thus become symbolic of Britain's collective working-class culture, with Vic's father playing in the miners' union band and the two of them regularly donating blood which Vic's mother supports, arguing 'it's up to everybody to do their bit' (145). But this working-class collectivism coexists with Vic's moderate outlook, Haywood describing him as having 'no particular grudge against the establishment' (108). As such, while union membership is touted as ensuring income security for Vic and others like him, the novel nonetheless eschews conflict between employer and employee, such as Vic's acceptance that his employer 'isn't so bad [...] and if he does turn nasty once in a while, well, that's the boss's privilege' (135). Such acquiescence is exacerbated in Vic's relationship to Mr Van, itself suggestive of more cooperative trends in contemporary class relations. For while Vic not only repeats similarly obsequious sentiments around employee-employer relationships—'He's the boss, isn't he, so who am I to mind?' (72)—he also displays a concern with company profitability which belies the conflictual nature of his relationship to his employer: upon hearing Mr Van is too ill to open one Saturday, Vic exclaims 'It nigh breaks my heart to think of the shop being shut and all that trade being turned away' (191); Vic's concern is thus one of an employee identifying entirely with the profits of his employer.

The removal of antagonism from Barstow's conception of class, then, reduces it to a simple classificatory system of difference between discrete categories based on external signifiers. Ingrid's family, for instance, are 'a notch above' Vic's, evident because Ingrid says 'Mother' and not 'me mam' (124). Relatedly, Vic's wealthy friend from grammar school, Percy, is admired because

he didn't throw his money in your face, though he liked to make the best of it. I had to find out he lived in a house with seven bedrooms and they had a maid and a

housekeeper, and I liked him all the more for not bragging about it or thinking it made him any different from the other lads. (303)

Thus, Percy's family wealth is mentioned, but abstracted from the conflictual social relations which make it possible. As a result, classes are abstracted from the social processes by which they are created—such as that between Vic and Mr Van—and reduced to the purely external signifiers of 'bragging about it', snobbery or classificatory signals of vernacular.

A concomitant result of this eschewal of class antagonism is that political conflict in the text is limited to that between right and left, with the content of these respective camps themselves far more limited than may have been the case in writing before the war. As such, Vic's family's collectivist Labourism is contrasted with the Conservatism of Ingrid's family. Her mother, Mrs Rothwell, in particular, is characterised by a petty Tory snobbery, keeping 'a scrapbook of the Queen and Philip and the kids' and recounting tales of putting shopkeepers 'in their place' (279) while Vic laments how she never has 'a good word for the Labour Party and the trade unions' (280). The limitation of the novel's political parameters to this Labour-Tory binary therefore functions as an extension of the novel's reduction of class to an issue of discrete cultural categories rather than antagonistic social relationship. That is: the working class as inherently collectivist, vernacular using and Labour voting in contrast with the middle class, defined by snobbery, Standard English and Conservative voting, with little focus on the antagonisms which bring such traits into being. This essentialist binary is reaffirmed in a passage at a pub during which Vic and his father encounter Herbert, his father's friend and fellow miner, who tells them 'We've never had it as good as this last ten year' (153) before their conversation goes from 'coal-getting and economics [...] to politics. They're both Labour, of course' (154). This final statement is noteworthy in its effect on the

window of acceptable working-class politics in the narrative: that they are ‘both Labour, of course’ functions not only to limit the window to the right (‘of course’ they are not Conservatives) but also to the left (‘of course’ they are not Communists) and from below (‘of course’ political discussion is limited to the binary of parliamentary politics, rather than, for example, the politics of the miners’ union or even the illegal miners’ strikes during the Attlee government). The absence of space in the narrative world for a working-class politics outside of social democratic representation to an extent surpassing even that of *Love on the Dole*—whose author was a Labour Party candidate the year of its publication—itself indicates the degree to which the working class had been integrated into the postwar social compact. Indeed, this integration is exemplified in Herbert, a Labour-supporting miner, clearly channeling Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s ‘never had it so good comments’, simultaneously symbolising the postwar political consensus as well as erasing the possibility of a politics outside of it.

This restriction of scope for the novel’s political possibilities extends also to the novel’s treatment of gender. Though Vic begins as a romantic ingénue, the bulk of the novel takes place once he has fallen out of love, though not before impregnating Ingrid and being forced into marriage. Yet the opportunity for a novel critiquing the nuclear family is declined in favour of one criticising Vic’s personal choices and unsafe sex while the ideal of domestic tranquility is reaffirmed at several points. In Vic’s sister’s marriage, for instance, she epitomises feminine domesticity and conformity with gender roles with ‘a coffee pot in her hands [...] a pale blue dressing-gown or housecoat thing on, with a tight bodice and high neck and skirt that touches the floor’ (322). Such traditionalist gender politics is heightened with Ingrid’s miscarriage and subsequent depression, during which Vic slips into a machoism common amongst Angry Young Men, suggesting she ‘laps it all up and sits about all day as

though she's in the last stages of a decline' (297). Vic is particularly reticent regarding Ingrid's reluctance to engage in sexual activity, becoming 'neither use nor ornament' (297) as Vic suggests 'they must have taken away her sex glands with the kid' (298) for not doing 'what any normal wife would do' (299). While this may have been part of an artful construction of a complex and flawed character, such potential is undermined by the extent to which traditional gender roles are reaffirmed throughout the novel: for instance, when Vic tells his parents of Ingrid's pregnancy, his mother is unhelpfully emotional—'You girt fool [...] entangled with some cheap young piece' (252)—while his father is both rational and sagacious, imparting wisdom through irrefutable maxims (252-253). This is paralleled exactly in Ingrid's family, with her mother becoming the source of all problems in the novel, which Ingrid's father explains saying 'Women are always a lot more emotional about these things. It's their nature, I suppose' (257). The possibility for a complex appraisal of gender and patriarchal expectations is therefore undermined by the novel's complicity with them throughout the text.

Moreover, the potential for complexity in Vic's characterisation is ultimately undermined when, at the end of the novel, rather than any accounting for his behaviour, blame is instead shifted onto Ingrid's mother and the stifling home environment they were trying to escape. As Ingrid explains, 'it wasn't that I didn't want [to have sex]; only it never seemed right somehow, while we were living at home' (342). Rather than a reappraisal of Vic's sense of entitlement to his conjugal rights, the novel instead provides external justification for why Ingrid was unable to provide them. In the novel's denouement, which sees Vic and Ingrid reunited and moving into their own home, the moral of the story becomes one of personal responsibility, summed up in Vic's closing monologue: 'Whether I love her or not's another thing altogether, but that's not what matters now. What matters is I know I'm doing the right

thing' (344). Though Barstow discusses the taboo subjects of pre-marital sex and contraception, his novel remains completely mired within postwar morality around the nuclear family, gender roles and divorce, itself reflective—through Vic's Labourism—of the predominant masculinist social democratic politics of the time.

As such, the contraction of what Fox would term the novel's 'political terrain' is thus confirmed in Vic and Ingrid's happy reunification in what had previously been a loveless marriage of convenience indicating, as Stevenson argued, the tendency of Angry Young Men towards a reconciliation with society. Indeed, just as they are about to consummate their mended relationship, Ingrid asks if Vic has 'got something', intending a condom, to which he replies, 'As it happens, I have' (343): the lesson thus learned, the novel's fabular quality—over and above any social critique more commonly associated with working-class writing—is confirmed, somewhat heavy handedly, as Vic declares 'So endeth the lesson' (345) and reconciliation with society is achieved.

In some ways, Barstow's novel can be thought to contrast with John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957). Braine's *Angry Young Man*, Joe Lampton, is more typical of the period's aggressive machismo, looking back on his rise from his working-class roots in Dufton to middle-class success in Warley and the sexual relationships with wealthy women which accompanied his social ascendance. Braine's novel was one of the most successful "Angry" texts, selling 34,000 copies in its first year of publication (Todd 2015: 238), and embodied many of the milieu's defining features around the dilemmas of upwardly mobile working-class people following the war. Again in contrast to *A Kind of Loving*, class antagonism is ever-present in Braine's novel: in one passage, Joe describes the rich as 'enemies' (2002: 75) while, in another, he imagines calling a wealthy man with an Aston-Martin and attractive

girlfriend a ‘capitalist beast’ (29). However, the form which class antagonism takes is shaped significantly by the form of class identity which Joe embodies, typifying the construct of working-class masculinity outlined by Crowley, with his ‘Big and red and brutal’ hands (83) and an aggressive hypermasculinity extending as far as workplace sexual harassment and domestic violence (Braine 2002: 59, 65, 140). In one passage, in bed with Alice—a woman married to a wealthy local businessman—they engage in distinctly class-inscribed sexual fantasies, she calling him a ‘beautiful uncomplicated brute. [...] You should have been a navy. [...] I’d let you beat me every Saturday night’ (98). In an interesting contrast with Lawrence’s portrayal of sexual relationships and related fantasies of a middle-class woman with a working-class man in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Braine uses such activity precisely to fix Joe in a traditional class-gender role. Where Connie and Mellors’ affair served to undermine class hierarchies through affectionate reciprocated mockery which negated the significance of those distinctions, Braine reaffirms them through his construction of female sexual fantasies deriving precisely from essentialist class and gender tropes predicated on those hierarchies.

One result of reaffirming such a hypermasculine working-class identity is that women in the novel are largely relegated to the terrain upon which class conflict—between men—takes place. For instance, the aforementioned man with the Aston-Martin and, more importantly, attractive girlfriend who Joe describes as being ‘as far beyond my reach as the car’ but whose ‘ownership, too, was simply a question of money’ (28). Though Joe expresses a class-based antagonism with the man (as ‘capitalist beast’), the framing of such antagonism around Joe’s ‘rights’ (29) to possess not only the man’s car and clothes but also his girlfriend, highlights a form of class politics entirely centred around a masculine identity. As Joe’s entry into Warley society is as a working-class interloper in a bourgeois world, his sexual relationships are

constructed as acts of class warfare: meeting Susan and her would-be suitor, Jack Wales, Joe thinks to himself ‘I’ll pinch your woman, Wales, and all your money won’t stop me’ (56) while during his secret courting of Susan he describes himself in military fashion as constantly ‘manoeuvring for position’ (77). Similarly, George Aisgill, Alice’s husband, represents for Joe the same ‘power of money as Jack did: he was another king’ (64). Joe’s philandering, then, is explicitly conceived as a marker of career progression in his battle against the upper-classes to rise to “the top”, his “conquest” of women a site upon which class antagonisms are symbolically enacted. Yet, equally significant, is that such antagonisms are confined within the struggle for social mobility *within* class society, rather than against it; the essentialist class-gender role constructed by Braine is thus the performance of a masculinist working-class identity which, similar to Barstow, moves his text away from the ‘more intersectional set of cultural values’ which Hubble argues underpinned a conception of ‘social change outside the patriarchal hierarchy’ (2017: 40) and confines the terrain of politics firmly within the logic of postwar British welfare capitalism.

This confinement of the political imagination is similarly evident in Haywood’s description of Joe’s rapid social mobility as being ‘a mythic story of his own making’ (1997: 95) wherein the ‘mythic dimensions of Joe’s progress are incorporated self-consciously into the narrative [...] enhancing Joe’s mystique, while allowing him to keep a self-deprecating distance from gross self-flattery’ (96). Haywood mentions Joe’s references to himself at various points as a ‘swineherd’ or ‘King for a Day’, but other similar references abound in the text forming one of its central narrative devices. For instance, Joe also describes Susan as ‘the princess in the fairy stories’ (2002: 57) while his pursuit of her is his own ‘fairy story’ (58). Such explicit acknowledgement of the novel’s interweaving fairy tale conventions into the narrative structure returns when Joe meets Susan’s father at the Leddersford Conservative Club, where

contrary to his expectations he is offered her hand in marriage and a higher paying job:

‘Instead of having the book snatched from me halfway, I was reading into the next chapter’

(209). Susan’s father plays the role of benevolent king, testing the swineherd to ensure he has the requisite qualities to marry his daughter.

However, the novel’s blending of fairy tale and other literary conventions—particularly realism and melodrama—results ultimately in a complex negotiation of class antagonism: as Jameson explains, fairy tales have traditionally been part of the popular class *langue* of peasant communities in dialogic relationship with the cultural masterworks of hegemonic power. However, as Dentith argues, the politics of a particular literary form cannot simply be deduced ‘from one formal choice rather than another’ but is instead ‘subject to constant negotiation over time’ (2003: 41). As such, though Braine’s ‘swineherd’ and ‘princess’ get married with the sanction of the benevolent king—the fairy tale’s conventional structure for the utopian upending of traditional social hierarchies—in the context of postwar welfare capitalism, this framing of the struggle between classes functions to confine it to one of struggle *within* class society rather than *against* it: as with the fairy tale structure, class hierarchy becomes immutable, its utopian subversion limited to the struggle for individual working-class social mobility in rising to the top, rather than in the negation of class hierarchy itself.

However, even these limitations are themselves undercut by the fairy tale marriage leading directly to the death of Alice. Yet the significance of her death is not merely in the narrative’s closing image of Joe wracked with guilt, but also in his being reassured that he ‘mustn’t take it on so [...] it was all for the best. She’d have ruined your whole life. Nobody blames you’ to which Joe responds, with the words which close the novel, ‘that’s the trouble’ (Braine 2002:

235). Braine's novel, then, is a 'cautionary tale whose denouement tinkers with melodrama, tragedy, and irony as Joe Lampton comes to realise the real cost of what he has lost and gained in the belated restitution of a moral- rather than cash-based economy' (Hargreaves 2012: 215). Alice's death and Warley society's attempts to absolve Joe of blame become the narrative's culmination of the working-class dilemma of social mobility: Joe's single-minded pursuit of his fairy tale ending results in his ascension into the middle-classes, but at the expense of the death of the woman he loved. The subsequent attempts of middle-class society to absolve him of blame, rather than comforting him, merely highlight the poverty of its moral compass in its valorisation of self-interest at all costs.

This combination of conventions, each with what Macherey would term their own 'specific weight' retaining 'a certain autonomy', pull in different directions with regards to the novel's exploration of social anxieties around class. The aforementioned deployment of fairy tale conventions constructs social mobility as its utopian imagination; however, the novel's melodramatic conclusion undermines such utopianism, expressing widely-held postwar anxieties around rising affluence and the potential loss of traditional working-class values.

These anxieties around social mobility are counterposed in the novel through Joe's engagement with the older working-class values of his roots, depicted in the realist mode of the rest of the novel and alluded to by Braine in Joe's comparison of Dufton to 'a charade upon *Hard Times*' (2002: 24). This unification of older realist forms with older working-class values is expressed primarily during Joe's return to his Aunt's in Dufton, which remind Joe 'of the core values he has abandoned' while his Aunt 'is a classic embodiment of traditional working-class decency; she is Hoggart's "our mam" of the 1920s and 1930s' while 'her

unselfconscious “language of giving” (Haywood 1997: 99) contrasts sharply with the middle-class selfishness which justifies Alice’s death for Joe’s personal advancement.

Similarly, Joe’s memories of his deceased parents function to connect him with an older working-class collective culture, his father described as ‘too good a workman to be sacked and too outspoken about his Labour convictions to be promoted’ (Braine 2002: 94) while his mother prided herself in wanting ‘something better’ than ‘a common fat man with a motor car’ (95). Such a framing parallels with *A Kind of Loving* in terms of juxtaposing the Conservatism of Susan’s father with the Labourism of Joe’s family, similarly demarcating the narrow boundaries of class discourse within both the narrative and, by extension, postwar Britain. Furthermore, as with Barstow’s novel, the class subject constructed by Braine is entirely in keeping with social democracy’s dominant image of its class constituency, with the respectable working class symbolised in the ‘good workman’ and Labour-supporting father and his wife. Indeed, Joe’s mother’s rejection of material advancement in favour of love—her disavowal of material comfort another measure of her respectability and the diametric opposite of Joe’s constant ‘manoeuvring’—forms another juxtaposition with the middle-class values of Warley to which Joe defects.

Yet this construction of such an essentialised “respectable” class subject is symptomatic of wider issues with how class is portrayed by Braine. Specifically, Braine’s use of the Dufton-Warley spatial metaphor to depict class differences—and between which the reader tracks Joe’s progress—draws the text towards such an essentialising view of class because of its inherent tendency to minimise scope for any analysis of their interaction. Similarly to Barstow’s novel, the spatial metaphor turns class relationships into one of discrete categories, of class experiences as distinct “worlds” rather than mutually-constituted and constituting

social relationships. An analogous manifestation of this issue is perceptible in a passage when Joe, in a taxi, passes a bus and sees a ‘middle-aged woman in front’ he recognises who ‘never paid her rates until the last moment [...] as we passed *it seemed that two worlds were meeting*’ (126, my emphasis). As with Todd’s critique of Young and Willmott’s study, these ‘two worlds’—of the class Joe once belonged to and the one he belongs to now—are depicted by Braine quite literally as ‘hermetically sealed’ from one another, the spatial metaphor implying that the activity within one vehicle has no bearing on that of the other, reducing them and their internal characteristics to essentially-held differences. The ‘worlds’ of taxi and bus, Warley and Dufton, middle and working class are thus depicted as discontinuous, rather than interrelated, categories: one defined by wealth, large houses, self-interest, ambitiousness and Conservative Clubs; the other poverty, terraced housing, collectivism, lack of ambition and the Labour Party. Sealing off these categories from each other, Braine negates the possibility for a resolution based on their mutual antagonism—negating the possibility of negation, if you will—limiting the narrative conflict to the pursuit of the social mobility fairy tale within an immovable class hierarchy at the expense of older working-class values, or maintaining such values through the realistic eschewal of fairy tale endings reaffirming an essentialised image of traditional working-class life.

Barstow and Braine’s novels, like many other texts emerging from the Angry Young Men milieu, contain a range of commonalities which place them firmly within a specific postwar tradition of social democratic discourse, with their narratives of young, working-class people navigating their experiences of class and the dilemmas of social mobility in postwar welfare capitalist Britain. As such, like the proletarian novels of the previous chapter, their status as *parole* in a working-class *langue*—in dialogue with the *langue* of hegemonic class discourse—is indisputable in that they, in Jameson’s words, ‘undermine the dominant “value

system” in their validation of popular life in opposition to dominant conceptions of what constitutes legitimate literary material; indeed, it is easy to imagine the accusations levelled at Jimmy Porter for being ‘uncouth’ or ‘cheaply vulgar’ being directed equally at Vic Brown or Joe Lampton.

These texts remain oppositional strategies in their depiction and valorisation of a traditionally subordinate working-class culture for, as Fox explains, there is no neat distinction for working-class writers between ‘the act of recording their experience “truthfully” through language’ and ‘contesting dominant culture through language’. However, these oppositional strategies pursued by Barstow and Braine are nonetheless unable to transform the boundaries of their form; ultimately, though oppositional to hegemonic value systems, they nonetheless remain aesthetic expressions of the recently emerged hegemony of social democratic postwar consensus and its integration of—a particular representation of—the working class. These texts become the aesthetic expression of postwar consensus politics by, in Rancière’s terminology, delimiting the visible and invisible in a number of ways: firstly, the centring in these novels of white and masculinist working-class subjectivities often reaffirmed through monologic control of the narrative voice by their—white, male, working-class—autodiegetic narrators; second, the construction in these novels of essentialised working-class individuals/communities detached from the antagonistic social relationships which underpin class society. Similarly to Todd’s critique of Young and Wilmott’s study, then, these texts frame working-class collectivism as an innate quality of the individuals within the class, overlooking the fundamental and ineradicable tensions which make such collectivism necessary; thirdly, this construction of a working-class culture detached from the conflictual social relationships of class society is itself an expression of the postwar social democratic consensus, manifest textually in a restricted political terrain within a binary opposition

between mainstream parties, rather than the more complex treatments of social movements, trade unionism and gender politics evident in interwar working-class writing. Indeed, the frequent nostalgia in postwar working-class writing for older, traditional working-class cultural forms—such as Vic’s parents in *A Kind of Loving* or Aunt Emily in *Room at the Top*—reveals more than merely a dilemma around social mobility and class identity; rather, it reveals an imagined prewar working class often significantly different from that imagined by prewar working-class writers—from Greenwood to Gibbon—themselves. Indeed, the ‘intersectional set of cultural values’ which expanded the political terrain of prewar novels differs significantly from the more conservative postwar portrayals of good workmen and their wives in traditional nuclear family units. This traditionalism is itself indicative of a contraction of the postwar working-class novel’s political terrain, evident not only in their diminished conception of social change outside the patriarchal hierarchy but also the negation of class society itself, reaffirmed in the renewed dominance of realism in the postwar working-class novel establishing ‘the density and solidity of what is’.

### Indicating fracture: Alan Sillitoe

By contrast, Alan Sillitoe (at least partially) resists such tendencies with his 1958 novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* pushing at the limits of—if not always breaking entirely with—postwar working-class representational practices, both political and aesthetic. Sillitoe’s novel follows Arthur Seaton in his libertine adventures of heavy drinking and philandering, activities themselves facilitated by the increased living standards of postwar Britain and comprehended as part of a significant improvement from the prewar years. Arthur describes his father as being ‘happy at last [...] and he deserved to be happy, after all the years before the war on the dole, five kids and the big miserying that went with no money and no way of getting any’ (Sillitoe 2008: 26), contrasting it with his ‘sit-down job at the factory, all the

Woodbines he could smoke, money for a pint if he wanted one [...] The difference between before the war and after the war didn't bear thinking about' (26-27).

Yet such improvements in working-class living standards do not serve to negate class conflict, but at most provide a transitory truce in hostilities. Unsurprisingly, then, where the Angry Young Men novels by and large frame their narrative conflicts within the logic of welfare capitalism and the postwar consensus—Labour versus Tory, affluence versus traditional working-class values, and so on—Sillitoe's novel is more in keeping with many prewar texts, such as *May Day* or *The Furys*, in locating antagonism as an ineradicable characteristic of class society and the capitalist labour process itself. For instance, when Arthur explains that 'you got fair wages if you worked your backbone to a string of conkers on piece-work' (27), what is expressed is not an eschewal of class antagonism but its reconfiguration within the context of postwar welfare capitalism in which, as Panitch notes of the Attlee government's 1948 White Paper, there could be 'no justification' for increased wages 'unless accompanied by a substantial increase in production'. Arthur's comment, then, satirises the idea of 'fair wages' linked to productivity increases as obtainable only through intensified workrates negatively affecting workers' physical health thus reconfiguring the conflict between worker and capital in the welfare capitalist context.

This theme of class conflict runs throughout the text, such as Arthur's resistance to scientific management whereby he explains how 'the rate-checker sometimes came and watched you work, so that if he saw you knock up a hundred in less than an hour Robboe [the foreman] would come and tell you one fine morning that your rate had been dropped' (31). As such, 'when you felt the shadow of rate-checker breathing down your neck you knew what to do [...] make every move more complicated, though not slow because that was cutting your own

throat, and do everything deliberately yet with a crafty show of speed' (31-32). Arthur's refusal of work, then, becomes the literary manifestation of the workers' conflict with the alienated labour process imposed upon him, explaining how 'you earned your living in spite of the firm, the rate-checker, the foreman, and the tool-setters [...] all through the day you filled your mind with vivid and more agreeable pictures than those round about' (32). Just like the Langfrier's women continuing 'with their private functionings' in Sommerfield's novel, Sillitoe depicts Arthur as similarly resisting absorption into the production process and, instead, reaffirming his proletarian subjectivity in conflict with capital.

Such class conflict also motivates Arthur's dislike of the aforementioned foreman, Robboe, with Arthur explaining the more jovial than usual relations on pay day disappearing once the wages are in his pocket: 'Truce time was over. The enemy's scout was no longer near. For such was Robboe's label in Arthur's mind, a policy passed on by his father. Though no strong cause for open belligerence existed as in the bad days talked about, it persisted for more subtle reasons that could hardly be understood but were nevertheless felt' (61). The recalibration of class relations for the postwar context nonetheless involves a continuation with the more overt forms of conflict 'passed on by his father' from his experiences of 'the bad days', something which 'fair wages' may mask temporarily but cannot eradicate. Class antagonism is therefore 'presented, for all the muffling effects of Keynesian macroeconomic policy and the Welfare State, as an undisguised dialectic without consensual *Aufhebung*: labour is still clearly recognised as struggle between capital and worker.' (del Valle Alcalá 2016: 14). The way and extent to which this dialectic is "muffled", and its concomitant continuity of its 'subtle reasons' for conflict which are 'hardly [...] understood' but 'nevertheless felt', speaks volumes about the expunging of conflictual lexicon from the discourse of postwar welfare capitalism. What Sillitoe succeeds in doing—where many of his

contemporaries failed—is to depict precisely the lack of space for such antagonistic discourse without succumbing to the narrowed political horizons which the limited capacity for such discourse erroneously implies. Thus, Arthur is allowed to not entirely comprehend the muffled dialectic underpinning his antagonistic outlook, but he can nonetheless feel—and, therefore, act—upon it.

This centring of the conflict between capital and the working class allows Sillitoe to circumvent the limitations of a postwar consensus invested in the simple Labour/Tory binary. Thus, Arthur expresses disdain for ‘big fat Tory bastards’ (Sillitoe 2008: 35) but also ‘them Labour bleeders too’ (36) as well as more radical left groupings and trade unionists implied by ‘the big-headed bastard that gets my goat when he asks me to go to union meetings or sign a paper about what’s happening in Kenya’ (132). Resultantly, Arthur—and therefore also the wider working-class youth he symbolises—is depicted in a decidedly ambivalent relationship with Communism, rejecting ‘mainstream politics outright, but also reject[ing] the main form of organised radical discourse against the dominant power group [...] indicative of the contemporary “crisis” in Marxist and communist politics in Britain in the 1950s’ (Bentley 2007: 201). According to Bentley, Arthur’s rebellion is ‘never contained within an organised collective movement of resistance, but is articulated as an individual and irresponsible rebellion against all authority figures’ (216). In a similar yet divergent vein, del Valle Alcalá views the texts’s radicalism precisely in its ‘rejection of integration and harmonisation as viable answers to the conjunctural changes undergone by the system’ (2016: 15). Against the backdrop of a working class integrated via its institutions—from the trade unions to the Labour and Communist Parties—into the imagined community of the nation via a combination of political consensus, collective bargaining and the residues of Popular Frontism, Arthur’s rebellion becomes

a direct response to the co-optation of collective agency by an ossified and ineffectual institutionality. This is not a retreat from mass politics, but an insistence that the fundamental lines of conflict need to be reassessed and revitalised if the notion of class is to retain its revolutionary valences (15).

As such, though Bentley is correct that Sillitoe is responding to the crisis in British Communism during the 1950s—precipitated in particular by the 1956 events in Hungary—del Valle Alcalá's contribution is equally valuable, relating to the creeping integration of working-class organisations into the functions of national capital evident also in the CPGB's trajectory—the discussion of which began in the previous chapter—in which the Party attempted to balance rank-and-file agitation *against* capital with an increasing preoccupation with its representational position *in relation to* capital. In Arthur's rejection of party politics and ceaselessly antagonistic relationship to society, Sillitoe's novel thus attempts to reconfigure the lines of class antagonism in a period of widespread social peace in which even the CPGB—despite being 'the main form of organised radical discourse'—was implicated, integrating itself into the imagined community of the nation with its calls for 'all true patriots to defend British national interests'.

Just as Sillitoe's novel rejects the postwar framework of acceptable politics, so too does it distinguish itself from other novels of the period in its resistance to essentialist depictions of a positive proletarian identity constructed around traditionally "respectable" working-class values. Rather, Arthur and his family—and particularly his Aunt Ada and others in his extended family—eschew respectability, embracing instead 'some "undeserving" elements' (Haywood 1997: 103), such as when Arthur's cousin Betty flirts with a man to encourage him

to buy drinks for the whole family only for her eldest brother Dave to then threaten to ‘smash him if he didn’t clear off’ (Sillitoe 2008: 74). Yet such roguish behaviour does not invalidate the status of ‘Aunt Ada’s ‘tribe’ as a ‘stalwart institution of class consciousness, [...] provid[ing] Arthur with the resources to remake his working-class identity’ (Haywood 1997: 103). The most politically significant example of such resource provision comes in the backstory of Ada’s three sons refusing military service during the war and living off petty criminality. The significance here goes beyond the simple affirmation of working-class anti-militarism but also its relation to the aforementioned importance of the war as a historical moment of working-class integration into what Virdee calls the ‘imagined national community’. Ada’s sons’ refusal thus places them in symbolic opposition to that process of integration, maintaining their proletarian autonomy and thus placing Arthur’s rebellious agency within a tradition of working-class resistance to absorption into the ossified institutionality highlighted by del Valle Alcalá.

In this context, Arthur’s philandering must also be understood as another manifestation of that proletarian eschewal of respectability and assertion of autonomy—albeit one mirroring the masculinist underpinnings of other Angry Young Men novels not to mention postwar social democracy more generally. As Bentley explains, this tension between the text’s radicalism and its sexism are, ultimately, never satisfactorily resolved (2007: 224-225). Yet while acknowledging its problematic nature as a textual strategy, it nonetheless remains one intended to symbolise Arthur’s resistance to integration within bourgeois society, his affairs with married women challenging the ‘dominant family unit that underlies both conventional middle and working-class culture of the period’ (218). Furthermore, the men to whom these women are married are also an illustrative aspect of Arthur’s challenge to society: Brenda’s husband, Jack, for instance, is a tool-setter and lay representative in the factory union who, as

Arthur notes in passing, drinks ‘the firm’s tea’ (Sillitoe 2008: 33), something Arthur refuses to do. As a skilled worker, Jack is the traditional constituency of social democratic trade unionism—such as the previously discussed AEU, who only began recruiting lower-skilled workers like Arthur around the time the novel was published—while his drinking of the firm’s tea, indicates precisely the integration of working-class institutions against which Arthur is rebelling. Even more illustrative, however, is when Arthur is eventually assaulted by Winnie’s husband, Bill, and a friend of his (both of them soldiers). They are assisted in this endeavour by Jack; the subtext being Sillitoe’s implication of working-class representative institutions in reinforcing societal norms against a rebellious worker through collaboration with the strong-arm of the state.

Arthur’s rebellious spirit is thus apparent both inside and out of the workplace, the novel’s famous passages in which Arthur smashes a jewellers and overturns a car exemplifying actions against ‘emblems of the consumer society’ (Bentley 2007: 216). Moreover, they act as further examples of Arthur’s refusal of the kind of working-class respectability present in Barstow’s and Braine’s novels not to mention the positive working-class identity more generally. However, as well as the sense in these acts of a celebration of roguish illegality and rebellion against consumer society, Arthur’s attack on the jewellers is particularly suggestive of radical intent with Sillitoe describing how in ‘the sound of breaking glass’ Arthur hears the ‘most perfect and suitable noise to accompany the end of the world and himself’ (2008: 108). In this passage, the positive working-class identity evident in Braine’s or Barstow’s texts is eschewed in favour of a class identity more approximate to Marx’s previously-cited ‘negative side of the antithesis’ compelled ‘to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat’ (1975: 36). The breaking glass, then, in its symbolic negation of bourgeois society, becomes the sound most suitable to

accompany the 'end' of a world based on private property and thereby its opposite, Arthur 'himself' as proletariat.

Moreover, while Sillitoe's text shares some degree of what Stevenson mentions as indicative of a 'reconciliation' with society, such as Arthur's termination of his libertine philandering and subsequent marriage to Doreen, any 'reconciliation' is, at most, only partial. Instead, the novel closes with a restatement of rebellion, explaining that 'if he was not pursuing his rebellion against the rules of love [...] there was still the vast crushing power of government against which to lean his white-skinned bony shoulder' (Sillitoe 2008: 203). Rather than reconciliation, Arthur declares,

Once a rebel, always a rebel. [...] And it's best to be a rebel so as to show 'em it don't pay to try to do you down. Factories and labour exchanges and insurance offices keep us alive and kicking – so they say – but they're booby-traps and will suck you under like sinking-sands if you aren't careful (202).

Here, Sillitoe restates Arthur's refusal of integration into welfare capitalism; but his comments also bear a Camusian quality in their valorisation of the rebel subject. Furthermore, Arthur's statement that 'trouble for me it'll be, fighting, every day until I die' (219) is itself quasi-Sisyphean in its acceptance of such struggle's open endedness. Mulling on the—again, unstated, though unquestionably male—proletarian condition, Arthur opines,

you sweat again in a factory, grabbing for an extra pint, doing women at the week-end and getting to know whose husbands are on the nightshift, working with rotten guts

and an aching spine, and nothing for it but money to drag you back there every Monday morning. (219)

In sandwiching Arthur's previously rakish behaviours ('grabbing' pints, 'doing women' etc) between the more obviously alienated activities of sweating in a factory and being dragged back on Monday morning, Sillitoe highlights Arthur's previous activities as essentially futile and similarly alienating attempts at a life beyond alienation. The mention of Monday morning (particularly evocative at the end of a section called "Sunday Morning") thus opens up the narrative beyond its title as the 'rhythm of the week forms the structural framework of the plot and represents the inescapable world of manual labour for the central characters [...] the arbitrary structure of existence which is enforced by capitalist working practices' (Bentley 2007: 214). Thus, Arthur's chaotic 'Saturday Night' is followed by the peace of 'Sunday Morning' before he is 'dragged back' on Monday morning to restart the endless cycle of rebellion against 'the arbitrary structure of existence' imposed on him by capitalist working practices. Just as Camus explains that human rebellion 'progresses from appearances to acts, from the dandy to the revolutionary' (1956: 25), so Sillitoe closes his novel with his dandy transformed into a revolutionary; on the cusp of Monday's recommencement of class hostilities and another opportunity to 'lean his white-skinned bony shoulder' into the crushing power of society, Arthur relishes the opportunity, ending the novel in true Sisyphian fashion 'with a grin on his face' (Sillitoe 2008: 219).

It should be no surprise, then, that a novel such as Sillitoe's, so resistant to the dominant forms of working-class political representation and their integration into postwar British welfare capitalism, should also be more resistant—at least, relative to the texts discussed in this chapter thus far—to traditional forms of realist aesthetic representation. As such, while

critics such as Haywood see in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* a fiction ‘reminiscent of nineteenth-century naturalism in its gritty portrayal of closed working-class communities’ (1997: 105), this sits alongside an engagement with avant-gardism which seeks to extend—if not quite break with—such naturalism. Stevenson, for example, compares Sillitoe’s writing to that of his Nottinghamshire compatriot, DH Lawrence, in ‘extensively’ transcribing ‘the inner thoughts of his characters, creating an inwardness with working-class life which sets him apart from other writers at the time’ (1993: 96). Bentley expands on these themes arguing that ‘debates around the ideology and commitment of specific literary forms in the 1950s are partly to blame for this placing of Sillitoe within a realist tradition’ (2007: 205), whereby within the dichotomy set up by critics such as Rabinovitz between commitment and formal experimentation, Sillitoe’s overtly left-wing politics leads critics to designate his work neatly as realist and neglect the novel’s more experimental tendencies. Countering this, Bentley highlights a range of techniques deployed by Sillitoe which highlight his experimental inheritances such as Sillitoe’s creation of a ‘fluid relationship between the third-person narrative voice and the central character’ as well as frequent ‘use of free indirect speech and internal monologue’ (206). In contrast to the use of such techniques common within realism, Sillitoe’s extensive use of free indirect style to transcribe Arthur’s inner thoughts function similarly to what Rancière notes in Woolf’s distension and contraction of temporalities, in that Arthur’s ‘continuous train of thought as he works at the capstan lathe, is detached from a specific temporal framework [and] represents the range of mental activity of the factory worker that resists the monotony of the physical task in which he is engaged (207). As with the Langfrier’s women in *May Day*, Arthur’s ‘private functionings’ are central to his refusal of integration into the alienated labour process and are therefore afforded an emphasis not common to realism more generally, and certainly not the temporally specific retrospective narratives discussed in this chapter. In doing so, Sillitoe records ‘the mental processes

involved by an individual engaged in a semi-skilled manual job' (206), thus functioning ideologically to 'represent the internal thoughts of a class that had previously been under-represented in literary texts, and to counteract the externalised representation of the factory worker' (207). Indeed, this function of representing under-represented working-class subjectivities is particularly significant due to Arthur's position *within* the working class as a semi-skilled worker, thus symbolising that fraction of the class—low/semi-skilled workers—that had hitherto been under-represented even by the traditional organisations of working-class representation, such as the aforementioned AEU. Thus, Sillitoe's focus on the antagonistic subject position of a low/semi-skilled working-class relatively marginalised section within its representative institutions sees the increased application of techniques which extend or challenge traditional modes of aesthetic representation to portray a class subjectivity largely excluded from traditional modes of political representation in a period of social democratic consensus.

Similarly, in contrast to the realist plot-driven narratives discussed in this chapter, Bentley notes that Sillitoe's novel is marked by a 'rejection of linear plot construction' (206) in favour of a series of picaresque vignettes (in part due to numerous sections of the novel having their origins as separate short stories and even poems). For Bentley, this rejection of the linear plot-driven narrative reflects Sillitoe's desire for an aesthetic based on 'anecdotal stories' suggesting 'a correspondence to an older oral tradition within working-class culture, which operates under different criteria to the "bourgeois" novel form' (213), concluding that this 'rejection of a plot-driven narrative structure represents a rejection of the accumulative aspirations of middle-class culture' (214). Indeed, such an aspirational culture is even visible in the plot-driven narratives of postwar social mobility novels like *Room at the Top*. Building on Bentley's analysis, then, another useful reading sees these novels as posing what Todd

described as the ‘very modern dilemma’ between using ‘postwar opportunities to pursue wealth and social status’ or rejecting them in favour of the community and solidarity of working-class life. The dilemma which drives the linear, plot-driven narrative of working-class social mobility novels, then, does not necessarily accept the ‘accumulative aspirations of middle-class culture’; it does, however, tend towards accepting the density and solidity of what is: as a counterweight to working-class social mobility—Joe Lampton’s progression to Warley, for example—is an essentialised working-class culture whose respectability is defined in large part by its renunciation of such single-minded aspiration—and so, like Joe’s Aunt Emily, remain in Dufton.

The traditionally realist textual strategy of a plot-driven narrative therefore lends itself and its specific weight to appropriation by texts whose social dilemmas ultimately remain contained within the structural boundaries of the social worlds they faithfully depict: to rise from or remain within the working class, but never the antagonism which negates class society. Through his episodic form, Sillitoe removes himself from the binary—between social mobility and essentialised working-class respectability—so common to the structure of postwar working-class plot driven narratives. Meanwhile, Sillitoe’s structural framework around the rhythm of the working week attempts to stretch realism’s structural boundaries to centre the open-ended rebellion of a class subject not fully integrated—nor even fully integrable—into the institutions of welfare capitalism, mitigating against the possibilities of reconciliation or counterposing past and present class cultures through a narrative of linear progress and closure.

Such discussion of Sillitoe’s emphasis on individual interiority or subversion of plot-driven narrative is not to claim Sillitoe as a “modernist” or “avant-garde” writer and Haywood is

correct to note the significance of naturalism in Sillitoe's depiction of working-class life. Rather, such discussion is intended to note how his integration of literary techniques commonly associated with traditionally non-realist forms—even within a more traditionally realist framework—means that the 'specific weight' of those techniques nonetheless 'retain a certain autonomy' even when blended into the totality of the text as a whole. As such, with its episodic structure and heightened focus on the interiority of a low-skilled factory worker, Sillitoe's novel differs from many texts by his Angry Young contemporaries in stretching the boundaries of realist form, foregrounding an antagonistic class subject position and so indicating some points of potential fracture within the postwar consensus.

In tracking the reconfiguration of proletarian literary formations from the inter- to postwar years, what becomes perceptible is a movement from a formation which was (on the whole) more amenable to experimental literary strategies to one more traditionally realist and, moreover, that this shift occurred concurrently with a general contraction of the political terrain within the novels of those formations. Reflective of the conditions they were written in, the often modernist-inspired proletarian novels of the 1930s depicted a fundamentally unstable world-system on the brink of collapse and the possibilities for radical social transformation therein, while the postwar turn towards realism portrays the difficulties and dilemmas of—an often highly gendered, racialised and essentialised construction of—the working class in a newly-stabilised class society. This manifests in a political framing which, while oppositional in its investment of working-class experience with artistic value and challenging traditional middle-class perspectives on culture and society, remains unable to novelistically transcend the structural boundaries of postwar consensus. This manifested in numerous ways, such as reducing the multiplicitous political terrain of prewar working-class novels to a party-political binary, positing social mobility in contrast to a nostalgically

constructed 'traditional' working-class culture, depicting class cultures as the innate expressions of discrete social categories, or even the outright rejection of class conflict itself.

The ideological outcome of such a constellation of motifs in postwar working-class fiction is the reaffirmation of, to recall Jameson, 'the density and solidity of what is' (due in no small part to its genuinely renewed solidity) with the result that postwar working-class fiction tends to 'struggle to imagine a creative alternative to the constraints of the present' (Hubble, 2018: 38). This is perhaps true even of Sillitoe's novel which, while significantly more radical than those of his colleagues, is nonetheless restricted to reaffirming, as del Valle Alcalá puts it, 'the fundamental lines of conflict' and indicating potential social fractures then evident only in their most "muffled" and embryonic form and whose ruptures would only take shape a decade later.

### At the margins of consensus

That the literary output produced by postwar working-class realist authors was, by and large, the literary manifestation of postwar consensus politics is also evident in the degree to which those identities largely excluded from the postwar political imagination were similarly excluded from the imagination of much of the period's working-class fiction. Indeed, as discussed above, the monological dominance of the male autodiegetic narrator in these novels meant that women were largely marginalised, figuring 'in so far as they impeded or facilitated his rise' (Sinfield 1997: 234) or relegated to the terrain upon which conflicts between men manifested.

Comparable tendencies can be observed with regards Britain's burgeoning migrant communities who, as discussed above, also found themselves generally excluded from the

integration of working-class organisations into welfare capitalism and the national community. Thus, in the postwar novels discussed in this chapter, people of colour are depicted either somewhat problematically or as largely non-existent. In Sommerfield's novel, for instance, black presence is conspicuous in its absence—especially given the prevalence of passages set against the backdrop of London youth culture and jazz clubs—with their mention restricted to a single off-hand comment about 'strolling coloured students' on a quiet Sunday (Sommerfield 1960: 44), implying little more than non-threatening peripheral coexistence. However, given the novel's previously-discussed Marxist undercurrents with regards to working-class navigation of the postwar housing crisis as well as the text's publication shortly after the racially-motivated violence of 1958 (themselves propelled in significant part by racist narratives around housing), a continuity from Sommerfield's two decades of CPGB membership becomes detectable. That is, the narrative's marginalisation of black characters permits a reading of the novel as embodying the CPGB's economic-reductionist approach to anti-racism not by confronting race and racial discourses but avoiding them in a simplistic attempt to discuss the "real" economic base at the root of all social problems.

Novels such as *A Kind of Loving* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, meanwhile, suffer from related problems, though manifesting somewhat differently. Barstow constructs a complex characterisation of Vic as holding some prejudiced ideas alongside a "common sense" "live-and-let-live" tolerance arguing that among the 'coloured bods' in his town 'there'll be right'uns and wrong'uns among them like there is with anybody else' though qualifying his statement saying he 'wouldn't like to be a bird walking home late at night by myself up Colville Road. There's so many of them living up there the locals call it the Road to Mandalay. God! I'm glad I'm English' (Barstow 2010: 92). Later, however, Vic reaffirms

his anti-racism, satirising Mrs Rothwell's desire to 'pack that lot off home' as 'it's getting as a respectable Englishwoman daren't put her nose outside her own door' (280), contradicting his previous statement about the supposed danger to women on Colville Road. Meanwhile, Sillitoe similarly attempts to address issues of race through the character of Sam, a black soldier in the British Army who stays with Arthur's Aunt Ada after befriending her son Johnny while serving together in Africa. Subject to what famed psychiatrist and postcolonial Marxist, Frantz Fanon, described as the 'thousand details, anecdotes, stories' with which white society 'battered down' black people with discourses around their supposed intellectual deficiency and savagery (2008: 84), Sam is bombarded with questions, "jokes" and assumptions, such as thinking 'telegrams are sent by tom-tom' (Sillitoe 2008: 191) and being asked whether he can read and write (192). Yet he is also defended by Aunt Ada, who, responding to Bert, 'turned on him fiercely. [...] "you'd better be nice to 'im, or Johnny'll gi' yer a good thump when 'e comes 'ome from Africa."' (193). As Haywood points out, during Sam's brief presence in the narrative, 'the festive camaraderie of the occasion extends to him also, and seems to offer him a tentative place within this older working-class culture' (1997: 104). However, the place offered to Sam is 'tentative' precisely because it is fundamentally imperiled by the assumption underpinning the family's relationship to him: 'He's a guest' (Sillitoe 2008: 193), explains Ada and, in framing his presence this way, Sillitoe implicitly attaches temporal conditions to the aforementioned camaraderie while simultaneously severing Sam from the possibility of more profound bonds of solidarity. This is exacerbated by Sillitoe's portrayal of Sam as the "perfect guest", grateful and unimposing, an obvious attempt at undermining stereotypes of black savagery or predatory sexuality but which ultimately result in Sam having hardly any personality at all. So while 'Sam beamed with happiness at the universal sympathy around him' (196), he is also removed from the social questions and struggles of race and class in Britain, leaving Sillitoe capable of addressing

racism only on the relatively superficial level of individual phobia rather than as part of the social relations which he is able to portray with regards to Arthur's antagonistic subject position. Indeed, Sam's 'guest' status is inadvertently complicit with anti-migrant '*Gastarbeiter*' discourse (Sivanandan 2008: 75) and runs counter to the identities which would be constructed by the future protagonists of Britain's anti-racist and black liberation movements, exemplified in slogans such as 'Here to stay, here to fight' and 'Come what may, we're here to stay' (Ramamurthy 2013). In the end, what is evident in both Barstow's and Sillitoe's novels, is that while there exist attempts to directly confront racism, these attempts remain on the level of interpersonal prejudice rather than the articulated structures of class and race, while the voices of non-white characters are minimised; indeed, Barstow's 'coloured bods' do not speak at all, existing only as objects of discussion in the background, while Sam says little more, but instead is frequently spoken for by the novel's white characters.

Such a tendency towards the removal of agency and subjectivity from non-white characters was counteracted by the emergence of what can be considered a 'proletarian literary formation' around the milieu of postwar Caribbean writers whose radical oeuvres often focused explicitly on black or migrant working-class experiences, even if often categorised in ethnic rather than class terms. However, though the 1950s, as 'the great decade of the West Indian novel' (Hughes 1979: 90), is correctly understood through the analytical frameworks of race and postcolonialism, productive readings can be made through analysing the milieu's characteristics as a proletarian literary formation paralleling—but nonetheless distinct from—that of the Angry Young Men. This is not only due to the working- or lower-middle class origins of some of its authors—such as the 'scholarship boy', George Lamming, or Sam Selvon, who left school at fifteen and worked as a wireless operator during World War

Two—nor merely the depiction in their novels of working-class experiences and anti-colonial struggle. Rather, as well as these, postwar Caribbean writing can be considered a proletarian literary formation for the fact that it formed what Denning might describe as a distinct literary institution growing out of a specific social formation of class recomposition arising from the need for migrant labour to rebuild Britain following the war and, to draw on Jameson, reaffirmed the existence of a marginalised and oppositional culture of postwar Caribbean migrants while restoring them ‘to their proper place in the dialogical system of the social classes’ (2002: 71).

The postwar Caribbean proletarian literary formation was buoyed by support from Henry Swanzy whose influence can be thought of as broadly analogous to that of John Lehmann at *New Writing* discussed in the previous chapter. During his editorship of the BBC radio programme *Caribbean Voices*, Swanzy not only provided a platform for burgeoning Caribbean writers but also supported them financially: in 1949, Swanzy said the BBC was ‘subsidising West Indian writing to the tune of £1,500 a year in programme fees alone’ (1949: 28), a claim supported by George Lamming, explaining how

in one way or another, all the West Indian novelists have benefited from his work and his generosity of feeling. [...] If you looked a little thin in the face [...] he would make some arrangement for you to earn. Since he would not promise to ‘use’ anything you had written, he would arrange for you to earn by employing you to read. (2005: 67)

Swanzy’s contribution, however, went beyond the purely financial, sustaining the Caribbean proletarian literary formation in London through ‘informal evenings of literary discussion at his home. West Indian writers from across the region could, for the first time, meet and enter

regular discussions with each other' (Nanton 2000: 69). Swanzy's contribution was such that in 1960 Lamming argued that 'No comprehensive account of writing in the British Caribbean during the last decade could be written without considering his whole achievement and his role in the emergence of the West Indian novel' (2005: 67).

Keeping in mind Denning's refocusing of discussion away from "haggling" over the 'backgrounds and affiliations of specific writers' and towards the kinds of writing, genres, forms and formulas which proletarian literary formations produced, one effect of *Caribbean Voices* on postwar British Caribbean literature was the result of radio's focus 'on the diversity of Caribbean vernaculars [which] drew attention to narrative form and poetic voice as much as content' (Griffith 2001: 19-20). Influencing writers' approaches to form and voice, radio also highlighted an oft-neglected tendency within disagreements between the London BBC office and literary agents in the Caribbean with Griffith observing the 'ironic situation' whereby BBC personnel promoted West Indian accents on *Caribbean Voices* while significant sections of the Caribbean literati preferred (Standard) English accents (15). Griffith quotes Jamaican poet John Figueroa's opinion that 'when one looks more carefully, and observes who are strongly praised as readers, one cannot help noticing they are either English or have very "Oxford English" voices' (15). It is important to note, then, that Caribbean writers arriving in London, were also escaping a latent conservatism within their region's middle-class literary milieu.

Moreover, as novelists often depicting the articulated experiences of racialised working-class migrants from the Commonwealth, their texts therefore sit at the intersection of issues of class, race, citizenship and colonialism while similarly navigating forms of political representation attempting to contain/exclude this complex marginalised subject position

within its structures. Thus, where white working-class novelists wrote in dialogue with the traditional institutions of working-class representation which structure working-class oppositional culture, Caribbean migrant writers did so as well, but with the added necessity of dialogue with organisations representing them communally. These writers contributed a literature reflecting the concerns and debates of the wider expatriate community, both regarding their new home and political developments in their countries of origin.

However, what becomes evident in much postwar migrant writing is not merely its depiction of the conditions of contemporary migrant life, but also the way in which many of these texts prefigured the antagonistic anti-racist identities of the future. Indeed, by the mid- to late-1960s, such antagonistic identities became hegemonic within British anti-racism: in contrast to the ‘tolerant and accommodationist’ organisations of the immediate postwar period, Ramdin argues that from the mid-1960s, ‘the “winds of change” had introduced greater militancy as reflected in the industrial struggles [...] and community-oriented social and cultural organisations created to fight racism and fascism during the 1970s and 1980s’ (1987: 371). The aforementioned RAAS is one such example while McLeod cites the often ignored black politics of the 1970s, including:

the establishment and popularity of *Race Today* [...] protests against police intimidation such as the 1970 march against the police’s harassment of the patrons of Notting Hill’s Mangrove Restaurant [...] the emergence of a new British-born rather than migrant generation of black Britons – youthful, uncompromising and militant – who responded to discrimination with outrage and action (2015: 93-94).

Moreover, as Sivanandan explains, the black working class ‘had to fight simultaneously as a people and as a class’ (1981: 138), evidenced in the numerous black workers’ strikes—Mansfield Hosiery in 1972, Standard Telephones and Cables in 1973, Imperial Typewriters in 1974—in which black workers struck not only against racial discrimination from employers, but also against opposition from their own trade unions whose priorities lay with representing their white members. However, as the decade wore on, it was working-class black youth who began ‘to emerge into the vanguard of black struggle [and] were now beginning to carve out a politics from the experiences of their own existence’ (140). This existence was increasingly defined by an identity that was *both black and British* and whose political organisations displayed a greater degree of radicalism and militancy: Evan Smith notes how black activists set up networks ‘primarily without the help of white people, against the racism of employers, unions, police, local authorities, political parties and others’ and drawing inspiration in part from ‘radical Marxism and class-based politics, but was just as informed by anti-colonial politics from Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, which intertwined to present a black British identity with a colonial legacy, rather than merely colonial subjects in the “Mother Country”’ (2010: 19).

The development of British anti-racism thus sees the proliferation of a structural analysis around a postcolonial and class-based theoretical framework alongside an assertive black British identity. Though, as discussed above, Britain’s iconic anti-racist struggles would take place a generation after the initial Windrush-era arrivals, the roots of those struggles lie in the political and cultural formations of the immediate postwar period discussed earlier in this chapter. However, while writers of the postwar Caribbean literary formation were responding to the hardships navigated by West Indian migrants from the period, their texts—and notably often those deploying avant-gardist textual strategies—often looked ahead, intervening in the

prevailing distribution of the sensible to challenge the ideology of ‘tolerant and accommodationist’ communal representation as well as that of nativist working-class institutions. In so doing, these texts prefigured the theoretical underpinnings and antagonistic subject position of a future black British anti-racist identity.

Just as postwar Commonwealth migrant communities took inspiration from anti-colonial movements in their countries of origin, so too did West Indian writers in Britain take inspiration from their countries of origin in their fiction where intersections of class, race and colonialism were central. Thus, the early novels of VS Naipaul, Sam Selvon and George Lamming, not to mention those of less well-known authors such as Edgar Mittelholzer, Victor Reid and Roger Mais, all focus extensively on life in the Caribbean and its intersecting structuring systems of class, race and colonialism. However, as a full analysis of postwar Caribbean writing in Britain would be too wide-ranging for this chapter, discussion here will be limited to those texts focusing on the migrant experience of arrival and settlement in Britain. These texts, taking inspiration directly from the lives of postwar migrants in Britain, are also steeped far more explicitly in the contemporary debates and struggles of the Caribbean community and provide more direct parallels with their white counterparts in their portrayals of British working-class experience, political representation and artistic responses to them.

Though not itself focused on working-class Caribbean migrants, ER Braithwaite’s autobiographical *To Sir, With Love* (1959), based on his experiences teaching in an East London secondary school, is highly illustrative both in regards to its depiction of realities common to the West Indian community in general as well as how its differences with other

London-based Caribbean novels parallel similar tendencies vis-à-vis realism, experiment and political representation.

*To Sir, With Love* follows Braithwaite as his romantic illusions about Britain and Britishness—fostered while at Cambridge and in the RAF—are shattered by the poverty he sees and the racism he experiences: expecting ‘the London of Chaucer and Erasmus’ he is disappointed by the ‘slipshod shopfronts and gaping bomb sites’ (Braithwaite 2005: 5) of the postwar East End as well as exasperated by his debarment from employment due to racism. Though Braithwaite’s novel, as will be detailed below, is problematic with respect to its cultural assumptions and anti-racist textual strategies, like the Angry Young Men texts discussed previously it remains an oppositional strategy in his troublingly accurate depiction of a ubiquitous British racism: his accounts of the colour bar in employment, the anxieties induced by assumptions around his sexuality, his frequent racialisation, all correspond with those experiences recounted by numerous contemporary and present-day commentators. Told at one interview he is ‘in terms of qualification, ability and experience [...] abundantly suited to the post’, he is nonetheless rejected to avoid ‘adversely affect[ing] the balance of good relationship which has always obtained in this firm’ (33) by allowing him a position of authority over white staff. This itself is suggestive of the “colour bars” enacted by union and management cooperation, and highlights the extent to which black people were excluded from the cross-class collaboration which defined postwar welfare capitalism. When Braithwaite does eventually find employment, he is instantly—and incessantly—racialised by his colleague Mr Weston, who refers to Braithwaite pointedly as a ‘black sheep’ (11) and suggesting he use ‘black magic’ on troublesome pupils (58). Braithwaite is, like Sillitoe’s Sam, ‘battered down’ by Fanon’s ‘thousand details, anecdotes, stories’ of white society, bringing him ‘face to face with something I had either forgotten or completely ignored [...]

my black skin' (Braithwaite 2005: 33). In this realisation, Braithwaite also captures the contradiction outlined by MacPhee between the legal and ethno-nationalist definitions of Britishness: 'I realised at that moment that I was British, but evidently not a Briton' (38). Braithwaite's depiction of racialisation can therefore be read as an accurate portrayal of life in what Virdee described as the 'golden age of white supremacy', which was also the zenith of working-class integration into the nation, though on the unspoken condition of whiteness.

The issues with Braithwaite begin, however, with his relentless acquiescence, paralleling the respectability politics of the Standing Conference's desire that black politics in Britain should not cause embarrassment to the High Commission of the West Indies Federation. As such, Braithwaite plays the role described by Anthony Richmond in his 1954 *Colour Prejudice in Britain* as the 'ideal migrant', having a 'balanced personality' and refusing 'to succumb to his aggressive inclinations in response to ill-treatment by whites' (quoted in Collins 2001: 410). Resultantly, Braithwaite almost never responds to provocations, at times suggesting he may even be 'unnecessarily sensitive' (Braithwaite 2005: 58). In other instances, Braithwaite actively sabotages attempts to confront racism. Early in the novel, a middle-class woman boards a bus and refuses the seat next to Braithwaite, the only one available. Tension rises as she ignores the conductor's instruction that standing is not permitted, leading a group of women to aim hostile looks at her 'in their immediate sympathy and solidarity with the conductor against someone who was obviously not of their class' (4). Braithwaite, however, asks to get off at the next stop thus resolving the situation in the woman's favour. The conductor gives 'an odd disapproving stare, as if I had in some way betrayed him by leaving before he could have a real set-to with the woman [...] By leaving I had done that conductor a favour, I thought. He'd never get the better of that female' (5). In leaving the bus, Braithwaite circumvents the possibility for solidarity. Yet this encounter does not merely encapsulate

Braithwaite's wider strategy of deliberate self-presentation as a non-threatening black male ever-willing to turn the other cheek but also reveals the class rationale behind it.

Braithwaite's sentiment of having helped the conductor comes from his view of an immutable class hierarchy. However, the conductor, in endeavouring to engage in a 'real set-to with the woman' with the 'solidarity' of the working-class female passengers, symbolically threatens to upend that hierarchy and so, in disembarking, Braithwaite ensures its immutability while simultaneously claiming its inevitability. Just as name-dropping Chaucer demonstrates his familiarity with the cultural monuments of bourgeois British life, his forfeiture of white working-class solidarity for the benefit of middle-class racism functions to display his fidelity to British class society, pandering to prejudice rather than building multiracial unity in opposition to a racialised class hierarchy. Birbalsingh argues that Braithwaite 'constantly stresses the ease with which he could assimilate into British society if only his colour were disregarded' (1968: 75); though intended primarily with regards to Braithwaite's sentiment that his cultural capital makes him 'under his skin [...] as British as Britons themselves' (75), it is equally applicable to his suppression of class antagonism, which occurs throughout the novel as an expression of loyalty to a distinctly class-inscribed ideal of Britishness.

Indeed, the suppression of class antagonism arises again between Braithwaite's working-class students and Mr Bell, a middle-class authoritarian formerly of the Army Education Service. Resented by the pupils, they revolt against him due to his relentless bullying of a classmate. Here, again, Braithwaite functions to dampen the revolt, explicitly phrasing opposition to his pupils' actions in the language of adherence to the norms of class society: 'Mr Bell was the master there [...] In two weeks you'll all be at work and lots of things will happen which will annoy you, make you wild. Are you going to resort to clubs and knives every time you're

upset or angered?’ (Braithwaite 2005: 156) Not only is Mr Bell’s position as ‘master’ invoked as one necessitating obedience but education’s preparatory purpose for the transition of working-class children into the labour market is also expressed unequivocally: in work, as in school, they can expect their ‘masters’ to ‘annoy’ them and make them ‘wild’; nonetheless, they must contain their urge to revolt. The incident concludes with Braithwaite succeeding in getting the pupils to apologise to Mr Bell for their mutinous behaviour.

While Braithwaite foregrounds a narrative of opposing societal racism by asserting his individual capacity to defy the ‘stories and anecdotes’ of bourgeois Britain, the text’s *impensé* is its anxiety around working-class revolt against class society, including—or even particularly—when that revolt aligns with the struggle against racial prejudice. Not only does Braithwaite’s text comply with the limits set by class society, but it also closely parallels the ‘tolerant and accommodationist’ black organisations of the period, particularly the Standing Conference’s reluctance to engage in activity which might embarrass the High Commission and CARD’s rejection of black working-class activism more generally. Like those groups, Braithwaite’s anti-racism is entirely educative, symbolised not only in his job as a schoolteacher but also his attempt to serve as a living embodiment of black people’s ability to contradict white society’s ‘stories and anecdotes’. By showing how he ‘had grown up British in every way’ (36), Braithwaite demonstrates his facility with British customs and habits. Yet he subsequently ‘battles for his humanity according to the brutal criteria of a value-system which tacitly acknowledges white standards of behaviour as superior to all others’, the implication being that ‘in spite of a black skin which apparently identifies him with inferior non-white conduct, he can, in fact, measure up adequately to white standards’ (Birbalsingh 1968: 79). Braithwaite, therefore, adheres totally to the cultural standards of empire and, by extension, to the exclusion of those without his level of cultural capital.

Braithwaite is often absent from discussions of the 1950s West Indian literary milieu and his choice of register—both for narration and his own character speech—certainly contrasts sharply with much of its output, with its intentional and unequivocal utilisation of Standard English. Indeed, just as his Cambridge education, knowledge of Chaucer and service in the RAF represent Braithwaite’s attempts at underlining his claim to Britishness in content, his Standard English register and deployment of realist aesthetics—in contrast to the cosmopolitanism often associated with the avant-garde—represent narrative strategies towards that same end. Braithwaite’s Standard English narrative voice comes to represent a textual manifestation of the ‘Oxford English voices’ mentioned by Figueroa, an implicit self-positioning in contradistinction to ‘other’ (usually working-class) Caribbean migrants and their regional vernaculars which, though not included in the novel, form its unstated social and cultural context. His eschewal of their vernacular comprises in significant part his claim to Britishness, evidence in his case to prove to have ‘grown up British in every way’; yet, by extension, this logic also undermines the claims to Britishness of those (again, mostly working-class) Caribbean migrants unable or unwilling to similarly conform to such a racialised and class-inscribed Britishness.

Interestingly, Braithwaite’s use of Standard English register also serves to distinguish him from the novel’s white working-class characters, such as during his observation of a group of East End charwomen:

“He’ll be lucky to get bread and dripping today, he will.”

“He can’t do you much good on bread and dripping, Gert.”

“Feeding him on steak and chicken won’t make no difference neither, Rose. Never mind, he keeps me back warm.” (Braithwaite 2005: 2)

In this passage, Braithwaite clearly demarcates the non-standard linguistic characteristics of the women’s speech, its contrast with his own underlining that it is he, the autodiegetic narrator, who commands the accepted speech repertoire and (by extension) legitimised perspective on events in the narrative while the women, peripheral to the narrative and using the typical vernacular of working-class Londoners (evident in their irregular grammar and syntax), are delegitimised. Again, their inclusion functions to highlight Braithwaite’s cultural capital, contrasting his “correct” English with their “incorrect”, and demonstrating his successful inculcation of British cultural standards. Implicit to this, however, is a narrow definition of Britishness based entirely on the acquisition of bourgeois cultural markers (Chaucer, a Cambridge education, Standard English) as symbolic of a racially and class-inscribed version of British culture. While an oppositional strategy in its resistance to the dominant racial discourse embedded in postwar consensus politics, Braithwaite’s text is nonetheless also the aesthetic embodiment of the respectability politics emanating from some contemporary black community representatives. Form and content in Braithwaite’s novel function together to preclude the possibility for the emergence of more radical anti-colonial unities which would challenge—and ultimately transform—both the traditional institutions of British social democratic representation as well as the more moderate black communal leadership and, indeed, ‘Britishness’ itself. Braithwaite’s narrative strategies remove him from this process, his Standard English register working with his novel’s content to eschew class conflict, assertive anti-racism and the self-affirmation of Caribbean identity, instead signifying a worldview which is unable to acknowledge the legitimacy of any cultural pattern outside of a narrow, bourgeois Britishness.

One novel highlighting the distinctness of Braithwaite's text from those of the *Caribbean Voices* milieu is George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), depicting the experiences of a group of West Indian migrants—or, rather, emigrants—from their journey across the Atlantic to settlement in England. Lamming's narrative strategies see his frequent deployment of modernist-inspired opaqueness, such as his skillful portrayal of the process of community formation on the ship to Britain where passengers 'initially portrayed as a heterogeneous group' travelling from various places for various reasons but soon 'those leaving in search of "a better break" in England become a distinct group within the wider one' (Guarducci 2010: 345). In the early dialogues, 'None of the characters involved is mentioned by name; instead, we find a series of "one man said", "another said"' (346), resulting in a sense of dislocation for the reader mirroring that of the characters themselves, the reader's introduction to the characters occurring synchronously with the characters' introductions to each other. Gradually, out of this opaqueness individualities emerge, as do the various names/nicknames, personal histories, future plans and national rivalries. Yet the slide into parochialism implied by the latter is resisted when one of them, the Governor, appeals forcefully: 'doan lemme hear any more o' this bullshit 'bout small islan' an' big islan' [...] All you down here is my brothers' (Lamming 2011a: 38-39). The appeal for unity across the boundaries of nationalism depicts how a common Caribbean identity was forged in the émigré experience, a process felt also through the passage's formal techniques taking the reader from its original opacity to relative clarity as connections between characters—and reader—are forged.

The process begun on the ship continues upon arrival in London: Trinidadian Tornado and another character known as 'the Jamaican', reunited in a barber's shop for the first time since meeting on the journey to England, greet each other in a way that 'Anyone would think them

wus countrymen’, to which the Jamaican explains ‘That’s just w’at we is’ (130). Yet the concept of black community is extended further when an African client argues ‘It’s the Africans in this country that teach you all that [...] Teach you the unity of your peoples [...] nowadays it seems we will all soon come to an almost perfect unity and brotherhood’ (131). While the Jamaican expresses doubt on ‘the unity part’ (131), he nonetheless, through their sharing of the same social space, substantiates the Jamaican’s claim as their discussion can only occur precisely *because* of their burgeoning co-existence as a black community, made all the more significant by the discussion’s eventuation in that early base of community formation, the barber’s shop. Moreover, it underlines how, in contrast to Braithwaite’s narrative of individual trial, Lamming depicts the collective experience of largely working-class black migrants in the process of settlement and community formation in London. As Robinette explains, Lamming’s title itself suggests the novel is ‘less about particular characters than shared experiences. He takes the group, rather than the individual, as his unit of analysis’ (2014: 15). Furthermore, as the barbers’ shop passage shows, narrative focus is less concerned—as in Braithwaite’s novel—with a central hero who transforms those he meets through irrefutable argumentation but more in the burgeoning process of black social-political (re)composition in Britain. This process, in which Lamming depicts the movement from national to regional and eventually international black diasporic unities, was part of a construction of the anti-colonial politically black identity discussed by both Lentin and Sivanandan, borne from the migrant experience of racism, eventually expanded also to South Asians, and highly important in the analytical framework of the British black liberation movement.

Yet Lamming’s differences with Braithwaite go beyond content and into the form and register of his novel as well as the political conclusions which they encourage. Like many

around the *Caribbean Voices* literary formation, Lamming experimented with vernacular in his dialogues yet equally distinguishes himself from many of his contemporaries through his formal experimentation. For example, upon his characters' arrival in Britain, Lamming makes use of indentation for many of the dialogues, sometimes markedly so:

Say Tornado what wrong wid dese people  
at all? You doan' mean to say people drink  
tea when it ain't got milk. They ain't that  
poor un, un, Tornado, no tell me de  
truth, dey ain't so poor they can't spare a  
drop o' milk in they tea

[...]

'Ave 'alf pint o' bitter John?  
My name ain't John.  
Oh no 'arm meant. Jes' gettin' to  
know you. 'Alf a pint for me an'  
my pal... (2011a: 112)

Here, indentation demarcates the new and unfamiliar situation in which the emigrants find themselves, reflected in the unfamiliar positioning of the text on the page, while the use of enjambment and unattributed speech perform the same function as the earlier dialogues on the ship: to create a similar sensation of confusion and alienation from the passage in the reader as that existing for the emigrants in their new environment. This confusion is not only the result of their new surroundings, but also their confounded expectations of Britain and Britishness evident in the decontextualised discussion of milkless tea: possibly suggestive of

postwar rationing—or some other motivation—both reader and character are left unclear as to the motivation for the tea’s milklessness but which, nonetheless, contradict the Caribbean association of Britain and Britishness with colonial power and class privilege as they adapt to new realities in the imperial metropolis.

Furthermore, in juxtaposing these varieties of non-Standard English—Caribbean and Estuary, respectively—Lamming reaffirms the validity of these ethnically-distinct deviations within the national language and highlights their potential for unity based on their shared exclusion from it: the British working-class vernacular excluded on the basis of class, the Caribbean working-class vernacular on the basis of both race and class. Meanwhile, the absence of meta-language in this passage means not only that neither vernacular is privileged over the other but also that neither subjectivity represented by those vernaculars is subordinated to the position of an object-language vis-à-vis the “objective” narrative voice to whom validation—or lack thereof—is tasked, as was the case in Braithwaite’s text.

Lamming’s overt avant-gardism signals his radical departure from both the aesthetic and political assumptions underpinning Braithwaite’s work. Linking Rabinovitz’s characterisation of postwar writing and Virdee’s regarding postwar consensus politics, Brown outlines how following the war ‘experimental writing was commonly linked with notions of exile and an outsider status, which were becoming particularly suspect in a time of national consolidation’ (2006: 673-674). Against such a context,

Lamming’s modernist difficulty can be read as a quintessential migrant strategy—an assertive literary-political gesture aimed at preserving a West Indian (racial, political, cultural) difference while countering an English exoticism that tended to read West

Indians as simple, unthinking (and unworking) residents of a tropical paradise. (674-675)

Therefore, in a noticeable contrast to Braithwaite's respectability politics and assimilationism—reaffirmed in his adherence to the dominant realist mode of postwar writing—Lamming intentionally assumes the position of modernist outsider specifically to 'allay the threat of assimilation' (675) into the dominant aesthetic modes of a Britain increasingly preoccupied with questions of national consolidation. Lamming's text can thus be understood as an example of postcolonial social modernism, his experimental form reaffirming his status as cosmopolitan postcolonial outsider in the heart of imperial metropolis and, in contrast to Braithwaite, maintains an antagonistic identity which seeks Britain's transformation as a prerequisite to his integration rather than attempting to demonstrate his ability to assimilate into an unjust British class society.

Taken together, then, Lamming's techniques serve to validate the migrant's outsider status and create equivalences—and potential unities—between the non-Standard Englishes of black and white working-class fractions in postwar Britain. In doing so, Lamming simultaneously challenges the 'tolerant and accommodationist' black leadership of the period through his assertive reaffirmation of working-class Caribbean identity while also challenging the traditional organisations of British working-class representation in his insistence on their acknowledgement of working-class West Indians as a legitimate constituency within the wider working class meriting unity on the basis of a shared antagonistic subject-position in a period dominated by class collaboration and consensus.

Similar themes and deployment of innovative formal techniques are present in Sam Selvon's 1956 classic, *The Lonely Londoners*, exploring issues around the intersections of race, nationhood and class through the roguish misadventures of a group of working-class Caribbean migrants, centred in particular around cynical old hand, Moses Aloetta, and ingenuous recent arrival, Sir Galahad. Selvon produces a tableau of the Caribbean experience in London, balancing the tragic with the comic and the cynical with the optimistic, vindicating Stein's assessment that *Windrush*-era texts contain 'a peculiar romance with London [...] and romance, of course, brings with it a fair amount of volatility' (2004: 22). Such a characterisation is perhaps truer of Selvon's novel than any other, his characters swinging from great highs to grim lows from almost one paragraph to the next. One passage, for example, sees Galahad walking around the city 'cool as a lord [...] This is London, this is life oh lord, to walk like a king with money in your pocket' (2006: 75) only to have his self-assurance punctured by a reminder of his racial "Otherness" when a white child indicates him in the street saying 'Mummy, look at that black man!' (76). Forming an interesting intertextual parallel with Fanon's own 'Mama, see the Negro!' (2008: 84), what these boys 'see' is not merely complexional difference, but the myriad of 'stories and anecdotes' around race which such difference is supposed to signify, establishing a consistent motif with Braithwaite's and Lamming's texts as well as numerous others of the postwar migrant experience. Thus it is that, as Janice Ho explains, Selvon's novel 'pays close attention to the social rights of citizenship from which the immigrants feel excluded' both in terms of 'equal access to employment, welfare, and housing' as well as 'how they are further marginalised through their tenuous connections to the public sphere' (2015: 123) in which participation is frequently regulated by racialised understandings of citizenship and belonging.

Again like Braithwaite, Selvon addresses the numerous ways in which these aforementioned ‘stories and anecdotes’ manifested in the themes specific to postwar British racial discourse. Fear of miscegenation, for instance, is depicted in the character of Bart being thrown out by his white girlfriend’s father ‘because he don’t want no curly-hair children in the family’ (Selvon 2006: 51). Similarly, the tension discussed by MacPhee between the codified, legal definitions of Britishness and its unspoken ethno-nationalist counterpart finds expression in Moses’ rancour towards a Polish restaurateur who refuses service to black people, stating that ‘he ain’t have no more right in this country than we. In fact, we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner, we have more right than any people from the damn continent to live and work in this country’ (21). Selvon’s choice here of a Polish restaurateur is significant, a reference no doubt to the fact that the number of postwar Polish migrants to Britain was ‘roughly equivalent’ to the number of West Indians (Ramdin 1987: 189), but without the related moral panic, underlining Collins’ point that the issue with Caribbean migration was ‘more than merely numerical’ and that ideas of national belonging were frequently predicated on race rather than legal citizenship rights.

However, in contrast to Braithwaite—and more significantly with respect to the development of a militant black politics in Britain challenging both social democratic and black communal representation—Selvon also succeeds in illustrating the functioning of racism at an institutional or systemic rather than simply interpersonal level. For example, Moses explains how the employment exchange marks black people’s records: ‘J-A, Col. That mean you from Jamaica and you black. [...] Suppose a vacancy come and they want to send a fellar, first they will find out if the firm want coloured fellars before they send you’ (Selvon 2006: 28). Similarly, in another passage, Moses describes the situation of the black factory worker: ‘the work is a hard work and mostly is spades they have working in the factory, paying lower

wages than they would have to pay white fellows' (52). In these two passages, then, Selvon moves beyond depictions of postwar racial discourse to highlight how British welfare capitalism was also a racial capitalism, in which the racialised "Other" is systematically discriminated against as a strategy for maximising capital accumulation. The aforementioned examples show the concentration of West Indians, as a 'fraction of labour', into the lowest-wage sections of the employment market (thus reducing overheads on variable capital) or, with the function of making such hyper-exploitation desirable, excluding them from sizeable portions of the labour market entirely; indeed, Moses' description of factory work mirrors the experience of Asian workers during the Red Scar Mill dispute almost a decade later. Selvon's text is therefore a marked divergence from the individualised, interpersonal incidences of bigotry discussed by Braithwaite who, in his uncoupling of race from the social relations which underpin it, can be read as analogous to a similar uncoupling of class from its social relations among the Angry Young Men. Meanwhile, Selvon's text, prefiguring the analytical framework of the British black liberation movement, roots questions of race and class firmly within the context of the structures which reinforce and articulate them.

Parallels with the Angry Young Men are also evident in Selvon's treatment of the organised forces of the left and trade unions which Bentley notes are 'conspicuous by [their] absence', arguing that while Selvon's novel 'addresses the experiential connection of class and ethnicity [...] his characters reject organised left-wing political action as a means for dealing with the specific concerns of a black British/Caribbean subculture during the period' (2007: 55). Indeed, whereas in novels such as *A Kind of Loving* and *Room at the Top*, the presence of working-class representational institutions functions to limit the political scope of their narratives to that acceptable within the framework of postwar consensus politics, the absence of such institutions in Selvon's text functions akin to del Valle Alcalá's point regarding their

outright rejection in Sillitoe's novel. That is, that it serves to highlight the growing complicity and institutionalisation of these organisations into the exploitative and oppressive postwar welfare capitalist structures which negatively affect those sections of the class excluded from their narrow imagination of their class constituency. By contrast, Selvon foregrounds the experiential articulation of racial and class oppressions—much like Sillitoe foregrounds the conflict between the worker and capital—as well as a critique of their structural manifestations. This is in stark contrast to Braithwaite's novel, again prefiguring the analytical framework of the following decade's black liberation movement, which arose in significant part as a response to the inability of those institutions omitted from Selvon's narrative to address the concerns of the black working class whose experiences are central to *The Lonely Londoners*.

This prefiguration of Britain's black liberation movement is perceptible also in the assertive reaffirmation of Caribbean cultural identity, evident not only in the novel's content but also its structure and form. For example, Selvon incorporates the musical genre of calypso into his narrative structure, maintaining its stylistic attributes as a 'musical narrative form' that is 'episodic, with each song focussing on a particular scene or event drawn from contemporary life' (MacPhee 2011: 119). As such, much like the 'anecdotal stories' of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *The Lonely Londoners* 'lacks a conventional plot, but is instead composed of a series of surrealistic and poetic vignettes or "ballads" from the life of a group of black migrants' (119). Thus, the disconnected 'ballads' of various Caribbean migrants incorporate the calypsonian's musical structure into its picaresque narrative, their often comedic style incorporating the genre's superficial levity while recounting the daily trials of the migrant experience in London. Indeed, this last point captures another important divergence between Selvon and Braithwaite (as well as a commonality with Lamming): while Braithwaite's

perspective, in his role as the text's author-hero-narrator, dominates all others in a narrative focused on how he individually overcomes the adversities of a ubiquitous societal racism, Selvon's work is thoroughly polyphonic, focusing on the *collective* experience of postwar Caribbean migrants and its aforementioned episodic structure depicting the subjectivities of a diverse black working class in what Bakhtin would theorise as a 'plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices' (1999: 6). Indeed, as Dyer argues, Selvon 'interweaves migrants' individual stories [...] and describes London and Londoners from the migrants' perspectives and in their unique voices' (2002: 117) while McLeod, developing this point, underlines the ways in which these unique voices sometimes contradict each other; the result is that 'conflicting moods characterise the novel' as each character conjures 'a different view of the city' (2004: 34). McLeod here focuses on the contrast between Moses' cynicism and Galahad's optimism, pointing out there is 'an element of each character in the other: Moses indulges in some of the coasting and horseplay of Galahad and the other boys, and Galahad gradually develops a sense of realism about living in London' (37). Through his disparate calypso-inspired structure, then, Selvon opens up his narrative to validate the various personal experiences and responses of individual, mostly working-class migrants, while ultimately unifying them as part of a collective narrative of black working-class composition in Britain.

However, Selvon's reaffirmation of Caribbean identity is perhaps most evident in his use of Trinidadian vernacular throughout the novel. When Galahad's white lover criticises his accent, his response—'What wrong with it? [...] Is English we speaking' (Selvon 2006: 82)—reasserts the legitimacy of his non-standard grammatical structure. Yet unlike many of the novels discussed previously in this chapter (by both British and Caribbean authors), the use of vernacular is not limited to dialogue but rather permeates the whole text via its

Trinidadian-inflected narration. Indeed, the effect of *Caribbean Voices* on experiments with narrative voice manifests itself more strongly in Selvon's novel than any other from the period, marking its 'most radical innovation' (MacPhee 2011: 120). As MacPhee elucidates, while there exists

a long tradition of using dialect or non-Southern British English in the novel, this usage had traditionally been confined to dialogue, lending weight to the experiential verisimilitude of the realist novel, but clearly distinguished (we might say quarantined) from the standard Southern British English of the narrative voice. The narrative voice is therefore tacitly presented as a "universal" frame of interpretation and linguistic rectitude. (120)

In opting for vernacular narration, Selvon intentionally abjures this tradition as to quarantine his characters' non-Standard English to the text's dialogues would imply 'a hierarchy of experience between the language of the characters and that of the narrative voice, which would decentre and devalue the experience of the West Indian migrants' (121). This marks an interesting continuity with the modernist-inspired narrative methods of Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*, which utilised Scots dialect for similar reasons—and with similar political implications vis-à-vis representation—to Selvon with regards to validating the perspectives of his novel's lower-class dialect speakers, while standing in stark contrast to Braithwaite's self-conscious use of Standard English (and its implied rejection of Caribbean vernacular's cultural legitimacy). Though Selvon himself would be critical of the British black power movement—see his 1975 novel, *Moses Ascending*, discussed in the following chapter—his radical stylistic innovations nonetheless have radical political implications, affirming black identity in such a way as to prefigure developments in British anti-racism, such as the

aforementioned vernacular reference of RAAS and the emerging linguistic hybridity described by Gilroy as a ‘demotic multiculturalism’ (2006: 108). *The Lonely Londoners*, then, is a precursor to the assertive black British identities which would make—and be made by—the black liberation struggles of the following generation, creating a hybrid British identity which Hall would observe among third generation West Indians who ‘know they come from the Caribbean, know that they are Black, know that they are British. They want to speak from all three identities. They are not prepared to give up any one of them [...] they say this Englishness is Black’ (Hall 1997: 59). Selvon’s novel thus indicates the possibility of new hybridised political identities, analogous to that of Arthur Seaton in its expression of antagonism with the racialised class society with which it finds itself in opposition.

The London-set works of Selvon and Lamming thus represent two important novelistic engagements with the ‘making’ of the black British working class emerging from the postwar proletarian literary formation around *Caribbean Voices*. This engagement is not merely expressed through the content of their novels but also in their decentred experimental narrative forms. Braithwaite—in keeping with the dominant ideology of contemporary moderate black representative organisations—understands racism primarily as an issue of personal prejudice and accordingly structures his novel around the struggles of an exemplary individual challenging those prejudices. Conversely, both Lamming and Selvon, in focusing on the fortunes of larger groups of migrants are able to capture the mass nature of the postwar Caribbean experience in Britain, the structural nature of racism and therefore the collective nature of the response to it. In doing so, Selvon and Lamming produce texts depicting the emerging social and political tendencies within the Caribbean expatriate community which would inform the next generation’s anti-racist movement, reconceptualising class and class struggle as well as pluralising definitions of Britishness and which must therefore be

understood in continuity with the social modernism of many of the proletarian novels discussed in the previous chapter. As such, Lamming's and Selvon's texts—in both their content and formal techniques—challenge not only contemporary 'tolerant and accommodationist' black representatives but also those institutions of working-class representation integrated into the welfare capitalism of postwar Britain and who were unable—or, perhaps, unwilling—to acknowledge them as consociates within a wider, multiethnic working class.

## Conclusion

The establishment of the postwar welfare state brought with it unprecedented gains in working-class living standards as its representative organisations were integrated into a freshly-stabilised British capitalism. Such integration, however, was not—and perhaps could never have been—inclusive of the class as a whole in its multifaceted complexity; rather, it was the integration of a particular essentialised construction of the class along strictly gendered, racialised and occupational lines.

Such biases in working-class political representation found expression in the Angry Young Men, the predominant mode of working-class literary representation of the time. Their texts, often through the first-person narratives affirming the monological dominance of their white and male heroes, centred those subjectivities at the expense of black and female working-class characters who were similarly marginalised by the predominant working-class political formations of the period. This overemphasis of white, male working-class subjectivities is itself part of the Angry Young Men's general contraction of the 'political terrain of the proletarian novel', often framing politics entirely within the logic of postwar consensus or positing nostalgia for older forms of working-class subordination as its alternative to the

supposed moral ambiguity of working-class affluence. By contrast, the lexicon of class struggle, resistance to gender norms and social transformation so common in the working-class writing of the prewar years was replaced with one of class as a sociological category underpinned by masculinist assumptions and social mobility within an immutable—though ameliorated—class hierarchy.

This new era of capitalist stability and national unity was coincident with a renewed interest in realism in working-class writing. Indeed, the deployment of realist literary form in postwar working-class narratives functions to reaffirm the ‘density and solidity of what is’. This is equally reflected in the content of these novels frequently framing political discourse within the logic of postwar class society—Labour or Tory, affluence or traditional working-class values—itself reflective of (and subsequently reaffirming) the newfound stability of that society as well as the working-class institutions which had been integrated into it. This signifies a profound shift from the more heterogeneous proletarian literary formation of the prewar years, arguably most clearly evident in the transition between John Sommerfield’s *May Day* and *North West Five*, though no less evident also in the novels of Angry Young Men. The twin fidelities of these novels to realist literary conventions and a particularised image of the class subject mark an intervention in the distribution of the sensible which, while making visible the experiences and subjectivities of working-class white men, are simultaneously complicit in making invisible those of other sections of the working class, in keeping with broader contemporary tendencies regarding working-class political representation and the logic of welfare capitalism.

Conversely, it was those texts which were most overt in their attempts to challenge, extend or even rupture with the remit of realist literary representation which were simultaneously those

which similarly attempted to challenge, extend or even rupture with the remit of working-class representational politics. Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* represents one partial attempt: rejecting the Labour/Tory political binary as well as the nostalgia for older forms of pre-affluence working-class respectability, Sillitoe centres a politics based upon the ineradicable antagonism between the worker and capital, utilising techniques of internal monologue and free indirect style to emphasise the subjectivity of a Camusian proletarian rebel resistant to the integration of working-class institutions into the administration of welfare capitalism as well as deploying an episodic structure to resist the linear plot-driven narratives common to contemporary social mobility novels. Meanwhile, Lamming's *The Emigrants* and Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, as social modernist texts emerging from the Caribbean proletarian literary formation, intervene in the distribution of the sensible by using avant-garde formal strategies to focus on the collective experience of Caribbean migration to Britain. Similarly to Sillitoe—and in contrast to both Braithwaite and contemporary 'tolerant and accommodationist' Caribbean anti-racist organisations—Lamming's and Selvon's texts reject assimilationism and respectability, valorising instead an assertive postcolonial subjectivity expressed through a range of experimental textual strategies, such as vernacular-inflected narration, episodic structure and narrative polyphony situated within a structural understanding of the intersections between class and race in postwar Britain.

These novels, then, by virtue of their focus on subjects and subjectivities at the margins of consensus, point towards those unresolved—and, indeed, unresolvable—antagonisms which would fracture that consensus. This focus on the antagonistic subject positions largely excluded from the integration of working-class representative institutions into the imagined national community upon which consensus was based, expressed itself formally as a challenge to or extension of—and even, at times, rupture with—the realist literary strategies

which typify the aesthetics of consensus. While postwar novels could only indicate the lines around which such rupture would take place, it would proceed apace over the coming decade as social and political consensus disintegrated in the face of gradually intensifying class struggle as well as increased struggles over how the class imagined itself and what constituted its struggles.

## Chapter Three: Literature in an Age of Revolt

### The end of consensus

By the end of the 1960s, spiralling social antagonisms marked the end of Britain's postwar era of political consensus. The promise of Arthur Seaton's antagonistic subject position was fulfilled in the development of a new militancy—particularly among young workers—unleashing what Todd describes as 'the most radical wave of industrial unrest that the country had experienced since the 1920s' (2015: 275). Frustrated by the failure of the postwar consensus 'to deliver its ambitious promise of a better world of equality', striking workers were 'determined to create it for themselves' (284). The struggles and symbolism of this period of industrial militancy—in which successive Labour and Tory governments tried, unsuccessfully, to curtail the right to strike—would themselves become iconic: the 1968 Dagenham Ford machinists' strike for pay parity between male and female workers; the 1970 council workers' strike which saw bags of rubbish piled up in the streets; the resistance to restrictions on the right to strike, both in the form of Barbara Castle's (Labour) 1969 white paper *In Place of Strife* and (Conservative) Ted Heath's 1971 Industrial Relations Bill, which saw, among other actions, the biggest trade union demonstration in British history; and, finally, the 1972 and 1973 miners' disputes, with pitched battles at Saltley coke depot in 1972, the declaration of a State of Emergency, the three-day week, intermittent blackouts across the country, the eventual miners' victory and subsequent defeat of Heath at the next general election. This was matched by similar scenes of unrest across Europe and North America, not least the epoch-defining May 1968 uprising in France, with its slogan to "be realistic: demand the impossible". That the postwar consensus had by this point disintegrated completely was abundantly clear to all.

This period of militancy also ushered in what Raphael Samuel described as ‘the “pay explosion” of 1969-72’ (quoted in Beckett 2010: 56) while Todd notes that between ‘1965 and 1970 manual workers enjoyed their longest continuous period of wage rises since the war, and clerical workers also saw their pay increase’ (2015: 284). The result of this, as Beckett explains, was that as the seventies progressed, British society became ‘probably more equal than it had ever been before – and certainly more equal than it has ever been since’ (2010: 409), with the Gini coefficient<sup>10</sup> reaching its lowest level in 1977 and the proportion of individuals below the poverty line doing the same in 1978. Yet, as noted also in the preceding chapters, such widespread social antagonism manifested not only in the conflict between classes but also between the working class and its political representatives in both the Labour Party and trade unions. Indeed, against the tendencies claiming hegemony within the labour movement following the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, during the 1960s, the ‘top-down, hierarchical way of doing things began to be challenged by a less deferential, more egalitarian form of industrial relations’ (Beckett 2010: 56). As such, the ‘strikes and walkouts of the late 1960s and early 1970s were often unofficial [...] started on the shopfloor, precipitated by young workers, some of whom were not even trade union members’ who resented the ‘short-sighted collusion of an older generation of trade union officials’ (Todd 2015: 284). Beckett concurs, stating that many of these unofficial strikes were not merely without permission but actually ‘in open defiance’ (2010: 56) of the trade union hierarchy.

This crisis of representation was not restricted to social democratic unions and political parties but also the CPGB whose *British Road to Socialism*, as discussed in the last chapter with reference to Virdee, located its project on the terrain of the British nation-state.

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<sup>10</sup> The Gini coefficient is a method for measuring inequality in a given society. Zero (0) represents complete equality while one (1) represents maximum inequality (where one person holds all the wealth while everyone else has none).

Meanwhile, drawing on del Valle Alcalá's discussion (also from the previous chapter) regarding the necessity to reassess and revitalise the 'fundamental lines of conflict [...] if the notion of class is to retain its revolutionary valences' (2016: 15), it is significant to note that the young working-class militants of the late-1960s and early-1970s 'fused the older labour movement's commitment to workers' collective independence with the sixties ideals of personal autonomy and self-expression' (Todd 2015: 285-286) in a way which often unsettled the older generation of labour activists, both revolutionary and reformist. Indeed, as Beckett explains, this new working-class youth culture was difficult for the CPGB whose 'austere and disciplined political style left it ill-suited, in many ways, to the looser Britain of these years: the party was uncomfortable with the libertarian, hard-to-control character of many of the period's radical movements' (2010: 62).

Like the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracies, then, so too did the CPGB often find itself outflanked by the demands and expectations of a new generation of workers; a diffusion of Arthur Seaton's, increasingly ambivalent towards either 'Labour bleeders' (Sillitoe 2008: 36) or Communism as 'the main form of organised radical discourse' (Bentley 2007: 201), but nonetheless retaining their ineradicably antagonistic class-subject position. Though the CPGB certainly remained more radical than its social democratic institutional counterparts—and, due to the general context of the Cold War hysteria, remained a political bogeyman—the comparison nonetheless serves to highlight the extent to which the politics of representation were put into crisis by the unrest of the late-1960s and 1970s whereby all those claiming to represent working class interests were outflanked by the demands of the class itself.

The roots of this crisis of representation lie in the 'horizontal integration' of the working class 'into the imagined national community' described by Virdee in the previous chapter, in

particular, what Panitch highlights as the inherent fragility of such institutional integration into the mechanisms of macroeconomic policy formation. The fragility which Panitch noted in the previous chapter around trade union support for postwar wage restraint ‘threatening the stability of the trade unions themselves’ (1976: 38) was therefore a specific instance of the general tendency mentioned in the introduction for cooperation between state, capital and trade unions to remain inherently ‘prone to contradictions and limitations due to the inability to eliminate class conflict over the labour process and distribution’ (27). Rather than represent the insertion of working-class politics into the state, the integration of unions into the mechanisms of macroeconomic policymaking is instead the institutionalisation of an imperative on the part of trade unions to administer state policy to/upon its members. Silver concurs, arguing that while such corporatist structures may have ‘integrated unions in decision making down to the shopfloor level [...] Unions were expected to discipline the rank-and-file in exchange’ (2005: 162). The integration of trade unions into the creation and administration of state economic policy formation therefore remains inherently prone to rupture.

The result of such intensification was that, as Todd explains, it was becoming abundantly clear that ‘the needs of big business and the needs of their workers were essentially incompatible’ (2015: 296), reaching its apogee in the 1978-79 “Winter of Discontent”, the largest labour stoppage since the 1926 General Strike. The strike wave was a response to Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan’s imposition—agreed with the TUC—of a 5% cap on wage increases in an attempt to control inflation. Beginning with an unofficial walkout at Ford’s Dagenham factory, the—still unofficial—strike soon spread, involving 57,000 workers and only receiving official sanction two weeks after the initial walkout at Dagenham before smashing the 5% cap and winning a 17% increase. In doing so, Ford workers

exemplified Panitch's argument, showing how the integration of unions into the state 'threaten[ed] the stability of the trade unions themselves' as tens of thousands took action independent of their union to reject a policy constructed by the unions in collaboration with a Labour government.

This pattern would recur throughout the strike movement, which spread not at the behest of union leaders but in a way 'more shapeless and anarchic [...] without the approval of union hierarchies' (Beckett 2010: 465). Another particularly significant moment in the 'Winter of Discontent' was the similarly unofficial lorry drivers' strike and blockade in Hull, dubbed by newspapers as a 'Second Stalingrad' (López 2014: 94), launched not only independently of union hierarchies—as at Ford—but in self-conscious opposition to them. One lorry drivers' shop steward describes how union headquarters were 'not keen' on a strike: 'We thought, "We'll go without them." There's a big gap between us and them in London. [...]

Headquarters were frightened to death of a strike. They and the TUC were virtually part of the government." (quoted in Beckett 2010: 486). Though arguably most explicit in Hull, this antipathy towards the union leadership—often viewing them as mere appendages of the state—underlines the level of defiance towards political and union representatives during the Winter of Discontent and demonstrates the extent to which rank-and-file militancy ruptured the postwar consensus but also the representative organisational forms upon whose integration such consensus was predicated. Indeed, as with the 1926 General Strike, it is with heightened militancy that the disjuncture between base and officialdom and the resulting limits of these forms can be discerned.

The increasing worker militancy of this period—peaking in the winter of 1978-79—brought out this tendency within the trade union movement; however, similar tendencies around the

challenge to working-class political representation were also at work in movements originating from other marginalised sections of society such as black and women's liberation. Following the discussion of black liberation in the previous chapter, it is now necessary to give a similar appraisal of the women's liberation movement, which was 'built around networks of local women's groups, which met to offer advice and support to women, a forum for discussion and debate [and] consciousness-raising' (Andermahr 2014: 70). Marsha Rowe, co-founder of pioneering feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, describes early discussions with women who had been dealing with sexism in the left-wing and underground press, explaining

It was like the lid had been taken off [...] Almost immediately, it was about how you did all the shit stuff at home [...] We didn't have any language [...] Sexism wasn't a concept. We just had to find a way by... mentioning experience. You'd start by describing your experience to each other. And then you'd come to an analysis (quoted in Beckett 2010: 223-224).

Beckett observes that this analytical method, with its 'emphasis on individual experience as the basis for forming political ideas was the exact reverse, in many ways, of how trade unions and other orthodox left-wing bodies functioned' (225). Yet while its approach differs from that of the traditional institutions of the left, it is interesting to note also the degree of similarity with the Italian workerists regarding their 'non-objective social science' and their analysis beginning with workers' enquiry into the experience of the mass worker in Italy's factories. Thus, it is noteworthy that these political movements, though diverse in terms of ideological tradition and geography, share both the epistemological premise of building analysis from experience as well as their challenge to the traditional institutions of working-class political representation.

However, as Todd elucidates, the women's liberation movement was much more than merely discussion groups, often including working-class women instrumental in organising rent strikes on council estates (2015: 304) or starting informal nurseries and playschemes, running them voluntarily before demanding 'the local council provide them with funding and with training' (306). The women's liberation movement was therefore made up of both middle and working class women, often finding common cause for cooperation in imposing their demands on a patriarchal capitalist society. Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to gloss over the strains arising from this cooperation as 'the relationship between class and feminism was never without tension' (307), with some women feeling 'feminism didn't deal with the underlying economic injustices that shaped working-class women's lives' (308). Todd gives the example of Judy Walker, a campaigner uneasy with the term feminism, who in times of financial hardship would clean for wealthier members of her women's group, with Todd commenting that 'some middle-class women's fight for liberation continued to be eased by the labour of less privileged women' (308)

Internal tensions aside, however, it is no surprise that the increasingly strident activism arising from the women's movement should also, in a way analogous to that of the heightened workers' militancy of the period, function to undermine the established institutions of working-class representational politics. This is true both in terms of feminism's explicit focus more explicitly on the economic issues facing working-class women as well as that on consciousness-raising, sexuality and relationships with men. As Todd explains, the women's liberation movement's activity around large-scale rent strikes and community campaigns 'made clear that housekeeping was a political issue, and that housing estates could be centres for campaigns that were just as important as strikes in the factories' (2015: 304).

Meanwhile, women who were in fact employed in factories acted to impose their demands on a trade union movement which, as discussed in the previous chapter, had hitherto excluded them from the consensus of postwar welfare capitalism. For instance, at the time of the 1968 Ford female machinists' strike, less than a third of women workers in Britain were unionised compared to over half of male workers: 'union leaders ascribed women's low trade unionism to their apathy. They claimed that women worked for "pin money" and couldn't be organised' (288) whereas Todd shows women often told a very different story, viewing shop stewards as 'bosses' men' while unions 'rarely defended these women's claims for better working conditions and officials resisted demands for equal pay' (288). As such, working-class women's demands for equality with their male counterparts challenged representational politics by imposing the needs and demands of a hitherto marginalised subjectivity onto it. As such, when the first ever National Women's Liberation Movement conference took place in 1970, it tabled four basic demands: 'equal pay for equal work; equal educational and job opportunities; free contraception and abortion on demand; and free 24-hour nurseries' (Andermahr 2014: 71). This marked a significant moment in both the women's and working-class movement, not only in its expression of an articulated working-class women's politics but also in its existence as a working-class politics expressed on a national scale from outside the established organisations of working-class political representation.

However, the significance of the women's liberation movement must also be understood in its redefining of politics away from that related to government policy. Indeed, the women's liberation movement also challenged political representation through its widening the scope of that traditionally considered "politics" and its insistence on the politicisation of the personal. As Kate Millett explains in her pioneering text of feminist literary criticism, *Sexual Politics* (1970), she 'does not define the political as that relatively narrow and exclusive

world of meetings, chairmen, and parties’ but rather ‘power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another’ (2016: 23), integrating analyses of the gender dynamics in psychology, the family and sexual violence alongside more traditionally “political” spheres of economics and class. This expansion of the political terrain, to recall Pamela Fox’s terminology, is evident in feminist magazine, *Spare Rib*, founded in 1972 and which contained not only reports of campaigns for equal pay and alterations to government policy but also ‘laid bare the intricate workings of gender inequality in Britain: the discomfort of going to the pub as a woman alone [...] the drudgery of family weekends spent buried under washing and dishes’ (Beckett 2010: 227), issues common to all women and which problematise representational politics precisely in its focus on an area hitherto rarely considered “politics” at all. This issue regarding the relationship of women’s liberation to political representation can be seen in Virginia Sapiro’s paper on “The Problem of Political Representation of Women” in which she argues that ‘Law and policy serve as direct and indirect buttresses of [gender] differentiation and stratification’ and that ‘gender differentiation and stratification in private life buttresses the political economy, affecting, at minimum, child care and welfare, education, consumption, employment and labour supply, and property and wealth arrangements’ (1981: 704). While Sapiro is absolutely correct to draw links between policy and gender inequality, it is suggestive that her list of areas affected by gendered social policy largely neglects those areas pertaining to interpersonal relationships and gendered behaviours. Sapiro does not mention those aspects of feminism existing outside issues of policy, such as that which Rowe calls ‘the shit stuff at home’ or *Spare Rib*’s discussion of women’s experiences in male-dominated public spaces not to mention what Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) calls ‘the problem with no name’ against which every ‘suburban housewife struggled [...] alone’: ‘As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with

her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night, she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question: “Is this all?” (1972: 13). This is not necessarily even a criticism of Sapiro, who herself notes areas of women’s politics outside the realm of social policy, such as the tendency of men to ‘freeze women out of conversations and debates, or simply render their communication ineffective’ (1981: 711). Rather, what it does is indicate the limits of conventional modes of political representation and policy formation vis-à-vis gender politics and how women’s liberation posed political demands which fundamentally challenged those limits, expanding the political terrain by politicising the interpersonal and so foregrounding a politics which not only challenged established forms of political representation but also inherently existed beyond its limits.

## Writing revolt

This pattern of challenge towards—and at times even rebellion against—the traditional forms of working-class political representation during the late-1960s and 1970s was set in motion by none other than the strength and autonomy of various sections of the working-class chafing against the limits of consensus politics. It is therefore interesting to note how this period of challenge towards/rebellion against the institutions of working-class political representation related to the various modes of literary representation within the period. Indeed, the boundary-pushing arising from the internal contradictions inherent in the established institutions of working-class political representation would equally manifest in the tendency of the era’s literary representation to variously push against, extend or rupture entirely with realist literary form. The aesthetics of the Angry Young Men, rooted in so many ways to the political forms of the postwar consensus, were of diminished relevance in a period where such consensus was being supplanted by social conflict.

One such manifestation of this phenomenon can be observed in the rise of feminist fiction during the 1970s. Given the emergence of the women's movement as a social formation in dialogue with the broader working-class movement, it seems necessary to engage with feminist writing—like the *Caribbean Voices* literary milieu—as its own proletarian literary formation with its own ecology of writers, editors, publishers and magazines producing distinctive genres, forms and formulas. This complex ecology can be seen, as Andermahr explains, in the 'close and dialectical relation between politics, theory and literature: the Women's Liberation Movement fed directly into women's writing through consciousness-raising groups, writing workshops, conferences, reading groups, magazines and publishing houses' (Andermahr 2014: 69). Indeed, feminist publishers were set up throughout the seventies, such as Virago Press (1973), Onlywomen Press (1974) and the Women's Press (1978) while countless magazines were established, of which the aforementioned *Spare Rib* was only the most famous, and, in 1979, the feminist academic journal, *Feminist Review*, published its first issue. Also of significance was the formation in 1975 of an informal network of radical female literary critics out of which emerged the Marxist Feminist Literary Collective. Building on feminist concerns around the politicisation of that not commonly considered political, Andermahr explains that the Collective drew on a Machereyan framework to address 'the "not-said" of the text as much as to what is explicitly represented and ideologically permitted', reading 'the contradictions of the text as symptomatic of the inscription of gender difference' (2016: 74). These various strands intertwined to form what Andermahr describes as a 'new feminist counter-public sphere' (69), a self-sustaining milieu-cum-infrastructure, at once encouraging the production and evolution of feminist literature as well as building and developing the audience which would consume its output.

Drawing, then, on Denning's discussion of the productive questions to ask regarding proletarian literary formations (rather than fixating on the backgrounds of individual authors), it becomes necessary to discuss 'what kinds of writing, what genres, forms, and formulas did those writers produce' (2010: 202). Gayle Greene argues that fiction coming out of the 1970s feminist literary formation shared commonalities with modernism in terms of its 'sense of the unprecedentedness of contemporary experience, it developed new fictional forms to express the "newness" of now; but it differed from Modernism in being part of a collective effort at social change' (1991a: 292). Though problematic with regards to her resurrection of the unhelpful binary between avant-gardism and commitment—by now proven untenable given the discussion of 'social modernism' in prewar proletarian and postwar Caribbean literary formations—Greene's comments are useful in noting the degree of modernist inheritance within the 1970s feminist literary formation. Andermahr confirms this in her discussion of more 'mainstream' feminist writers such as Angela Carter, Fay Weldon and Eva Figes, 'whose work is formally innovative using modernist and postmodernist techniques to deconstruct myths of the feminine' (2016: 77) while others, such as Michèle Roberts and Sara Maitland, 'who emerged from feminist writers' groups [...] also experiment with form and voice' (77). Moreover, as well as resisting their binary categorisation as either avant-garde or committed, feminist novels also frequently resisted being categorised as either "social-political" or "psychological-personal", working instead to 'collapse binaries and dualisms that characterise Leftist as well as bourgeois thinking' (77), very much in line with the politicisation of the personal which defined the wider women's liberation movement of the period. In fact, it is very significant to note that while many feminist novels from the period deal thematically with issues traditionally conceived as pertaining to radical rather than socialist feminism, nonetheless, these 'psychological and psychoanalytic fictions of British feminist writers are informed by socialist and Marxian perspectives' (81). As such,

Andermahr argues, the 1970s remain ‘one of the most politically and aesthetically radical periods of women’s writing to be seen in any decade or indeed century’ (89). Returning to Pamela Fox’s comments from Chapter One regarding the expansions of the proletarian novel’s political terrain to include an appreciation for both the private arena and the gendered self, a similar phenomenon can be observed in a feminist fiction that centres precisely that gendered self and a utopian politics of a transformed private arena. This expanded political terrain is precisely the nexus of socialist and radical feminist frameworks common within the women’s liberation movement, which so fundamentally challenged the institutions of working-class political representation and patriarchal class society. Indeed, the Marxist Feminist Literary Collective’s Machereyan concern with the ‘not-said’ of the text must therefore be understood as the literary critical embodiment of feminism’s expanded political terrain, indicating a concern among feminist authors to express precisely that frequently left ‘not-said’, either in politics or literature. The fiction of the feminist proletarian literary formation, emerging from a social formation so fundamentally in conflict with the ontological necessity of the social world, was thus highly heterogeneous, producing an aesthetic in radical opposition to the density and solidity of what is and which Gayle Greene describes as ‘the most revolutionary movement in contemporary fiction – revolutionary both in that it is formally innovative and in that it helped make a social revolution (1991b: 2).

Just as the radicalism of the women’s liberation movement found its expression in the thematic and formal innovations of the feminist proletarian literary formation, so too did the wider disintegration of political consensus find its expression in the literary innovation of the period, particularly in the forms of science/speculative fiction and an increasingly active avant-garde. As Tew explains, these innovations were ‘engaged variously to abjure traditional modes of writing: formally through innovations and self-conscious devices,

thematically through ideological intensity [...] or by combining a number of these responses' (2014: 147). These formal and thematic devices were responding to new anxieties arising from intensified social antagonisms with Moore-Gilbert asserting that the novel 'was deeply implicated in the sense of social and cultural crisis characteristic of the 1970s' (1994: 152).

Such engagement with the fractious nature of British society existed also within the writing of a loose group of avant-garde writers who—similarly to the feminist fiction of the time and with a notable degree of overlap—were also significantly influenced by modernism, specifically with regards to 'structure, transcription of inner consciousness, and self-awareness about art' (Stevenson 1993: 111). As Stevenson explains, this 'general interest in innovation and experimentation [...] originated in the new liberal mood in Britain in the sixties' (111) with the emergence of an informal circle of experimental authors consisting of writers such as BS Johnson, Alan Burns, Ann Quin and Maureen Duffy, among others. Francis Booth, in his encyclopedic *Amongst Those Left: The British Experimental Novel, 1940-1980*, argues that the avant-garde novelists from this period 'do not in any sense constitute a coherent, and certainly not a conscious movement' (2012: 685) while Kaye Mitchell notes a degree of ambivalence among these authors regarding their collectivity, arguing they were 'not a "school" in any clearly defined, coherent sense' but, rather, 'diverse in [their] aesthetic practices and (sometimes) divided in [their] politics' (2019: 2). However, while not as consciously self-defined as, for example, the manifesto-prone avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, the 1960s-1970s British avant-garde did maintain a significant degree of collectivity, as suggested even by BS Johnson's 1967 claim that 'There are not many of us, and in the English way we do not form a "school"' (quoted in 2019: 2), a statement Mitchell describes as 'wilfully contradictory', claiming a 'we' while simultaneously refusing collectivisation (2019: 2).

However, despite Johnson's 'wilfully contradictory' statement, the 1960s and 1970s avant-garde most certainly constituted as a distinct literary formation. As Darlington argues, unless such groups consciously self-designate, there are always 'difficulties in ascribing "group" status' (2014: 15); yet, upon investigation, what emerges when looking at the literary avant-garde from this period is a broad network of writers, publishers, small magazines and bookshops connected to underground countercultures. Booth's synoptic perspective discusses how from 'the early 1960s to the mid-1970s there was a focus on the future of the novel and experimental writing in conferences, symposia and anthologies' (2012: 586) while publishers such as 'Peter Owen and John Calder, who had published Beckett, Burroughs and the *nouveaux romanciers* [...] took a personal interest in and encouraged emerging and experimental writers' (586-587). Meanwhile, 'Radical presses like Writers Forum and Gaberbocchus published the otherwise-unpublishable and found space in bookshops like Better Books in London's Charing Cross Road and the Paperback Shop in Edinburgh, which became meeting places and outlets for underground writers' while 'Several small literary magazines were devoted to the encouragement of new writing' (587).

It is against the development of such a vast network that a distinct group of writers can be discerned, with Darlington focusing on Johnson, Quin, Burns, Figs and Christine Brooke-Rose as 'a set of very close associates of comparable age and experience who write within the wider context of "experimental literature" and the greater artistic and social currents of the Sixties in general' (2014: 15). However, a case could also be made for numerous others, not least Maureen Duffy and Alexander Trocchi, to similarly be included. Booth describes many of this circle as 'friends' (2012: 685) but, as Alan Burns explains in his interview with Jonathan Coe, Johnson's relationship with the rest of his circle was more complex than

friendship, mixed up as it was with his ‘generalship’ which was ‘part of his campaign for the good stuff and we were his allies’ (Coe 2004: 399), suggesting a sense of conviction with regards to art not dissimilar from the commitments and priorities of earlier avant-gardes.

Moreover, setting this aesthetically—and often politically—committed avant-garde within the context of the aforementioned institutional framework, this extended group can be conceived as a proletarian literary formation not merely in the sense of their individual members’ class backgrounds, which publisher John Calder described as coming ‘from the newly-educated upward-thrusting working class or lower middle’ (2001: 277), but also in their connections to the social formation around the left-wing counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>11</sup>. Undoubtedly, these writers were connected more loosely—both ideologically and institutionally—than either the proletarian writers of the 1930s or the feminist literary counter-public sphere of the 1970s: Darlington notes the differences between ‘Johnson’s Old Left spirit of militant working-class stoicism, Burns’ New Left anarchism and Quin’s New Age “happening”’ (2014: 35). Yet even these distinctions can be viewed as paralleling the post-1956 splintering of the radical left while Darlington indicates the ‘class-conscious and progressive “continental” outlooks they shared’ (15) both in art and politics. Indeed, this manifested in collaborations on more explicitly political projects such as *Unfair!*, a short agitprop film written by BS Johnson and Alan Burns for the TUC in opposition to the 1971 Industrial Relations Bill (Coe 2004: 310). As such, though loosely-defined—yet arguably less so than the ‘inauthentic’ and ‘commercially driven’ literary formation of the Angry Young Men—the conceptualisation of the 1960s-1970s British avant-garde as a proletarian literary formation remains useful in terms of outlining its extended network of writers and institutions

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<sup>11</sup> There were exceptions to this, most notably author Rayner Heppenstall.

with links to the social formation of Britain's left-leaning counterculture and social movements whose looser, post-1956 New Left networks it seemed to parallel.

These writers were highly influenced by modernism and what Stevenson describes as its 'interest in restructuring the novel' via the 'Concentration of narrative within single days of consciousness and the use of memory to escape from chronological order' (1993: 112). As well as modernism, however, these writers were similarly influenced by the existentialist philosophies of the 1950s and 1960s which 'defined the period's cultural, intellectual and literary identity, foregrounding existential angst and alienation as key contemporary experiences' (Tew 2014: 147-148). As Tew elucidates, this existential doubt characteristic of the fifties and sixties 'gave way to an increasing historicity and reflexivity of the 1970s and 1980s because of an underlying confidence that individuals might liberate both themselves and the social order' (148). As a result, though owing much to the modernist canon with regards the 'intensities of [its] inner, aesthetic struggles, 1970s writers grapple more with an objective world of events, its moral and ideological struggles' (151), often collapsing the all-too-common binary between 'autonomous' and 'committed' art, placing them firmly in the tradition of social modernism connecting them to the proletarian writers of the interwar years as well as Caribbean writers such as Lamming and Selvon following the war.

### Not a vanguard, but an avant-garde: Johnson and Berger

One novel embodying precisely this social modernist literary heritage—engaging simultaneously with its aesthetic, philosophical and political struggles—is BS Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969), the infamous unbound "book in a box" in which the narrator, a sports journalist based on Johnson himself, arrives in a Midlands town to report on a football match. On arrival, he recalls his friendship with Tony, an aspiring academic with whom he once

visited the town and who died, aged 29, of cancer. While the first and last chapters of the novel are designated, the remaining 25 are can be read in any order. Johnson's inheritance from modernism is evident throughout the text, from its transcription of interiority, the use of memory to escape chronology, distending temporalities in a plot—insofar as one exists—which takes place within the space of a single day and, finally, the fragmentation and radical restructuring of the novel at its most fundamental level. Moreover, exemplifying Tew's point, the novel also contains subtle yet profound glimpses into the objective world, engaging with the social issues and antagonisms which defined—in some cases, only later—the period in which it was written.

*The Unfortunates*, first and foremost, is part of Johnson's wider project to 'seek out new forms in order to "embody present day reality", a reality [...] characterised by "chaos"' (Mitchell 2007: 54). However, it would be erroneous to assume that Johnson's literary practice was concerned purely with questions of a metaphysical nature. As Tew and White explain, Johnson, a working-class writer educated as a mature student at a non-Oxbridge university, did not fit the mould set by his counterparts in the literary scene and, as such, he 'occupied a nexus of issues around class, politics, realism and aesthetic form [whose] continuing experimentation [had] become an affront [while his] continued allegiance to working-class issues [...] did not help his cause' (2007: 6). Yet one curious way in which this nexus manifests is that while being both working class and a writer—not to mention 'passionate socialist' (Coe 2004: 173)—Johnson is rarely considered a "working-class writer" in the same way as, for instance, Greenwood or Sillitoe. This is in part due to biographical/biografictional reasons: firstly, Johnson is not from one of the labour movement's heavy industry heartlands nor even the East End with its own assured position within the tapestry of working-class history; rather, Johnson is from West London, an area

commonly associated in literary and public imaginations with wealth and power in contradistinction to the aforementioned working-class heartlands. Secondly, though alienated labour remains a consistent motif in Johnson's writing, his protagonists are often white collar in nature: as well as the journalist in *The Unfortunates*, other typical BS Johnson characters include an out-of-work architect-turned-supply teacher in *Albert Angelo* (1964) and a bookkeeper in *Christie's Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973). Finally, in contrast to the realist aesthetic often assumed to define working-class writing, Johnson is vociferously—even dogmatically—avant-gardist. As such, Johnson is frequently excluded from debates about working-class literature because he departs, both aesthetically and thematically, from common assumptions about what working-class writing—and, indeed, the class itself—looks like. The nexus of issues highlighted by Tew and White converge, therefore, not only around the extent to which Johnson's avant-gardism and class politics affronted the literary establishment but also how they unsettle traditional conceptions of working-class writing itself.

Against this context, then, *The Unfortunates* can be read as one textual embodiment of this nexus in which Johnson's radical aesthetics serve not only his philosophical interests—as noted by Mitchell—but also a particular form of class politics which departs radically from conventional forms of working-class political and literary representation, particularly of the postwar period. Focusing primarily on the metaphysical themes within *The Unfortunates*, Mitchell describes the unbound nature of Johnson's "book in a box" as a 'tangible metaphor for randomness' (2007: 54), particularly of the mind, exemplifying what Auerbach describes as 'the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment' (2003: 552), while in content it is 'preoccupied with time, memory reconstruction, ordering and sequence' (61). For Mitchell, the book's unbound chapters force the reader to create an arbitrary semblance of "order"

which ‘mirrors that of the narrator’ (61). Such randomness and lack of order manifests in Johnson’s transcription of the protagonist’s inner consciousness, frequently embarking on aimless tangents and returning to earlier topics to emphasise a circularity of the mind, which the narrator himself notes, stating that ‘the mind circles’ (Johnson 1999: ‘First’ 1). Similarly to the functioning of the mind, then, ‘the shuffling of the sections takes the reader round and round in circles, rather than allowing us to progress neatly from the beginning of his friendship with Tony, to Tony’s death and to that death’s aftermath’ (Mitchell 2007: 62). Johnson, Mitchell argues, is attempting to draw our attention to ‘the dilatory space of the middle, the passing of time between birth and death, first and last’ (62), his philosophical point being to underline the absurdity of the human condition: with its directionless, circling narrative, the narrator—and, via their participation, the reader—attempts ‘to delay the inevitable; but the reordering of this middle (which is: life) matters little [...] given our knowledge of the start and end points’ (62). Thus, through its unbound chapters and transcription of interior monologue, *The Unfortunates* underlines the fundamental absurdity of the human condition, of a life ultimately without predefined meaning and constituted instead by a chaos of choices made essentially at random.

Yet *The Unfortunates* is not simply a confirmation of what Lukács decried as the modernist exposition of a ‘universal *condition humaine*’: while existentialist-inspired philosophical concerns are certainly present, an oft-overlooked aspect of the text is how it engages with a more liberatory politics situating it in continuity with the ‘social modernism’ discussed previously. The initial outlines of such a politics can be discerned in the departure of Johnson’s text from the aesthetic modes of the Angry Young Men. For instance, the unbound chapters and interior monologue emphasising the circling nature of its autodiegetic narrator’s consciousness, completely abjures the linear plot-driven narratives of novels such as *Room at*

*the Top*, which counterpose bourgeois progress with an immutable and nostalgically-imagined working-class culture. Moreover, in contrast to the monological dominance of autodiegetic narrators—often aided by a retrospective narration affording them the “benefit of hindsight”—in Angry Young Men novels, Johnson’s use of interior monologue centres the tendency of the mind towards disorderliness (not to mention the extensive use of memory to distend temporalities and abjure linear plot construction) thus resisting any claim to narrative authority or reliability, let alone objectively apprehending the social world “as it is”.

These radical formal innovations thus become central to Johnson’s radical class politics and resistance to the ‘density and solidity of what is’ embodied in the aesthetics of the postwar consensus. For example, Mitchell outlines one of Johnson’s textual strategies for depicting the chaotic functioning of the mind which makes use of ‘frequent textual blanks [to] suggest gaps in knowledge, imagination or inspiration, the mind’s own blanks’, implying ‘a necessary interactivity, communication as exchange [...] the limits of language in representing that truth that so concerned Johnson’ (61). Mitchell then quotes the following passage in which the narrator, mulling over his recollections, decries ‘These melodramatic idiotic moments in which life is completely [redacted]’ (Johnson 1999: ‘His dog’ 4). The interactivity of this moment is clear, the narrator’s loss for words encouraging the reader to interject in the space vacated within the text, as part of what Darlington calls Johnson’s desire to disrupt ‘traditional reading patterns’ which were ‘synonymous with complacency’ (2019: 36). For Darlington, Johnson’s techniques serve to ‘draw explicit attention to the novel as a constructed object’ (37-38) as well as to ‘open a dialogue with the active reader, to encourage them to challenge their immersion in the narrative and actively undertake interpretation of the object before them’ (38), all aspects evident both in *The Unfortunates*’ unbound nature and frequent use of textual gaps.

However, beyond Johnson's philosophical concerns, the motif of a linguistic gap in the ability to express oneself recurs frequently throughout the text. In one passage with echoes of Betty Friedan, the narrator expresses his desire to write about 'housewives on suburban housing estates [who] were being driven mad by tedium [...] there would be an explosion sooner or later [...] But I could never prove it, housewives I interviewed on new town estates said they were too busy to be bored' ('Then they had moved' 6-7). Friedan's 'problem with no name' looms large despite—or, indeed, because of—the housewives' inability or unwillingness to express their dissatisfaction; the claim to be 'too busy to be bored' seems intended to be read as an evasive non-sequitur believed neither by narrator nor reader, nor even the housewives themselves; one can, after all, be both busy and bored while busyness does not itself negate the possibility for disaffection. Yet the non-expression of gendered grievances which such unconvincing deflection is intended to conceal does not imply, for Johnson, a political impasse but rather the postponement of rupture to 'sooner or later'.

Johnson similarly depicts the lack of language to express dissatisfaction with the relatively new consumer culture afforded by postwar affluence. Describing couples looking over individual pieces of furniture, feeling that 'what they see does indeed represent all there is to choose from [...] Then they wonder at [...] the dissatisfaction they vaguely feel, the resentment at each instalment payment, for 30 months or more a weekly reminder of the moment of non-choice' ('Time!' 2). The sentiments of France 1968 feel present in this passage, in particular the ideas of the Situationists, influential revolutionary Marxists who filled the walls of Paris with slogans such as 'The more you consume, the less you live' and 'Are you a consumer or a participant?'; despite "never having it so good", the acquisition of consumer goods functions merely as another instance of alienating activity in capitalist

society. As with Johnson's new town estate housewives, this experience resists expression, being felt only 'vaguely'. Yet it remains felt, nonetheless, each instalment a 'weekly reminder' of 'dissatisfaction' and 'resentment', indicating affluence and consumerism as ultimately moments of 'non-choice' unable to adequately fulfil human desires.

As mentioned previously, Johnson is also noteworthy for his depiction of white-collar alienation, in this instance, his journalist narrator. Contemplating his next encounter with his employer, he thinks to himself:

No doubt he will say that I should not be in journalism if I do not accept these things, just as he does every time I complain about the butchery by the subs. And no doubt I should not, that I want it to be better than it is, to be more like writing. [...] the only satisfaction must be in the money, which is good for what it is, I suppose. ('Last' 3)

In this passage, the worker's alienation from their labour is transposed to the age of postwar affluence. The lack of control over the labour process and end product—often associated solely with industrial workers like those in Sommerfield's *May Day* or Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*—is depicted here as an ineradicable aspect of wage labour itself, even for white-collar professionals. As a textual obverse to the aforementioned inability of the 'pay explosion' to dampen militancy, Johnson frames the higher price negotiated for the sale of labour as fundamentally unable to overcome the protagonist's alienation: the 'only satisfaction' he can imagine from his labour—the money—is undermined as suitable compensation by Johnson's inclusion of 'must be' and 'I suppose', making the nature of this 'only satisfaction' highly precarious. The motif around the inexpressibility of social

grievances also recurs, present in the huge textual gap preceding 'more like writing' to reflect the narrator's difficulty in identifying precisely the source of his discontent. Moreover, the difficulty suggested by the large textual gap is compounded by the imprecision of the statement ('more like writing') that follows it: specifically, that the alienating activity in question *is*, in fact, writing (though not quite the kind he means), an imprecision made ironic given its expression by someone who works with words.

In many ways, *The Unfortunates* is paradigmatic of a wider reversion in British writing towards a formal experimentation and radical politics more common in the working-class literature of the interwar years. Indeed, it is significant that Johnson deploys his textual blanks at points where the limits of postwar consensus and working-class political representation are reached while the grievances underpinning them struggle to be expressed: the housewives' 'problem with no name' indicates an expansion (à la Pamela Fox) of the text's 'political terrain' to include in its vision the related 'explosion' of women's liberation and its politicisation of interpersonal relationships and female domesticity. Equally, affluence and increased access to consumer goods are ultimately unable to overcome the alienating nature of both consumerism's 'non-choice' and, indeed, wage labour itself. In contrast to the realism of writers like Braine and Bartstow, whose novels reaffirmed the stability of the social world, Johnson's formal innovations emphasise the deepening lines of social antagonism and the limits of consensus (even in the white-collar professions the ascension into which was supposed, as in *Room at the Top*, to defuse such antagonism). This disintegration of consensus is depicted symbolically in an anecdote recounted by the narrator regarding the 'peculiar marriage' between 'he a rich factory owner, or son of one, and she a mere, ha, machine minder' who 'were always breaking up' (Johnson 1999: 'The estate' 7). Given the context of intensifying class antagonism, Johnson's couple seem suggestive of the

post-war ‘marriage’ between capital and labour, which both Todd and Beckett observe was, by the late-1960s, ‘breaking up’. Furthermore, Johnson’s desire to underline the peculiarity of the relationship to the reader is clear in his following the anecdote with ‘to me peculiar, anyway, and I think so to Tony and June, as well, by the way they talked to me of it, thought it worth my attention, that it was a matter of some remark’ (‘The estate’ 7). This commentary borders on meta-narrative, with the repeated subordinate clauses of Johnson’s staccato sentence structure forcing attention onto the universal agreement regarding the relationship’s peculiarity echoing Todd’s comment that, by the end of the 1960s, many accepted the incompatibility of interests between capital and labour. *The Unfortunates*, then, can be read as being in continuity with Arthur Seaton’s ‘subtle reasons’ for hostility ‘that could hardly be understood but were nevertheless felt’ (Sillitoe 2008: 61), transposed to a post-consensus era of social conflict. What del Valle Alcalá describes as the ‘muffling effects of Keynesian macroeconomic policy and the Welfare State’ (del Valle Alcalá 2016: 14) were rapidly eroding by the time of Johnson’s novel; *The Unfortunates* therefore begins to reassess and revitalise ‘the fundamental lines of conflict’ allowing ‘the notion of class is to retain its revolutionary valences’ (15).

This revitalisation of ‘the fundamental lines of conflict’ would emerge even more explicitly in BS Johnson’s 1973 novel, *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* (1973). Coe describes Johnson’s consciousness of injustice as ‘acute [...] The general shittiness of the world became just one more burdensome problem that he, as an individual, had to recognise and cope with’ and it is in this novel—arguably his most political and the last published before his suicide—in which he starts to confront injustice as ‘both a social and personal phenomenon’ (2004: 225).

This is done via the novel's protagonist, the titular Christie Malry, who 'had not been born into money' (2001: 11) and so 'like almost all of us, had to think of earning a living' (12). In keeping with Darlington's comments regarding Johnson's desire to 'open a dialogue with the active reader [...] to challenge their immersion in the narrative', Johnson's reflexive narrative form allows the narrator to discuss with both the reader and Malry 'the progress of events and the limitations of the omniscient form of narrative in which he appears' (Stevenson 1993: 115). This is evident early on with the narrator's parenthetical comment to the reader about 'how privileged we are to know' Christie's thoughts (Johnson 2001: 12). Such narrative reflexivity draws attention to the narrative form and, in doing so, undermines any supposed transparency by highlighting the materiality of the narrative prose. However, such reflexivity also performs another function, which is to create a (class) solidarity between reader, narrator and Christie. The 'us' which the narrator says Christie is like signifies those who must earn a living—that is, the proletariat—and as Tew explains, while Johnson depicts work as 'an embittering experience for the ordinary worker' (2014: 152), it is one assumed to be shared by reader, narrator and protagonist alike.

Whereas in *The Unfortunates*, Johnson discusses various forms of alienating activity, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* focuses on the alienation of workers from their labour. For instance, such alienation is present in the 'curious distancing effect felt by honest persons in a similar situation: the money [Christie] saw in piles and sacks was virtually a different thing from those notes and coins that he had in his own pockets' (15-16). As awareness of the constraints on his freedom develops, Christie begins to respond using the double-entry bookkeeping system—devised by the Franciscan friar Luca Pacioli and used by Christie at work—as a way of monitoring the injustices done to him as well as helping him ascertain the correct response: 'Every Debit must have its Credit' (24), Christie thinks to himself, opening

his account with 'THEM' (47). As Crews argues, when Christie 'discovers double-entry, he is able to turn the basis of capitalism against itself' (2010: 225). However, Johnson problematises the efficacy of Christie's innovative use of capitalist accounting methods, specifically with regards to whether his grievances can really be reduced to the quantitative double-entry bookkeeping system. Christie ponders precisely this problem, asking 'I am entitled to exact payment, of course. [...] But payment in what form?' (Johnson 2001: 24). The meaning of 'exact' here is playfully ambiguous on Johnson's part: as a verb, Christie is declaring his right *to exact* payment on the society that has wronged him. But as an adjective, Christie also desires *exact* recompense for these wrongs, raising the question of what form 'exact payment' could possibly take or, even, if it could exist at all.

This theme is returned to throughout the novel, underlying the increasingly extreme actions Christie takes and their efficacy at compensating him for the injustices of class society. After bombing a tax office, Christie mulls over the deaths he has caused, justifying it in entirely capitalist terms: 'human life was the easiest to replace. A machine would be difficult, costly: but the man who drove or worked or manipulated it could be replaced at very short notice by any one of millions of other men [...] all equally replaceable' (115). This symmetry with the logic of capital is explicit in his conclusion that 'if they are so callous about human life, then so shall I be' (116), his increasingly extreme actions culminating in the murder of over '20,000 innocent west Londoners' (151) according to Christie's account entry. Though Johnson, through his creation of class solidarity between reader and protagonist, certainly encourages sympathy with Christie's sentiments and grievances, such sympathy is not extended to Christie's methods. Indeed, Johnson suggests as much with a quotation from Pacioli—just preceding the entry regarding the killing of 20,000 people—in which Pacioli states that 'not being a good accountant in your affairs, you will have to feel your way

forward like a blind person, and much loss can arise therefrom' (149). Christie's arbitrary calculation of each death at £1.30, 'an allowance for the commercial value of the chemicals contained therein' (119), as well as his attempts to shoehorn qualitative issues such as 'Socialism not given a chance' (151) into the quantitative double-entry bookkeeping system, necessarily make him a "bad accountant"; Pacioli's statement that 'much loss can arise therefrom' is thus given grim new meaning by the huge loss of life arising from Christie's actions. Christie, however, as a "bad accountant" continues to move forward blindly, unaware of the significant losses arising therefrom.

It is precisely this inability to adequately address the qualitative issues with the quantitative bookkeeping system that does, however, point towards another form of politics which itself indicates the limits of working-class political representation. For instance, during a trip with his colleague, Headlam, around the Tapper's confectionary factory (whose accounts they manage), Christie observes various aspects of the production process, describing the experience as 'a guided tour of the enemy defences' (64). At the Moulders and Enrobers Department assembly line, he notices 'girls on either side of the belt [...] it looked highly skilled [...] but mindlessly monotonous for those doing it' (66), reminiscent of Todd's comment in Chapter Two on the gendered nature of deskilling assembly line work while the emphasis on the work's mindless monotony places it in continuity with *May Day's* Langfier's women whose work 'moves meaninglessly, repetitively' while they 'strive to carry on with their private functionings' (Sommerfield 2010: 48). The fundamental node of conflict here is not (only) around the proper remuneration of labour—feasibly mediated within the realms of representation and industrial relations policy—but the alienated process of wage labour itself.

At this point, the contributions of *operaismo* become highly illuminating with regards to the ‘thought that Tapper’s might be a microcosm crosses [Christie’s] mind’ (Johnson 2001: 75): where the Italian workerists attempted to ‘confront *Capital* with “the *real* study of a *real* factory”’ (S. Wright 2017: 3, original emphasis), Christie similarly looks to the (fictional) Tapper’s factory as a ‘microcosm’ for potentially understanding capitalist social relations and how workers are impelled to rebel against them and the alienated labour they engender. Returning to this motif, when Christie phones in a bomb hoax at Pork Pie Purveyors Ltd, he enjoys ‘seeing the workpeople spill tumultuously out of the gates! They were clearly delighted at having an excuse not to work’ (Johnson 2001: 123). Johnson’s novel, then, emphasises the working-class refusal of work—itsself rooted in the elemental and unquantifiable experience of alienation from it—which, simultaneously, resists representation due to its expression of class grievances most resistant to mediation and compromise: power and control of/within the experience of the alienated labour process. The ‘muffling effects’ of Keynesianism described by del Valle Alcalá in Chapter Two in relation to Arthur Seaton’s antagonistic subject-position vis-à-vis work and the wage are also true of Christie: ‘labour is still clearly recognised as struggle between capital and worker’ (2016: 14). In many ways, the direction of working-class politics and aesthetics indicated in Sillitoe’s novel during that period of postwar consensus can be read as materialising in Johnson’s text amid heightening class conflict. By showing how working-class grievances with capitalism are irreducible to the double-entry bookkeeping system, which Tew describes as ‘one of the cornerstones of capitalism’ (2014: 165), Johnson demonstrates the inability of the labour-capital antagonism to be resolved within capitalism.

This can be seen as part of a sentiment emerging among the political left from the late-1960s onwards that ‘the democratic process had failed British socialists, and that alternative – not

necessarily peaceful – forms of protest would have to be tried” (Coe 2004: 313). In particular, Christie’s note, ‘Socialism not given a chance’, seems to express the disappointment felt by many with the previous Wilson Labour government and their attempts to control the unions, a thread subsequently taken up by the Heath government which Johnson firmly opposed in his films for the TUC. However, issues exist with Coe’s claim that Johnson’s sense of political injustice in *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* is ‘an impossibly extreme one [...] which presented [Christie] with unenviable alternatives: terrorism or madness’ (225). Specifically, it seems that no such binary between terrorism and madness exists within Christie’s narrative arc, eventually becoming both “mad” *and* a “terrorist”. Indeed, Johnson’s narrative shows that Christie’s attempts to address his grievances through terrorism are an abject failure, an impediment rather than an aid in allowing him to understand his situation or resolve his problems. The only times he is able to glimpse the social nature of his grievances is via his personal relationships with other working-class people: his girlfriend’s ill-use by capitalism being ‘a reflection on society that it could find only inappropriate use for that wit’ (Johnson 2001: 138) or, similarly, his aforementioned epiphany with Headlam that Tapper’s may be a ‘microcosm’ for society as a whole. Moreover, it is in discussion with Headlam that Christie almost divulges his plans before deciding to remain ‘responsible for and to no one but himself’ (Johnson 2001: 100). In doing so, however, Christie also cuts himself off from the relationships he needs to understand the social nature of his grievances with society.

Meanwhile, in Christie’s earlier comment regarding his ‘guided tour of the enemy defences’—that is, the factory-level manifestation of capitalist forms in the relations of production, staffed by those it alienates and exploits, and so fundamentally defined by struggle over the labour process—Johnson depicts labour as the site for the antagonistic social relationship between capital and worker. As such, Johnson’s reflexive narrative

strategies in which the narrator highlights how ‘we’ (both reader and narrator) are given ‘privileged’ access to Christie’s thoughts (such as Tapper’s existence as a ‘microcosm’ for wider class relations) builds a solidarity between them around the common resentment against the compulsion of wage labour. This solidarity based around an antagonism towards work is similarly shared by the staff at Pork Pie Purveyors Ltd, the Moulders and Enrobers Department assembly line workers, Headlam and Christie’s girlfriend. Against this matrix of solidarities, then, Christie—like Arthur Seaton—symbolises the unintegrated antagonistic class-subject; however, it is not his individual nihilistic and increasingly callous terrorism with which Johnson’s novel implores us to sympathise but, rather, a refusal of the alienated wage labour that defines the working-class experience of the ‘general shittiness of the world’.

Another novel from the period which makes the radical potentialities of an antagonistic avant-gardism central to its narrative is John Berger’s *G.: A Novel* (1972a). Often considered primarily an art critic rather than novelist, Berger’s fiction is relatively neglected even within the already neglected study of the 1960s-1970s British avant-garde. The action in Berger’s transnational historical novel is set largely across Europe from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the First World War, the reader following the eponymous G from childhood through his many Casanova-esque sexual adventures against the background of various historical events which culminate in his eleventh-hour politicisation. Deploying a range of techniques, such as meta-discussion and non-linear narrative structure, Berger produces a novel intended to perform a task not dissimilar from the Lukácsian historical novel with regards the functioning of history and the development of class consciousness while—like *A Scots Quair*—using avant-garde techniques to emphasise the agency of collective and individual class-subjects. As Berger himself states,

It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. [...] instead of being aware of a point as an infinitely small part of a straight line, we are aware of it as an infinitely smaller part of an infinite number of lines [...] Any contemporary narrative which ignores the urgency of this dimension is incomplete and acquires the oversimplified character of a fable. (1972b: 40)

As such, for McMahon, *G* ‘incarnates the text envisioned as praxis [...] a manifestation of how proper arrangements of events and the motives behind those events can reveal that the forces needed to change history are already in, though not yet at work on, history’ (1982: 206). One example of these forces ‘in, though not yet at work on, history’ can be seen in Berger’s depiction of Beatrice, *G*’s childhood carer and first sexual partner. In a description of her time in South Africa—accompanying her soldier husband—Berger explains that her view of the world around her became ‘tilted’ (1975: 109): ‘Even when the delusion had passed, the idea of the sub-continent being tilted did not strike her as implausible; on the contrary, it seemed to correspond with the rest of her daily experience’ (110). Unlike her fellow settlers, she ‘began to feel, between the interstices of formal social convention, the violence of the hatred, the violence of what would be avenged’ (116). Szanto theorises this viewing of the world at a physical tilt as ‘a spatial description for a temporal phenomenon, to explain her feelings; but it is an explanation so alien that she has no terms within which to legitimise her sideways leap onto this new roadway’ (369). Indeed, this idea of the spatial tilt lends itself to its synonym “askew”, suggesting both “not straight” (that is, spatially ‘tilted’) as well as “with contempt or disapproval”. Lacking a language to express this disapproval, her sentiment is sublimated into this spatial tilt. However, as the reader knows, though Beatrice may lack the language in her own time, that language will indeed come into being through the struggle of colonised South Africans against their colonisers. What Berger

attempts to explicate is that it is primarily through action—the ‘violence’ which Beatrice foresees and of which the 1970s reader would have been keenly aware—that a language is created to describe the conditions against which action is being taken. In doing so, *G* compliments *The Unfortunates*’ textual gaps in depicting the existence of political grievances which resist overt expression with Berger developing the theme to show that it is action upon history which precedes—and, therefore, creates—the language necessary for the explication of those grievances.

It is this theme which Berger builds on throughout the text, explaining, in one of the many examples of theoretical meta-discussion, that

a moment’s introspection shows that a large part of our own experience cannot be formulated: it awaits further understanding of the total human situation. In certain respects, we are likely to be better understood by those who follow us than by ourselves. Nevertheless, their understanding will be expressed in terms which would now be alien to us. They will change our unformulated experience beyond our recognition. As we have changed Beatrice’s. (117).

The metanarrative here is multi-functional: firstly, it explains Beatrice’s experiences and how readers reframe and rewrite them in line with their own historical context; however, most crucially, Berger’s interruption of the narration of events here places his narrator at the extradiegetic level whose wider understanding of ‘the total human situation’ is the result of being, like the reader, further forward in history than the characters being narrated. Moreover, the repeated use of ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’ functions to include the narrator in this process of rewriting and reframing understanding. As such, Berger makes explicit his awareness of the

author's knowledge functioning to put the characters' experiences 'against a more illuminating background' (McMahon 1982: 205) and reflects in his metanarrative that future readers will similarly reformulate his own experiences in terms equally alien to him. Berger's metanarrational moment thus substantiates Greene's argument that drawing attention 'to the structures of fiction is also to draw attention to the conventionality of the codes that govern human behaviour [...] when a writer talks about narrative within narrative, she unsettles the traditional distinctions between reality and fiction and exposes the arbitrary nature of boundaries' (1991a: 293). This is certainly true of Berger's strategy—as it is in *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*—responding to the issue highlighted by MacCabe regarding the narrative prose of the 'classic realist text' which regards itself as simply a 'window of words' which lets 'the identity of things shine through' (1985: 35). Berger—like Johnson—abjures such false transparency, indicating the narrative prose's materiality through his metadiscussion to produce non-hierarchical relationships between narrator, character and reader in their incomplete 'understanding of the total human situation'.

Szanto develops this point, to explain how Berger shows through the interplay between Beatrice's experience and the reader's historical knowledge, that 'any individual, however, deprived, can and does act, and through action, can and does make. Any thing or experience, once made, can acquire a name' (1978: 369). This argument, evident in the narrative's splicing of metadiscussion with external historical and personal events, is elucidated further in Berger's treatment of revolt in which, 'through action', things and experiences are made and acquire names. At the start of the novel, Umberto, G's father and wealthy Livornese merchant, is described as fearing '*i teppisti*' (1975: 16; translation: 'hooligans' or 'the mob' as in violent crowds), whose 'Madness is native to the town' (16) and which he remembers from the 1848 revolution:

A single pair of eyes, met in that crowd, are enough to reveal the extent of its possible demands. And most of these demands will be impossible to meet. Inevitably the discrepancy will lead to violence [...] It has assembled to demand the impossible. It has assembled to avenge the discrepancy. Its need is to overthrow the order which has defined and distinguished between the possible and the impossible at its expense, generation after generation. (16)

Berger's choice of Livorno for the setting of this town's 'native' madness is itself significant as one of Italy's historic "red" cities (the PCI was founded there in 1921, for instance); the town's 'native' madness—from Umberto's bourgeois perspective—is synonymous with its radicalism. Meanwhile, the phrase 'demand the impossible' alludes to the Situationist slogans of the France 1968 uprising (specifically: "be realistic: demand the impossible!"). Berger's juxtaposition of 'impossible' and 'possible' thus highlights the unbridgeable chasm between capital and labour, the demands of the latter historically categorised as 'impossible' by the former, forcing revolt over the very meaning of what is 'possible'. Berger's allusion to the Situationists, then—whose radicalism brought them as much into conflict with the French trade unions and Communist Party as with the state—highlights how the same antagonisms over definitions of the 'possible' connect the events of 1848 and 1968, and how such antagonisms emerge from the ineradicable 'discrepancy' between possible and impossible.

This motif of unmediated class antagonism is one which is returned to several times within the novel. When G returns to Italy after many years and is caught up in the 1898 *Fatti di Maggio* food riots in Milan, Berger describes workers as organised into 'columns and contingents from particular factories' (79). All, however, ignore the socialist Turati and his

‘appeals for calm’ (74). As the revolt continues, the narrator remarks how workers have ‘stopped the factories producing, forced the shops to shut, halted the traffic, occupied the streets. It is they who have built the city and they who maintain it. They are discovering their own creativity’ (80). Noteworthy in this passage is that—in contrast to novels like *Clash*, *Major Operation* and *May Day*—working-class representative organisations are conspicuous by their absence, with Berger portraying the class not primarily by its institutions but its relation to production with emphasis given to the ‘contingents from particular factories’ while the ‘creativity’ they discover is fundamentally ‘their own’, rather than predicated on specific groups of militants “winning their arguments”. As such, working-class political representation in Berger’s novel is contingent rather than an ontological necessity within working-class politics.

Berger further pursues the problematic of representation in his description of the barricades upon which each militant ‘finds himself a few yards from the precipitous edge of an infinitely deep fissure which [...] like a deep cut into the flesh, is unmistakably itself; there can be no doubting what has happened’ (83). The ‘infinitely deep fissure’ here symbolises the chasm between capital and labour; however, in underlining the fissure’s infinite depth, Berger indicates that this division is fundamental, impossible to link except for at surface level, which nonetheless leaves unresolved the foundational distinctness of the two groups beneath the surface. That which ‘has happened’ and about which ‘there can be no doubting’ is the eruption of class antagonism which—unlike political representation—is ‘unmistakably itself’, a reaffirmation of this ‘infinitely deep fissure’ upon which society is based, but which for the most part remains obscured.

Berger finishes this section on the *Fatti di Maggio* with a piece of metadiscussion explicitly rebuking realist literary form, declaring he

cannot continue this account of an eleven-year-old boy in Milan on 6 May 1898 [...] To stop here, despite all that I leave unsaid, is to admit more truth than will be possible if I bring the account to a conclusion. The writer's desire to finish is fatal to the truth. The End unifies. Unity must be established another way (88-89).

Here, Berger outlines the “inconclusive” nature of history, its indefinite continuity made up of the ‘infinite number of lines’ representing people’s lives intersecting, ending or changing direction according to historical events. Berger therefore resists conventional realist approaches to narrative progress and closure as an imposition of historico-narrative ‘unity’, which he argues edges realism towards the ‘oversimplified character of a fable’. In order to ‘admit more truth’ by resisting the false closure inherent in the ‘writer’s desire to finish’, Berger states—somewhat opaquely—that ‘Unity must be established another way’: in Berger’s novel, this ‘unity’ is established between historical moments, something Berger intimates when he writes that ‘All history is contemporary history’ since, even when the events discussed are in the distant past, ‘the condition of their being historically known is that they should vibrate in the historian’s mind’ (64). These “vibrations” of history are evident, firstly, in Berger’s allusions to France 1968 in his depictions of the 1848 and 1898 revolts in Livorno and Milan, thus symbolically linking them in a continuous transhistorical demand for the ‘impossible’. Secondly, these vibrations are experienced in G’s own consciousness as the narrative—and his political awareness—develops: as a grown man, he finds himself running with Nuša, a Slovene woman he is courting, during the events which precipitate unrest in Trieste at the beginning of World War One. While running with her, he remembers the girl

with whom he ran during the *Fatti di Maggio*, except ‘it was scarcely a memory. The two moments were continuous; he was still running the same run and [...] the Roman girl had grown into the woman [...] now running fast but heavily beside him’ (327). An almost literal unity is created between two historical moments of proletarian revolt connected through the ‘vibrations’ in G’s mind with one event resonating with/into the other. Indeed, G’s run with Nuša can therefore be read as concluding the earlier one with the Roman girl whose stories about how G would buy her ‘white stockings and a hat with chiffon tied round it’ (83) come true with Nuša, ‘all of whose clothes [G] had bought’ (327); unity, then, is established through the resonance of class antagonism throughout history being experienced as contemporary history.

It is through this working-class insurgency that G finds an outlet for his own rebellion against the hypocrisies of bourgeois society, hitherto expressed merely via his pan-European philandering. As McMahon explains, it is in Trieste that G discovers that both he and the crowd share ‘the experience of alienation, the sense that they have been put at odds with their own understanding and hopes for themselves by some force which never bothered to consult them [...] Now they come together as a mass determined to pull apart or burn down some part of that other world’ (1982: 223). The tragedy, however, is that G only glimpses his affinity with the crowd shortly before his death; yet as McMahon points out, ‘the reader is clearly supposed to be able to derive a lesson from G’s final frustration’ that, while ‘there is no more time for [G], there is more time for the reader’ (219).

Berger, like Johnson, places the antagonistic class-subject at the heart of his avant-garde narrative. Like others in their milieu, Johnson’s and Berger’s radical formal innovations feed into their radical political stances: whether Johnson’s textual blanks highlighting the

inexpressible grievances which nonetheless animate politics or his reflexive narrative strategies to forge solidarities between narrator, protagonist and reader; or Berger's metafictional devices utilised to abjure the pretence of a 'transparent' representational narrative context and construct 'unity' across various moments of revolt, which he defines as distinct from the institutionality intended to mediate the 'infinitely deep fissure' between classes. These texts, rooted in a loosely-defined avant-garde proletarian literary formation— itself related to the loose networks of Britain's 1960s and 1970s counterculture—not only collapse the all-too-frequently invoked binary between political commitment and formal experimentation but also function undoubtedly *parole* in a class *langue* within what Jameson calls the 'dialogical system of the social classes'. Moreover, this fusion of avant-gardism with class antagonism produces texts which become every bit the 'galvanic force' of Hanley or Gibbon fuelled as they are 'by the released energy of social oppression' (Fordham 2002: 100).

### The feminist 'counter-public sphere': Fairbairns, Carter and Roberts

The frequent emphasis on social antagonism—and, specifically, social antagonism rooted in class—in the novels of the 1960s and 1970s avant-garde resulted in the production of a range of texts which unsettled working-class political representation. Similar can also be noted in the novels emerging from the feminist 'counter-public sphere' which developed around the women's liberation movement and whose 'polemic and subversive strategies' are situated—in the argument of this thesis—within Jameson's aforementioned 'dialogical system of the social classes' and, as such, whose network of counter-institutionality merits categorisation as its own (feminist) proletarian literary formation. Moreover, as discussed previously in this chapter, the women's movement as a movement which challenged the established institutions of working-class representation, exhibited similar tendencies to those described throughout

this thesis: that is, broadly, where realism is the dominant literary mode within a text, that text (while not losing its status as an oppositional strategy) remains limited by the structural boundaries of the form to stabilise class society and (a broadly-defined) working-class representation within it. Meanwhile, those texts engaging more overtly with avant-gardism will tend towards challenging, extending, destabilising and even breaking entirely with the supposed ontological necessity of ‘what is’ and political representation within it. And, as both Greene and Andermahr point out, though internally heterogeneous, feminist fiction from this period tended in significant part towards formal innovation and its related challenge to the ‘density and solidity’ of ‘what is’.

With this in mind, Zoë Fairbairns’ *Benefits* (1979), a dystopian novel in which the government introduces a universal ‘Benefit’ given to all mothers while removing them from employment, forms an interesting starting point for discussion, its plot exploring the ‘difficult relationship between work and motherhood, and dramatises contemporary debates concerning paying mothers for the work they do’ (Andermahr 2014: 86). Written as part of a women’s writing group (alongside other feminist writers such as Sara Maitland and Michèle Roberts), Fairbairns explains how contemporary debates informed her novel:

Some feminists supported it, believing as I did that financial independence was a necessary precondition for equality; but others took the view that if you pay women to stay at home to look after children it will confirm them in that role [...] I found that argument as convincing as the other one [...] I was on both sides. Being on both sides is not a very comfortable position to be in ideologically, but it is the perfect posture from which to write a novel. (quoted in Andermahr 2014: 87)

Though certainly a piece of speculative fiction in that it draws upon the ‘complex temporal structure’ outlined by Jameson ‘not to give us “images” of the future [...] but rather to defamiliarise and restructure our experience of our own present’ (2005: 286), Fairbairns’ novel is also ‘a realist “novel of ideas”’ which ‘works out a specific political issue’ (Andermahr 2014: 86), in this instance recreating ““movement” dilemmas’ (Miner 1981: 26) by dramatising the debates between socialist and radical feminisms with regards to the policy of child benefit; it is this issue, therefore, and the debates around it, which ultimately drive the narrative.

Set in a Britain in which ‘the curtain came down on the era of affluence that had spawned the British welfare state’ (Fairbairns 1988: 3), Fairbairns’ fictional government makes ‘a deal with the mighty trade union movement (mighty compared with the organised strength of mothers) that the workers would reduce their pay-demands if the government would reduce taxation’ (5). Discussion then shifts to within the feminist movement around whether they support higher taxation to fund child benefit, resulting in much ambivalence as ‘feminists weren’t sure if they wanted men’s miserable pay-packets docked to finance child benefits, they weren’t sure they wanted to be paid to stay at home and have children’ (6). This ambivalence is depicted in the positions of socialist and radical feminisms: the former, motivated by a sense of class solidarity, the latter, motivated by the policy’s reinforcement of patriarchal ideals around gender roles. This separation becomes more conflictual in a later feminist meeting discussing the merits of anti-male sentiment: ‘It divides the working class’ says one (clearly socialist feminist) activist, to which another (intended to indicate radical feminism) responds, ‘Men divide the working class’ (10). As well as division, however, Fairbairns’ dramatisation of these intra-feminist arguments shows how women’s liberation challenged established modes of political representation both in terms of social democracy’s

historical neglect of women as part of its class constituency (discussed in Chapter Two by Black and Brooke regarding postwar Labour and TUC women's policy) as well as opening up new or otherwise neglected spheres of politics relating to women's lives more generally. As such, Fairbairns' novel remains an 'oppositional strategy', an instance of *parole* within a class *langue*.

As the narrative develops and the dystopian nature of the government's 'Benefit' becomes increasingly apparent, the divide between the socialist and radical factions within feminism diminishes as it becomes clear that while 'the whole point of Benefit was to control [women]' (93), its withdrawal from women deemed "deviant" (in terms of heteronormativity, nationality or class) leads them to 'fight to the death to prevent it being taken away' (93). Fairbairns depicts women struggling with the Benefit system as an instance of tensions around the concessions of welfare capitalism: for instance, where the construction of Britain's postwar welfare state can be seen as the supplantation of class struggle by consensus, its concessions—while integrating a specific image of the working class into a restabilised class system—remain gains to be defended. Fairbairns notes precisely this double-edged nature of social policy, dramatising the struggles around state provision for women even as they contain it as a struggle against the social construction of gender roles by reinforcing that very social construct.

Yet while Nicola Nixon argues that *Benefits* posits a dystopian future 'in which women's rights [are] extinguished altogether' and women are 'valued only as breeders' (1992: 230), Fairbairns depicts not only rebellion but also a victory for women in her novel for overturning dystopia. When mums eventually strike, they force fathers to take their children to work and firms to 'set up creches and playrooms and let fathers work special shifts' while

the children nevertheless ‘disrupted the working day. Their demands could not be predicted and they were used to undivided attention’ (Fairbairns 1988: 141). In this passage, Fairbairns underlines not merely how the mothers’ strike disrupts the working day but again recreates the “movement” debates around how unpaid domestic work is essential to the efficient functioning of capitalism and, in doing so, provides an imaginative argument for socialist feminism. Fairbairns demonstrates how women’s withdrawal of their domestic labour increases overheads (through the necessity of establishing creches and playrooms) and makes labour less efficient (through children’s disruptions of the working day), vindicating Andermahr’s comment that ‘housework is not outside the capitalist and patriarchal system; it props it up’ (2014: 87). Women’s unpaid domestic labour, though not directly connected to the functioning of the workplace, is still essential to the efficient accumulation of capital.

However, though Fairbairns’ novel, like the women’s liberation movement as a whole, exists as an oppositional strategy not just to patriarchal society but also traditional approaches to political representation in general, it nonetheless retreats from pursuing fully the radical political and aesthetic challenges of women’s liberation. Fairbairns’ text, as may be expected of a ‘realist “novel of ideas”’, in many ways retains the aforementioned binary between ‘social-political’ and ‘psychological-personal’ which much of 1970s feminist fiction worked to collapse. As such, there is less emphasis on the distension or contraction of temporalities or focus on fragmentation or interiority not only common in many of the avant-garde texts covered in this thesis, but which were also instrumental in expanding the political terrain within their novels to include precisely those aspects of gendered experience frequently neglected by political representation. These tendencies manifest in *Benefits*’ highly reductionist view that ‘the nub of what women’s liberation’s all about’ is the ‘Economic control of mothers by men’ (Fairbairns 1988: 8) with the narrative’s preoccupation with the

economic and policy aspects of feminism leading it back onto an emphasis on the external “objective” social world commonly considered the domain of realism.

It is also interesting to note that the divisive and restrictive nature of policy alluded to above is largely forgotten in the narrative’s conclusion with the overturning of patriarchal dystopia and the drafting of a ‘consultative document New Deal for Women’: ‘you might think there were no men left, the way the new order was going to concern itself with the needs and desires of women!’ (211), before outlining the provisions of a renewed welfare state. This is not to suggest that Fairbairns portrays this renewed welfare state as a conflictless utopia: rather, this conflict is mediated by ‘The Women’ (177) who represent the unitary force of ‘Organised feminism’ rather than women in general or even the women’s movement as a broader ecology of organisations. Indeed, the representative institution of ‘The Women’ can be read as a fictional counterweight to the overbearing strength of the ‘mighty trade union movement’ depicted at the beginning of the novel; an acknowledgement of struggle as the basis for the social democratic/welfare capitalist settlement while nonetheless unable to imagine beyond it, as implied by the distinctly Rooseveltian ‘New Deal for Women’. As such, the narrative’s focus on the economic ‘nub’ of women’s liberation to the neglect of those aspects more resistant to political representation, lends itself to a utilisation of primarily realist literary techniques to address the “objective” external world while, simultaneously, limiting its structural boundaries to a reimagined welfare capitalism.

With this in mind, it is interesting to turn to a novel taking a radically different approach to both feminism and literary form: Angela Carter’s *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), a quasi-surrealist adventure novel in which the main protagonist and narrator, Desiderio, embarks on a mission to track down mad scientist Doctor Hoffman who

is attacking his (unspecified) country with reality-distorting machines. In contrast to *Benefits*'s adherence to realism, Carter's novel fuses elements of magic realism with postmodern literary techniques to explore, as Elaine Jordan attests, a wide range of intellectual, aesthetic and popular cultural material such as 'pornography, the Gothic, fairy tales, horror films, boys' imperial adventure stories, anthropological idylls according to Rousseau or Lévi-Strauss, and the fantasies of philosophy, the world as Will and Idea' (1990: 34). In doing so, Carter aims to ask uncomfortable questions of her readers, society and the feminist movement itself. For instance, one such technique comes in Carter's immediate establishment of Desiderio's unreliability as narrator, by beginning with his statement, 'I remember everything perfectly' (2010: 3), only to follow it soon after with 'I cannot remember exactly how it began' (9). In contrast to the Angry Young Men—whose autodiegetic narrators maintain monological dominance over their narratives—Carter invites the reader from the beginning of the novel to interrogate all of Desiderio's later assertions on the nature of events as potentially flawed.

One instance in which the reader is encouraged to interrogate events with more depth than the account of its narrator at first suggests is in his retelling of a sexual encounter with Mary Anne who, upon their first meeting, shows an immediate romantic interest in Desiderio, repeating his name to herself 'with a curious quiver in her voice which might have been pleasure' and, taking his hand, 'would not let go of [him] for a long time' (58). However, in Carter's depiction of sexual intercourse between the two, she is unequivocal that Mary Anne is sleepwalking and that Desiderio is 'perfectly well aware' (60) that she is asleep which, as Koolen points out, 'positions this sexual encounter as a rape' (2007: 404-405). Koolen then explains how, given Desiderio's unreliability as narrator along with his admitted awareness that Mary Anne was asleep, his various justifications—such as when he asserts that 'she came to me and I took the rose because she seemed to offer it to me' (Carter, 60)—read,

above all, like the rationalisations of ‘a rapist trying to justify his actions’ (2007: 405). However, in Carter’s method, Desiderio is never made to atone for his crime nor is he ever even made to understand it as such (though Desiderio’s own experience of sexual assault by a group of travelling acrobats perhaps serves as a moment of textual revenge or role-reversal in this respect). Nor is Mary Anne portrayed as the archetypal victim of rape common in the popular imagination in which an unsuspecting woman is set upon by a stranger, with her unsuspecting—and therefore non-sexualised—nature signifying that she is undeserving of attack. As such, Koolen argues, in sexualising Mary Anne, Carter constructs a ‘nuanced analysis of the complexities of rape’ showing that ‘mutual desire should not be used to excuse rapists since [...] expressing desire is not the same as consenting to have sexual relations’ (406). Carter thus resists reinforcing the trope of the “undeserving” victim of sexual assault—which necessitates its correlate of the “deserving” victim—allowing space for both Mary Anne’s sexual desires as well as boundaries.

Indeed, as Koolen points out, Desiderio in fact has several sexual experiences with women which ‘consist of him taking advantage of power imbalances which his descriptions often try to hide or excuse’ (405). For example, with Aoi, a nine-year-old girl offered to—and accepted by—Desiderio as a bride while staying with the Native American river-people or in his sexual encounter with sex workers at the ‘House of Anonymity’, who ‘you could not imagine they had names, for they had been reduced by the rigorous discipline of their vocation to the undifferentiated essence of the idea of the female’ (Carter 2010: 157). Desiderio’s frequent engagement in sexual acts based upon an imbalance of power (in his favour) as well as these acts being those of the narrative’s hero (and, indeed, offered voluntarily by him as anecdotes), is an attempt by Carter to highlight the normalisation and pervasiveness of rape culture, showing that sexual violence is not restricted to the secret

mores of unhinged monsters but permeates patriarchal society openly. That Carter establishes her narrator's unreliability early in the novel is therefore intended to encourage such interrogative reading, in contrast with the significantly more brazen machismo of sexual violence focalised through Braine's monologically dominant autodiegetic narrator in *Room at the Top* where it serves as a signifier for a narrowly-defined image of class and class conflict.

Desiderio's sexism is interesting to analyse alongside Carter's deployment of the action-adventure genre within her narrative. Indeed, that the novel's protagonist is employed by the government to undertake a secret mission to kill a mad scientist threatening to destroy the world has clear roots in the tropes of popular spy fiction; Desiderio is even asked if he is 'licensed to kill' (Carter 2010: 109) making the James Bond allusion absolutely explicit. The use of spy fiction tropes in Carter's text can be understood as a form of dialogue with the genre's machismo, problematising Bond's innumerable sexual conquests by depicting Desiderio's similarly erotic adventures alongside an inability—or refusal—to recognise the power imbalances which make them possible. Carter is suggesting that the spy fiction of her day was 'an inadequate representation of the tensions which permeate seventies' society – tensions created out of the warring worlds of gender, sexuality and desire' (Williams, M., 2014: 30). In contrast to the masculine and sexist world of James Bond, where narrative development is derived from conspiratorial macro-level politicking (often by men), Carter uses a range of experimental techniques to draw attention away from the macro and towards the micro-level, the politics of the interpersonal, how, as Koolen states, 'sexuality is subjectivity' (2007: 399) and how Carter's 'representations of heterosexual relationships demonstrate the pervasiveness and insidiousness of patriarchy' (400).

Comparing Carter's novel with *Benefits*, it becomes immediately clear that, in terms of both form and content, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* differs drastically from Fairbairns' text: while *Benefits* uses realist form to focus on the movement debates around the economic 'nub' of gendered social policy—indeed, that aspect of feminism most amenable to integration within institutional representational structures—Carter uses magic realism alongside a collage of generic styles and tropes to undermine the 'density and solidity of what is' to question the ideological assumptions and behaviour patterns which underpin our experience of reality. Where James Bond may live out the macho fantasies of a patriarchal society, Carter's reworking of the action-adventure narrative problematises many of the assumptions—particularly around sex and gender, but also around colonialism and power more generally—which make such adventures possible and desirable. That such an avidly anti-realist novel as Carter's would pertain to precisely those aspects of women's liberation—such as sex and men's perceived rights to women's bodies—that fundamentally resist integration into representational political structures is, therefore, the counterpart to the emphasis in Fairbairns' realist novel on the external social world.

Michèle Roberts' *A Piece of the Night* (1978) is one novel emerging from the women writers' groups which aims to balance these two poles within feminism, collapsing the binary between the 'social-political' and 'psychological-personal'. Recounting the story of Julie Fanchot, a French woman who moves to the UK to study and her subsequent political development as part of the feminist movement, Roberts' novel is retrospectively narrated through Julie's memories as she recollects moments of her life while back in France nursing her sick mother.

Treatment of political development is considerably different in *A Piece of the Night* in comparison to *Benefits*, with Roberts' 'ambitious attempt to encompass psychological and

political themes and to unite socialist and feminist interests’, exploring ‘psychic processes, the semiotic realm and mother-daughter relations as well as depicting feminist collectivity, alternatives to heterosexuality, and attempts to reorganise family life’ (Andermahr 2014: 84). Indeed, as well as these issues, it should also be noted that Roberts also successfully addresses the intersections between gender and class as well as divisions and tensions amongst women themselves. The balancing of these themes can be observed early in the novel with Roberts’ description of the five-woman commune in which Julie lives, in a building owned by her ex-husband, Ben: ‘They don’t pay rent. Ben prefers it that way [...] His experimental commune, he calls them [...] they have no legal status as tenants and will have to leave the minute Ben chooses to sell’ (Roberts 2002: 14). This threat of eviction becomes actual when, just before Julie leaves for France, she reads a letter from Ben in which he informs her that he intends to sell the house with these words, for Julie, being ‘like fists that hit her in the face’ (18). Like Fairbairns’ economic ‘nub’ of feminism, the women in the ‘commune’ are under the economic control of the male property owner: the commune is ‘his’ with any “communal” aspect severely undermined by his ownership and transformed into the ‘experimental’ relationship between scientist and guinea pig. However, this economic imbalance of power is linked symbolically with the violence of abusive relationships, the brutal imagery of the letter’s words being ‘like fists’ hitting her ‘in the face’ (an adaptation of the more common “punch in the gut” to signify an emotional blow) thus linking these two distinct forms of coercion as common to the female experience of patriarchy. In doing so, Roberts positions the female subject in a relationship to both patriarchy and capital as well as the importance of comprehending the grievances of such a subject-position as being simultaneously political as well as personal.

Ben's relationship to Julie as her landlord is only the latest in a series of unequal relationships between the two, which Roberts uses to chart the various instances of power imbalances between them—and, by extension, men and women more generally—at different points in her life. For instance, in one passage, Julie recalls an incident during the early stages of her relationship with Ben (then also her university lecturer), in which she expounds 'her ideas on mediaeval theatre and the best staging methods. She is carried away by her enthusiasm, it takes her a little time to notice that he is bored by what she is saying' (64). The subtext of yet another imbalance of power—between university lecturer and student—is reinforced by the trope of male disinterest in female intelligence with Ben's boredom denoting that his attentiveness is not based on their shared intellectual interests. This situation is exacerbated upon their marriage—and subsequently transformed unequal power relationship to that between husband and wife—when Julie's enthusiasm for her subject fades into obscurity, eclipsed by her new roles as housewife and mother. This, however, becomes the new site of an increasing, though as yet unexpressed, antagonism, with Julie thinking bitterly about how Ben 'always looked so clean and elegant' (87) in clothes which she had washed for him and how she desired to 'drag my groaning linen basket with me [...] shrieking of orgasms missed, to flap my sheets in his face. I wanted to tumble my unscholarly evidence all over his desk, women's domestic labour I wanted to scream' (87). This excerpt develops that theme of the politicisation of the personal in feminism as well as exemplifying an instance of qualitative and subjective experiences challenging traditional modes of political representation as Roberts dramatises Sapiro's argument that 'Political scientists have difficulty incorporating women into the political world because they [the political scientists] lack or reject the appropriate language' (1981: 711). Indeed, Sapiro's comment on resistance to incorporating women's experience into politics parallels Beckett's about feminist 'emphasis on individual experience as the basis for forming political ideas' as 'the exact reverse' of 'how trade unions

and other orthodox left-wing bodies functioned' (2010: 225) with activists, academics and politicians often unwilling—or sometimes simply unable—to use the analytical tools necessary to address women's experience of oppression. As such, Julie's desire to 'tumble [...] unscholarly evidence all over his desk' can be read as symbolising feminist activism itself: that is, no amount of men studying "scholarly evidence" will result in the incorporation of women's experience into their analysis, but, rather, by disrupting traditional politics and intellectual life, imposing (as Julie imagines) women's "unscholarly" reality on structures which lack or reject the language necessary to understand it.

Building on this experience of developing consciousness and action, Roberts describes two instances in Julie's life of more open conflict between genders, which, in being more open, also serve to crystallise her feelings into a more explicit feminism. The first, an encounter reminiscent of the type discussed in *Spare Rib*, relates to an incident at a pub in which a group of men interrupt Julie's conversation with friend and feminist, Jenny, and two other women. Though lecherous and imposing, Julie does not want 'to annoy them by rejecting their abrupt entry into the conversation' while Jenny is more direct, saying, 'For Christ's sake will you go away?' (2002: 98), leading to sexist epithets and an argument before the women, deciding they had had enough, leave unfazed. This show of strength impresses Julie, who 'Two rounds later, safe once more, with these women who were suddenly her comrades, her friends, she is emboldened to demonstrate her appreciation of their performance' (99). The second incident occurs at the end of the same evening, when Julie returns to bed following her outing. Immediately, Ben's hands 'seize her, seeking to know whether she will reject him or not [...] She lies rigid, incapable for once of pretence. As he rolls over away from her again, she catches the words he whispers. Frigid. Lesbian.' (102). Both incidents form examples of the challenge gender conflict brings within representational politics: whereas

earlier, Roberts demonstrates a similarity to Fairbairns in her discussion of the economic underpinning of women's oppression, these incidents bring her closer to Carter's focus on male entitlement to women's bodies and the difficulty of their mediation via representational institutionality. In the first encounter, the politics of interpersonal gender conflict is demonstrated by the entitlement shown in their insistence not to be refused and their anger when they are, resulting in a barrage of sexist insults. Meanwhile, the encounter with Ben, comes at the end of a pattern of behaviour demonstrating hostility to Julie's independent political and social life: after she mentions feminism one time too many, Ben leaves the table, walking past his bookcases containing 'the major works of Marxist historians' (99) before sitting 'headphones on [...] music binding his ears, a language he knows and can think and feel within, jazz bounding his self in safety, syncopating his brain, giving it order and coherence' (100). The bookcases of Marxist historians is clearly intended by Roberts to position Ben as politically on the left yet, nonetheless, deeply threatened by feminism, preferring to—quite literally—block it out, returning 'order and coherence' via the syncopation of his jazz music, which displaces the strong beats of feminism with those of his preconceived ideas and interests. Echoing Sapiro, Ben has difficulty incorporating women into his political worldview because he rejects the language necessary to do so. As such, when he seizes Julie in bed, it is not passionate libidinous rapture but part of his reclamation of ownership, 'to know whether she will reject him or not', due to that sense of ownership being challenged by her burgeoning independence and feminist consciousness.

These incidents also indicate how feminism's politicisation of interpersonal relations functions to challenge established modes of working-class political representation. Indeed, in both incidents Roberts places her antagonists in direct proximity and, therefore, conflict without the possibility for third-party representation (unlike, for instance, opposition by The

Women against dystopian social policy in *Benefits*) demonstrating the degree to which women's liberation forced a reconceptualisation of politics, both in terms of *where* politics take place and the organisational forms it necessitates. Moreover, Roberts' placing these two conflicts one after another within the text invites a comparative reading which highlights the cross-class nature of sexism: while Ben's class position is more clearly signposted (as a multi-property owning academic), the class background of the men in the pub is indicated more obliquely via their colloquial speech and syntax, such as 'Come on, darling, give us a smile' or 'Stuck up bitches, the lot of you' (98), suggesting working-class backgrounds. All, however, revert to misogyny upon challenge of their entitlement to women, Roberts building on Fairbairns' radical feminist who argues that 'Men divide the working class' by suggesting that they also promote class collaboration via a shared stake in patriarchy.

Another aspect of women's experiences which Roberts portrays, which similarly challenges working-class political representation is the gendered nature of working-class experience, such as when Julie goes to the social security office where

women vanish to the cubicles from which their voices drift back, angry, shy, complaining.

- No, I'm not married.
- Yes, I have a child.
- No, the father doesn't pay maintenance.

[...]

Everybody smokes, flicking ash onto the floor [...] Another woman will appear later to clean up. (130)

In this passage, Roberts highlights women's gendered antagonism as subjects largely excluded, as Black and Brooke explained in Chapter Two, from the imagination of postwar welfare capitalism whereby even the gains made in state provision for women continue to be contained by—and subject to pressure from—the inequalities they are intended to ameliorate. In this passage, women's access to social security is based on the degree of their “failure” within the traditional paradigm of family and gender roles, thus reinforcing both. Indeed, the hostility of the institutions to the women applying to them for support is intimated in the depiction of their conversations only via the women's answer, producing the impression of interrogation by a faceless bureaucracy of women isolated within the cubicles.

The continued antagonism around gender with Britain's welfare capitalist institutions also sits alongside an acknowledgement of a continued gender division of labour suggested in the mention of the woman who ‘will appear later to clean up’. Indeed, this demonstration of the gendered nature of working-class experience is something which Roberts supplements with her depiction of the classed nature of gender experience. Roberts depicts these divisions within women's experience in Julie's memory of being a student at Oxford, remembering her meals being ‘served by women in green overalls who have been at work since seven. Silently they watch the intellectuals stuff themselves [...] The undergraduates leave mounds of debris on their plates, it is the work of other women to clear up after them’ (136). The class divisions among women depicted in this passage recall Todd's earlier discussion of Judy Walker, the working-class women's activist who would sometimes clean for other members of her women's group, and shows that the gendered experience of class exists in the same political space as the class experience of gender, in this case, where the privileges of one strata of women are buttressed by the servitude of another.

Roberts' complex interweaving of an intersectional feminism's wide variety of social and political concerns lends credence to Andermahr's point regarding the novel's ambitious scope. However, as Greene explains, the 'most revolutionary feminist fiction is so by virtue of textual practice as well as content' (1991a: 292). This is certainly true for Roberts with her extended use of free indirect style to produce a heightened emphasis of Julie's interiority both to highlight the 'psychological-personal' nature of her political grievances as well as the use of memory in order to chart her intellectual and political development. Furthermore, Andermahr describes *A Piece of the Night* as 'stylistically innovative [identifying] femininity with an experimental, fluid form of writing' (2014: 85). Indeed, the focus on memory and interiority in Roberts' novel results in the "fluidity" of a non-linear narrative structure approximating the continuous flowing of the mind in its narrative shifts 'between countries and across time and characters' and these shifts 'occur from paragraph to paragraph' (O'Rourke 1979: 6). This fragmentary narrative structure reflecting the functioning of Julie's memory as she recalls and analyses her journey to feminist self-consciousness, relates to Greene's comment on the use of memory in feminist literature as 'our means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with' (1991a: 293). Conceived in this way, Roberts' use of memory parallels that of Johnson's in *The Unfortunates* in its eschewal of chronology to reflect the unstructured and fragmentary nature of the mind's—and memory's—functionings which, despite their fragmentary and non-linear nature, nonetheless coalesce into a narrative with which individuals are able to understand who they are and how they came to be. However, the big difference between Roberts' and Johnson's use of fragmentary and non-linear formal techniques is that, for Roberts, such techniques are directly rooted in and designed to reflect the unstructured nature of the consciousness-raising groups which formed vital building blocks of the women's liberation movement. Just as these consciousness-raising groups were essential to women's political

self-discovery—what *Spare Rib* founder Marsha Rowe describes above as having ‘to find a way by... mentioning experience’—so too does the self-discovery narrative become ‘a key, if not dominant, mode’ (Andermahr 2014: 76) of feminist fiction. Exploring the relationship between internal subjectivity and external objective conditions, it becomes a kind of *bildungsroman*, though one which ‘represents a kind of psychological and mythic journey of self-discovery’ (76). As such, parallels can be observed between Roberts’ fragmented narrative and the ‘mess of words [Julie] spills on the floor’ (Roberts 2002: 101) during a consciousness-raising session, which themselves parallel Marsha Rowe’s descriptions of early feminist meetings where it felt like ‘the lid had been taken off’.

The non-linear narrative structure thus reflects the non-linear nature of the discussion groups which brought about Julie’s self-discovery. This relationship between the novel’s form and its content is then restated in the final paragraph of the novel, this time with an intimation of the text’s wider political purpose: ‘Tell me about your past, Julie begins to urge other women and they to urge her. The women sit in circles talking. They are passing telegrams along battle-lines’ (186). A now-politicised Julie is instructing the ‘other women’ of the text to share their stories; yet in removing the quotation marks from Julie’s reported speech, Roberts inflects the narrative prose with Julie’s words, at once breaking the hierarchy of discourses noted by MacCabe and suggesting (at least until the mention of ‘other women’) that the narrator and/or Julie is directly imploring the reader to now share her own experiences. Arguably more than any other text in this chapter, Roberts’ text breaks down the distinction between the ‘social-political’ and the ‘psychological-personal’ with the women’s subjective experiences of patriarchy becoming tools in the struggle against it: their stories become ‘telegrams along battle-lines’, activated as political weapons as they are shared by the women who ‘sit in circles talking’. Meanwhile, in this sentence, the book itself becomes its own

telegram; one which both in form and content reflects the politics and practices of women's liberation as well as its challenge to the established structures of working-class political representation.

## Black British literature: Emecheta, Selvon and Lamming

Similar dynamics to those evident in 1970s feminist fiction can be observed in the Black British fiction of the same period, though—due to the specificity of developments in Black literary and political culture at the time—manifesting somewhat differently. Indeed, the radical Black political culture prefigured by much of the literary production of the previous chapter's Caribbean proletarian literary formation came to fruition in the 1970s, with the 'tolerant and accommodationist' leadership of the immediate postwar years gradually supplanted from the mid-1960s onwards with the increasing importance of Black youth leading these increasingly militant struggles.

However, while Black politics followed the general dynamics of the period in terms of increasing radicalism, the trajectory of Black literary culture over the same period is slightly more complex. Indeed, the termination of *Caribbean Voices* in 1958 resulted in a general decline in opportunities for West Indian writers (with obvious exceptions, such as the award-winning VS Naipaul). In response, EK Brathwaite, John La Rose and Andrew Salkey (among others) founded the Caribbean Artists' Movement (CAM) in 1966, 'originally envisioned as an antidote to the perceived decline in West Indian cultural visibility in Britain since the postwar literary boom' (Brown 2013: 176). However, as noted by McLeod, CAM was 'effectively finished' by 1972 (95), beset by internal disagreements around aesthetics and their relationship to Black politics (and, indeed, what form such politics should take). In contrast to Naipaul—by now a well-established figure in British literary culture—and his

espousal of Victorian aesthetic values and content removed from the tumult of Black British politics, debates within CAM see a dedication to both political commitment and formal experimentation; a subversion of the typical dichotomy between commitment and avant-gardism, for CAM avant-gardism and commitment were necessarily connected—contra the supposed “unideological” appropriation of Victorian aesthetics—suggesting that Black literary politics of the late 1960s and 1970s was already inherently resistant to established modes of representation both in literature and politics. Yet, as Brown notes, disagreements continued along the lines of what such a literary politics might look like (Brathwaite looking to the Caribbean, Salkey and La Rose to diasporic anti-racism), while disagreements around how artists were to relate to the Caribbean community resulted in the withdrawal of significant figures such as Wilson Harris (2013: 179-180).

As such, McLeod describes the 1970s as ‘something of a watershed in the fortunes of postwar black British culture, and especially as regards literary production’ (2014: 94). Specifically, he argues that it ‘marks an ending of a particular moment in the history of black British writing with many of those identified with the postwar migrant generation of writers moving away from Britain, both on the page and in their travels’ (95). Where feminist fiction and the 1970s avant-garde can both be conceived as specific—sometimes overlapping—literary formations whose institutional infrastructures can be thought to emerge from and reflect specific social formations, this period sees the effective dissolution of Black writing as a proletarian literary formation. As McLeod explains, though

possible to speak of black British *writers* of the 1970s, it is much harder to identify a distinctive black British *writing*, formulated (contentiously or confluent) across a body of writers who interacted with each other or wrote in the cognisance of the

examples of others. Black British writers of the 1970s were far more isolated figures, siloed within an often unaccommodating political and cultural landscape (96)

Moreover, what Sivanandan notes as the position of youth as ‘the vanguard of black struggle’ was itself aided by demographic shifts which meant that, by the mid-1970s, an estimated two in five Black people in Britain were born in the country. However, Black British writing remained ‘at a remove from these youthful militant activities partly because much of it was produced *not* by the British-born but by an ‘aging migrant generation’ who were often alarmed by or satirical of their political activities (McLeod 2014: 97). It is indicative of this issue that the oldest Black British character in the fiction discussed in this section is the 18-year-old Brenda, from Sam Selvon’s *Moses Ascending*, itself indicative of the difficulties writers had in imagining the still-emerging experience of Black British adulthood. As such, while much Black British fiction from the period focuses on

the bleak, racist social landscape of the time and the political necessity of challenging prejudice [...] it rarely possesses the ardent experimentalism of youth and seems much more wearied when contemplating the enormity of the task facing those who wish to destroy once and for all the pernicious discourses of race in British life (97)

As McLeod explains, the overriding sentiment underlying much Black British fiction of the 1970s is ‘that a sense of progressive, productive change for the better is difficult to discover or, when envisioned, to sustain’ (98). The combination, then, of the dissolution of Black proletarian literary formations and the disconnect between the older migrant writers and the rebellious British-born Black youth means that while similar tendencies regarding avant-gardism and political representation are broadly observable in the Black British fiction of the

period, those tendencies are less pronounced than might be expected in a period of such social and political tumult, resulting in a shift ‘discernibly away from experimentally creative modes and towards the documentary or chronicle’ (96-97).

One example of documentary realism in Black British writing is Buchi Emecheta—hailing from Nigeria rather than, as with the other Black novelists in this thesis, from the Caribbean—and her 1972 novel, *In the Ditch*. Emecheta centres the perspective of a working-class, Black single mother (Adah, though based on Emecheta’s own experiences) and her struggles in a world structured by race, gender and class. The profundity of these struggles are evident from the outset of the novel, when Adah is depicted as waking in the middle of the night to do battle with ‘the Great Rat’: following it with her eyes, she picks up ‘one of the library books she had piled on the table, aimed carefully at the hopping rat, and flung. The rat, for once, was scared’ (Emecheta 1979: 7). This conflict with the rat then widens out to one with her landlord (a fellow Nigerian) who is able to take ‘best advantage of the situation’ by charging exorbitant rents because ‘unfortunately for Adah, she was black, separated from her husband, and, with five kids all under six, there were few landlords who would dream of taking the like of her into their houses’ (8). Thus, Emecheta demonstrates how the intersecting structures of race, gender and class work simultaneously on the experiences of Black working-class women while the library book as a weapon of struggle is itself symbolically significant not so much in terms of progress within the narrative itself, but insofar as it represents Adah’s struggle to use education for social mobility.

Adah is soon rehoused by the council in the infamous Pussycat Mansions and is, from the beginning, beset with instances of racist interactions such as with Mr Small who comes to complain about the noise made by Adah’s children, beginning with ‘Look, I don’t mind your

colour!' (22) before smiling, glad he had 'put Adah in her place. A black person must always have a place, a white person already had one by birthright' (22). Indeed, such birthright is significant with Mr Small, who works as 'a plumber for the Council, and tradition had it that he was very hard-working' and made clear to Adah that he 'had been born in the Mansions and that Mrs Small had also been born in the Mansions, in the flat just opposite. Adah got the message, [...] She was being told to mind her ways, because the Council would rather listen to reports from the Mansions' senior citizens than to the story of a newcomer' (23). The Mansions here becomes a microcosm for the nation, not merely in the abstract symbolic sense, but rather as the integration of the (white) working class into British welfare capitalism as observed—in contrast with the Angry Young Men—from the outside. The Smalls have their 'place' within the Mansions secured as a nuclear family unit headed by a 'hard-working' skilled tradesman employed in the public sector, over and above a husbandless 'newcomer' (highlighting her "newness" to the nation as well as the Mansions) with five children.

Beyond Adah's struggles within the working class in relation to British welfare capitalism, Emecheta also depicts Adah's struggles with the institutions of welfare capitalism itself. Indeed, her accommodation at the Mansions is itself only secured after 'nine months of court-going, letter-writing and tribunal-visiting' (17) while similar struggle is depicted in Adah's experiences of claiming social security where despite 'Whatever security the signboard might promise her, she began to feel insecure as soon as she stepped into the building' (36). Indeed, paralleling Roberts' depiction of women vanishing behind cubicles to answer questions about their personal lives, Emecheta similarly depicts how Adah 'after what seemed ages [...] shifted and shuffled to the next empty space on the bench until finally you came face to face with the person behind the screen. The person wanted to know the history of your existence [...] In the end, your life and secrets were reduced to a "yes" or "no" table' (36). Similarly to

Roberts, welfare institutions are depicted as a hostile and inhumane bureaucracy invading women's privacy with reductive personal questions.

Dawson argues that 'the everyday struggle for survival recorded by *In the Ditch* therefore offers an important record of poor women's resistance to [...] the welfare state's attempts at oppressive regulation' (2007: 109). However, while noting that Adah's 'resistance to state charity is partially a result of [her] internalisation of classist stereotypes' (110), Dawson goes on to argue that the 'indignities to which the dole's inadequate payments reduce poor women had hardly figured in Adah's views of dole recipients as lazy parasites' (111). Ultimately, argues Dawson, Emecheta's text provides an insight into how the dole makes working-class women 'carefully ration themselves and struggle to make ends meet' while also systematically robbing them 'of their dignity and enforces an infantilising form of dependency on the stern authority of the usually middle-class, male state officials who supervise aid programs' (112). However, while partially true, Dawson seems to underestimate the extent to which Emecheta's text is itself complicit in the stereotypes which Adah's experience of the dole supposedly helps her overcome. For instance, upon receiving her dole money, Adah concludes it was 'not bad, considering that she did not have to work for it' (Emecheta 1979: 40); a particularly peculiar statement given the day-long struggle at the social security office in order to claim it while towards the novel's end 'she was not going to lower herself anymore' by using state services (in this instance, Carol, the Mansions Family Advisor) to 'get easy money' (121). The issue, then, with Emecheta's text is her tendency to run these two meanings of 'dependency' together, both as "supported by" (dole money) and "reliant on" (welfare state bureaucrats). Though linked—in that reliance on bureaucrats (and, therefore, vulnerability to the disciplinary aspect of welfare) comes with support by dole money—the two are not always separated in Emecheta's text while

Dawson's analysis disproportionately emphasises the latter, more progressive, definition rather than the former, more conservative one.

While the struggle against welfare state institutionality (in both its progressive and more conservative guises) exists within Emecheta's text, so too does a strong sense of community among the working-class women living at the Mansions, outlining 'how working-class women across a number of ethnic groups might come together to form a fledgling polycultural network of support and resistance' (McLeod 2014: 110). Indeed, one of the 'consolations and advantages' of living at the Mansions is that there were always warm and natural friends. Friends who took delight in flouting society's laws' (Emecheta 1979: 54-55). One such example can be read in a passage at the rent office when Adah struggles to formulate her complaint about dogs defecating outside her door at which point Whoopey and another tenant 'dashed from the back and held back Adah's hand. "Oh, no, she's not paying your flipping rent [...] Do some'ink about them bleeding bitches, first'" (69). Paralleling Todd's discussion of working-class women's activism from the period, Emecheta depicts the formation of a multiracial working-class women's solidarity: 'Differences in culture, colour, backgrounds and God knows what else had all been submerged in the face of greater enemies—poverty and helplessness' (71).

However, Emecheta does not allow Adah to enjoy such solidarity for long: 'Weeks later, she wondered whether it was worth all the trouble. She saw no mayor, and the dogs continued to leave their droppings outside her door [...] Pussy Cat Mansions were just made like that. Very difficult to change anything' (71). Indeed, this theme around the impossibility to act or to affect any positive change is a consistent theme throughout the novel: following a conversation with Mrs O'Brien about money troubles, the conclusion given by Emecheta's

narrator is that ‘You can’t change Things, you just accept them, and in any case the school bell ding-donged them both back to immediate reality’ (48). Thus, while Emecheta again portrays these moments of cross-cultural emotional solidarity among working-class women—though, for a Black migrant like Adah, a consistently fragile solidarity, evidenced in Mrs O’Brien’s unintentionally crass statement about ‘your people’ (47) immediately before—the ding-donging of the school bell signals the end of such discussion, superseded by a return to ‘immediate reality’ under which all possibility of improving conditions is submerged.

This divestment of agency continues also into the novel’s depiction of collective action (or, rather, lack thereof). Dawson, again, overemphasises the novel’s progressive credentials, describing how ‘mutual aid extends to collective action against the bullying bureaucrats of the welfare state’ and how ‘Adah is frequently encouraged by her neighbors to engage in rent strikes in response to the appalling conditions she must endure in public housing. In addition, she participates as the women organize a protest march’ (2007: 115). While true to an extent, these acts are ultimately depicted as going nowhere, either having no effect—as in Adah’s aforementioned threat of withholding her rent—or simply dissipating into nothing. For instance, in the chapter titled ‘The Ditch-Dwellers’ Revolt’, discussions take place among the women regarding ‘how to force “them” to do “some’ink now”’ (95) with an eventual plan—not dissimilar to that which takes place in Fairbairns’ *Benefits*—to hold ‘a protest march, followed by a long sit-in, in front of the town hall, with crazy banners waving, and as much howling as possible. At the end of the day the kids were to be left at the door, with a letter and all the used banners’ (96). However, soon the weather ‘became much milder’ and the ‘proposed march did not take place’ (100). Thus, the activism of working-class women is ultimately delegitimised, depicted as irrational, with ‘crazy’ banners and ‘howling’, a directionless whim as changeable, quite literally, as the weather. Meanwhile, the quotation

marks around ‘them’ and ‘some’ink’ functions precisely as MacCabe’s description of a hierarchy among discourses, with Emecheta’s meta-language functioning to delegitimise the activism being agitated for in the object language by emphasising its vagueness—with regards both its target and its demands—as well as highlighting its distinctness from the narrative prose in terms of the respectability of its tone and use of non-Standard English vernacular.

This is not to say that Emecheta does not depict action taken against oppressive structures within the novel. As Dawson explains, ‘Adah’s increasing strength is most apparent in her reaction to expressions of racism from some of her neighbors’ (2007: 115). Dawson notes how ‘by the end of her stint at Pussy Cat Mansions, Adah has developed the strength to stand up to such bigotry’ (115). One such example comes at the launderette where a woman positions herself ‘at the centre of the roller so that Adah would not have any room at all’ (Emecheta 1979: 105). In response, Adah ‘pushed her way, wordlessly, but with resolution, to the machine and started with the shabbiest of the pants’ (105). As such, this passage depicts Adah as she imposes herself on space, starting with ‘shabbiest’ pants in a demonstration of overt antagonism, symbolic of the analogous imposition necessary for her—and the wider Black community in Britain—to affirm herself within a racist British society. Yet while Adah imposes herself on British space, Emecheta seems to draw back from the radical implications of such imposition with Adah conjecturing that the woman in question may herself not be fully English as ‘the really happy balanced English natives were the least obstructive to immigrants’ (105). Adah’s guess proves correct (the woman is of Greek origin) while Charlie, the launderette manager and implied figure of ‘balanced English’ nativehood, enters to advise ‘the old lady to learn to give and take’ (106). This passage, in tandem with those discussed previously delegitimising collective protest, can be read as exemplifying

Janice Ho's point regarding Emecheta's subsequent novel, *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), whereby Adah's progress is 'inextricably bound up with the liberal tenets of possessive individualism' evident in her 'steadfast belief in the goals of independence and self-reliance [and] education as a vehicle for upward mobility' (2015: 138). As such, Adah 'seeks an ascent within the system without ever questioning the system itself' (139) with such an ascent conceived in terms of equal access to opportunity for individual social mobility. Thus, Charlie's arrival signals a moment of return to "British" common sense and fair play, in which Adah is "making space" within the nation as it is, rather than seeking its fundamental transformation.

There exists in Emecheta's documentary realist novel, therefore, a significant element of respectability politics, rooted perhaps in part around the novel's original serialisation in the *New Statesman*—itself rooted in the respectability politics of Fabian social democracy—as well as the limited scope for a working-class Black single-mother to engage with "unrespectable" narratives in the same way as writers like Sillitoe or even Selvon. Nevertheless, the result is that there exist parallels with the similar respectability politics of Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love*. Indeed, Emecheta's dedication of the novel to her father, 'Railwayman and 14<sup>th</sup> Army Soldier in Burma' (6) seems to function similarly to Braithwaite's frequent mention of his own RAF service, in this case Emecheta's highlighting his role as both worker and soldier serving to underpin her own claim to inclusion within the constituency of British welfare capitalism. Such respectability is expressed not merely in terms of the novel's politics—around benefits and collective action—but also in an oft-neglected aspect in discussions of the novel's communal and solidaristic themes: specifically, that while Adah is "in the ditch" and shares space with the other working-class women there, she nonetheless remains distinct from them. Though she sympathises with the women's needs

for ‘fancy men’ (60) Adah herself remains sexless throughout the text; while the other women swear and use the vernacular typical of working-class Londoners, Adah for the most part shares the Standard English register of the narrator; and while the Mansions’ mums make ‘empty plans’ in Carol’s office (41) and Whoopey, having ‘not learned her lesson’ (124), ends the novel pregnant again by a man she hardly knows, Adah not only ends the novel detaching herself from the ‘dependency’ of state handouts but the novel’s autobiographical nature itself stands as a testament to the fulfilment of (at least some of) her plans. Though not as dismissive as Braithwaite, Emecheta’s novel frequently diminishes the significance of community—even while simultaneously valorising it—in favour of a narrative focusing on the trials of an exceptional individual with such a focus limiting the scope of the novel to one which intends to create space within British welfare capitalism rather than indicating the potential for its fundamental transformation. As McLeod explains, ‘Emecheta’s understanding of the grim realities of the 1970s effectively counteracts and circumscribes such transformative utopianism’ (2014: 111). Indeed, Emecheta’s documentary style leaves little room for imagining possibilities beyond ‘the density and solidity of what is’.

Emecheta’s focus, then, on ‘Adah’s seemingly unending struggle to survive within an enduring racist and sexist milieu’ means that while she is able to ‘imagine and record moments of solidarity and resistance which challenge chauvinism, these are forever fragile and grimly, perpetually attenuated’ (111).

As with *The Lonely Londoners*, Sam Selvon’s 1975 novel, *Moses Ascending*, similarly eschews respectability politics and takes a wider—though, as will be discussed below, somewhat problematic view—of Black community. Picking up the story twenty years later, Selvon depicts Moses, having saved enough money to buy a dilapidated house in Shepherd’s Bush to become a landlord with a white manservant called Bob, getting into a series of

farcically comic predicaments such as hosting the headquarters of a Black Power organisation and aiding the traffic of illegal migrants.

Consistent with his depiction in *The Lonely Londoners* of a British racial capitalism beyond the level of individual phobia, Selvon begins his novel with a similarly structural perspective on the articulations of race and class. Indeed, expounding on his new position as landlord, Moses explains how ‘Whereas I did have a worm’s eye view of life, I now had a bird’s eye view’ (2008: 5), suggestive of an understanding of class relations in which the distinction is not—as in *Room at the Top*—merely a spatial one between “high” and “low”, but rather an inherently relational and antagonistic one between “hunter” and “hunted”. From this ‘bird’s eye view’, Moses describes himself as ‘taking an objective view of this whole business of employment’ whereby the Black man, for Moses, is privileged

to be in charge of the city whilst the rest of Brit’n is still abed. [...] He is the first passenger of the day. He is the harbinger who will put the kettle on to boil. He holds the keys of the city, and he will unlock the doors and tidy the papers on the desk, flush the loo, straighten the chairs, Hoover the carpet. (7-8)

This passage thus outlines the hyper-exploitation of Black labour upon which racial capitalism is dependent. Yet this section is also laced with irony, evident not only in Moses’ talk of how privileged Black workers are to ‘be in charge’ by virtue of performing the menial tasks on behalf of those who actually *will* be ‘in charge’ for the rest of the day, but also in the following paragraph’s musing on the Black worker’s ‘humble gratitude’ as he ‘looks about him at mahogany furniture, at deeply-padded sofas and armchairs, at myriading chandeliers [...] at silver cutlery and crystal glass, at Renoirs and Van Goghs’ (8). The irony here being

that they should feel ‘humble gratitude’ when it is their labour mentioned in the previous paragraph which enables such a lengthy list of luxury items. Furthermore, it is an irony of which Moses is scarcely aware: as Ramraj explains, Selvon ‘clearly intends this passage ironically, but [...] Moses appears to be taking both literally and ironically what he says here about the opportunities available to the blacks’ (2003: 80); that is, any irony expressed by Moses in this passage is done so self-consciously at the expense of Black workers. As such, Moses’ supposed ‘objective view’ is exposed as anything but; his ‘bird’s eye view’ is not a detached perspective, surveying proceedings from the benefit of a higher “objective” vantage point but rather the self-interested perspective of a predatory capitalist.

As discussed in Chapter Two, such a structural understanding of the articulations of race and class is consistent with the ideological framework underpinning both *The Lonely Londoners* and the British Black liberation movement of the 1970s. Similarly, Selvon also mentions issues surrounding racist policing, such as his statement that ‘when you are a black man, even though you abide by the laws you are always wary of the police’ (2008: 39). Thus, despite his protagonist’s seeming hostility to the Black community, Selvon nonetheless uses him to display a sensitivity to the issues affecting racialised communities in 1970s Britain.

Such sensitivity, however, is inconsistent. While Moses’ statements are clearly intended to be held up for satire, there is also a sense that satire in Selvon’s novel is not always so clearly controlled. As Ramchand explains, in *Moses Ascending*, Selvon ‘uses comedy to evade troubling issues’ (2003: 85) while the balance between comedy and tragedy—so conscientiously applied in *The Lonely Londoners*—is not ‘so consistently maintained’ (87-88); rather, ‘the comedy moves in a vein of farce and burlesque that suggests, in the midst of late twentieth-century social and cultural flux, either cynicism or an agnosticism that can

mock all sides of every question' (88). Selvon's satire remains fundamentally uncontrolled, particularly with respect to how racism is deployed in the novel as well as his engagement with Black power. Thus, while Selvon's 'hodgepodge of registers and styles and accents' is 'so deliberately subversive of literary and linguistic canons and their social implications that it can be deemed anti-imperial' (87), he simultaneously and no less significantly produces a text which is all too frequently complicit in the ideologies he intends to subvert.

Given Moses' establishment early in the novel as a vessel for reactionary ideas, there exists a degree of detachment between his frequent—and flagrant—displays of racism and the perspective of the text as a whole. However, issues begin where narrative events serve to confirm Moses' initial prejudices: upon hearing that Bob has rented the room to two Asian men, Moses suspects the existence of 'an international racket to smuggle Pakis into Brit'n!' (81). Yet rather than the adventure's revelatory moment result in Moses' satirisation for subscribing so readily to racist stereotypes, Moses does in fact discover an international racket to smuggle Asians into Britain. Similarly, when Moses says he has 'read in the newspapers about some Pakis in the Black Country slaughtering animals in their back gardens' (65), an interesting contrast can be made with *The Lonely Londoners*, in which Moses says that 'whatever the newspaper and radio say in this country that is the people Bible' (Selvon 2006: 2): highlighting the impressionability of the public with regards to racist media discourse, Selvon satirises such discourse in its contrast with the roguish but essentially sympathetic misadventures of the novel's characters. By contrast, in *Moses Ascending*, media claims about Asians slaughtering animals in their back gardens is confirmed in a moment of Orientalist discourse where Moses is informed (erroneously) that the eyes are 'a great delicacy' (2008: 74).

Selvon's satirisation of Black Power is equally uncontrolled, beginning with Moses' warning to Galahad that 'the black man cannot unite' (2008: 55). As with his questionable statements about Asians, Moses is frequently proven correct by narrative events, such as when the leader of Galahad and Brenda's Black Power organisation absconds with the party funds (151). Such moments of quasi-Naipaulian levels of farce serve to confirm the cynicism of Moses' statement about Black unity, complicit with various aspects of racial discourse around Black intellectual deficiency and inability to organise. Ultimately, as Ramchand points out, 'Selvon's ribald comedy in this novel has no system of belief or value to which it might attach itself' (2003: 95). Thus, even while the novel shares many of the concerns of the British Black liberation movement, its uncontrolled satire finds itself complicit in many of the reactionary discourses surrounding 1970s Black Britons and their activism. Indeed, against this context, Moses' conflicts with Brenda—in the form of whether she will sleep with him or Bob, or their various arguments around writing and politics—seem symbolic of a wider conflict imagined by Selvon between the older generation of Caribbean migrants (of which Selvon was a part) and the new generation of Black British youth who Sivanandan describes as 'the vanguard of black struggle'. Though the novel ends with Moses reduced again to his 'worm's eye view', the mention of 'a pair of Brenda's dirty panties hook up on a chair from an interlude the night before' (Selvon 2008: 184) suggests that while the novel may begin as a satirisation of Moses and his worldview, it ends with a final conquest for the older generation's cynicism against the radicalism of youth. Selvon's text thus trains its satirical eye as much on those opposing the racist structures depicted so artfully at the beginning of the novel as on those structures themselves.

In contrast to Selvon's satirical cynicism, is George Lamming's *Water with Berries* (1971), following three Caribbean artists (Teeton, a painter; Roger, a musician; and Derek, an actor),

living in London. Teeton's living situation is particularly illustrative, lodging with his landlady (known only as the Old Dowager), in a room which he has come to think of as 'a separate and independent province of the house. The house was the Old Dowager's; but the room was his; and house and room were in some way their joint creation; some unspoken partnership in interests they had never spoken about' (Lamming 2016: 35). Lamming's use of free indirect style here represents what Jeri Johnson describes as 'representing character through pre-verbal or unspoken "thoughts"' (1993: xxi), evident in explicit acknowledgement of their 'unspoken partnership' and 'interests they had never spoken about'. Yet that the voice inflected in the narration is Teeton's is clear from the contradictory perception of the room as an 'independent province' despite the fact that the house 'was the Old Dowager's' and, by extension, the room cannot—by definition—be 'his' nor the house 'their joint creation'. Rather, what Lamming is illustrating, then, in the context of post-colonial independence for many Caribbean nations, is the enduring nature of their dependency on the "Mother Country"—indeed, Teeton himself indicates the maternal nature of The Old Dowager's feelings towards him, believing her to love him 'as a son, as she might have loved her own offspring.' (221)—and, as such, the continuance of the colonial relationship in the supposedly post-colonial context. As Anthony Bogues notes, such concerns manifest in Lamming's novels following *The Emigrants*, which take place on the fictional island of San Cristobal and emerge as he

begins to think about how Caribbean anti-colonial nationalism had secured a formal political independence that shattered the possibilities of West Indian federation and established nation states. In this formal constitutional decolonisation process the middle classes became the new political elite without any rupture from the forms of political rule established by British colonial power (2011: xxv-xxvi)

*Water with Berries*, however, is an exception to this with San Cristobal existing on the periphery of a narrative set in almost entirely in the United Kingdom. It does, however, remain ever-present in Teeton's membership of the 'Gathering', a group of revolutionaries exiled after their failed rebellion against the country's post-independence neo-colonial government currently plotting their return from a basement 'like a cell [they] have tunnelled deep underground' (Lamming 2016: 62). For Teeton, San Cristobal's sovereignty 'was no more than an exchange of ownership. There had been no end to the long and bitter humiliations of foreign rule' (39). In this analysis of post-independence San Cristobal, Teeton is channelling Fanon's 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' with regards to the colonised 'national middle class' which believes 'it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country' but whose vision of independence 'will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country' (1963: 149) as it seeks merely 'the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are the legacy of the colonial period' (153). This self-interested 'national middle class' is depicted in the character of Jeremy: cultural attaché at the San Cristobal Embassy, Teeton suspects Jeremy's presence indicates infiltration on the part of San Cristobal's government. Jeremy is described as 'Flexible as a worm, he seemed to penetrate the narrowest spaces' (2016: 107), suggesting simultaneously the potential danger of a 'worm' like Jeremy penetrating the narrow space of the Gathering's underground meeting as well as the "spineless" adaptability of Fanon's national middle class to the structures of neo-colonialism.

Furthermore, an interesting politics begins to emerge from the stand-offish intellectual sparring which ensues between the two, with Jeremy asking pointedly, 'You like them?' (111), the 'them' in question being 'the English' as a collective national entity though the

ones indicated here being the regulars at Teeton's local pub, to which Teeton notes he 'had come to the defence of the English with surprising ease' (112). Conversation later moves onto 'Flamingo', an anti-colonial intellectual disparaged by Jeremy as thinking 'the Thirties were yesterday', to which Teeton responds, 'He also thinks the slave is very much with us today' (115). That Lamming mentions 'the Thirties' is significant: a period of widespread labour unrest across the British Caribbean, about which Lamming argued 'the major thrust of Caribbean literature in English rose from the soil of labour resistance in the 1930s [which] had a direct effect on liberating the imagination and restoring the confidence of men and women in the essential humanity of their simple lives' (Lamming 2001: 22). That Jeremy wishes to diminish the contemporary relevance of those struggles underscores his status as national bourgeois, content with limiting the imaginations liberated by that period of unrest to the simple 'exchange of ownership' and in opposition to Teeton's insistence that the structures of the colonial period remain. Yet this passage is no mere dramatisation of the antagonism between neo-colonial national bourgeoisie and Fanonite revolutionary anti-colonialism; in the 'surprising ease' with which Teeton defends the English, Lamming begins to outline—as mentioned in Chapter Two's discussion of *The Emigrants*—a Black politics rooted in the diaspora, influenced by anti-colonialism and class politics against the neo-colonial politics of bourgeois nationalism.

The political radicalism of Lamming's text is similarly matched by an aesthetic radicalism evidenced in its generic shifts between novel and drama, how it works with space and the distension of temporalities and its use of free indirect style to diminish narrative authority and emphasise the clashing interiorities of the novel's characters. For example, though Teeton believes the Old Dowager thinks of him primarily 'as a son', another passage depicts the Old Dowager's feelings, unbeknownst to Teeton, as romantic in nature, feeling 'like a girl again,

struggling against the first warning of excitement' as they prepare to meet (185).

Furthermore, Lamming also uses a form of fragmented interior mono/dialogue to transcribe the fragmented interiority of the colonised subject. For instance, in a passage where Teeton meets a white woman called Myra, who it transpires (unknown to the characters themselves) to be the Old Dowager's daughter, on Hampstead Heath. However, as they talk, Teeton begins to think of his escape from San Cristobal:

But I did leave. You took up the offer to get away. It was not even escape. I might have stayed. It was your duty to stay. Whatever the consequences, he had a duty to honour his promise to the men he had left behind. Your courage was then a promise which required no oath. There was a chance you would have died. It happened to some you left behind. You knew it was more than a chance. Your commitment had accepted such a certainty. Was it, then, his fear? Was it your fear of death which, after all, is soon over? It was his fear of knowing that he would have to die. He would have to bear witness to his dying. You would have been condemned for life to the spectacle of yourself about to die. (131-132)

The shift between first, second and third person in Teeton's interior mono/dialogue is Lamming's method for depicting his fragmented interiority. But it also suggests a continued engagement with Fanon—*Black Skin White Masks*, this time—in which he describes the experience of Blackness in a white-dominated world: 'I existed triply', writes Fanon, feeling simultaneous responsibility 'for my body, for my race, for my ancestors' (2008: 84). Black "triple-existence" manifests therefore not only in Lamming's use of the first-person (Teeton's 'body') for self-reflection—'I might have stayed'—but also the second person for the imagined direct interrogation from Teeton's 'race' and the third person to represent a more removed discourse with his ancestors while the increasingly accusatory nature of the second

and third-person statement (along with their dominance within the passage as a whole) themselves indicate the weight of such “triple-existence” on Black interiority. Teeton is told ‘It was your duty to stay. Whatever the consequences, he had a duty to honour his promise to the men he had left behind’, with ‘the men he had left behind’ itself suggesting a sense of abandonment not only of his comrades in San Cristobal but those who have suffered throughout the history of colonial abuses. Yet the weight of this “triple-existence” is also part of that which reconfigures the colonised subject as an antagonistic (racialised) class-subject, impelled to resolve this fragmented interiority by breaking the colonial relationship to create a post-racial, postcolonial world beyond the mere ‘transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are the legacy of the colonial period’.

Teeton’s interactions with Myra on the Heath also indicate the possibilities for a post-racial world, in part because their meetings take place in complete darkness making them unable to see each other’s racial difference but also because of the therapeutic and altruistic nature of their interactions: on their second meeting, Myra tells Teeton of her rape in San Cristobal, the divulsion of which leaves her ‘exhausted; but there was also a feeling of relief’ (175).

However, though further meetings between the two—and the post-racial potentialities they imply—are planned, these are dashed by subsequent narrative events suggesting that hopes for such communicative strategies for repairing the damage of colonial violence are similarly unable to move beyond the realities of a world structured for the benefit of racial hierarchies.

Indeed, it is here that the text’s profound engagement with *The Tempest* becomes important, latticing the entire narrative from the title’s origins in Caliban’s introductory speech to Lamming’s reconfiguration of Miranda as Myra and Randa (Teeton’s ex-wife) and the explicit recitation of quotes from the play in a passage focused on two transitory characters

who discuss the principal protagonists in their absence (itself a typically Shakespearian technique). Lamming's interest in *The Tempest*, and the Caliban/Prospero analogy for the colonial relationship—where Prospero is the coloniser and Caliban the colonised—can be traced in Lamming's work to at least his 1960 non-fiction, *The Pleasures of Exile*, in which he discusses the need to appropriate 'Prospero's magic' (xviii), that is, language and culture as a signifier of colonial authority: 'we shall never explode Prospero's old myth until we christen Language afresh [...] until we make available to all the result of certain enterprises undertaken by men who are still regarded as the unfortunate descendents of languageless and deformed slaves' (2005: 118-119). Yet as Brown suggests in his introduction to the 2016 Peepal Tree Press edition, it is necessary to read Lamming's title against the context of Caliban's initial Act One speech from which it is drawn:

When thou cam'st first,  
Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me  
Water with berries in't

What Brown is suggesting here is that Lamming wants to illustrate 'the intimate, bedevilling ties of interpersonal colonial contact. [...] Prospero did not just come and conquer, but instead exchanged kindnesses under the pretence of mutual affection and only later emerged as a tyrant. Water with berries thus references a loving gift from Prospero to Caliban, a gift whose fruit has, only in retrospect, turned bitter' (2016: 10). Indeed, these 'intimate, bedevilling ties' are most clearly manifest in Lamming's text in the aforementioned 'unspoken partnership' between Teeton and the Old Dowager, which suggests that the colonial relationship is not maintained solely through force but also consensual means: despite his utter dependence on

the Old Dowager within the house, Teeton nonetheless believes it to be ‘their joint creation’ while the Old Dowager herself does indeed show a genuine affection for Teeton.

These ‘intimate, bedevilling ties’ are evident in another passage filled with subverted references to *The Tempest*, in which Teeton, the Old Dowager and her (violently racist) brother-in-law Ferdinand sail on a small boat to the Orkney islands. Responding to Teeton’s questions about the boat, the Old Dowager responds, ‘it’s [Ferdinand’s] boat [...] It’s his and mine [...] Which means it’s also yours while you’re here. It’s ours. The boat belongs to all of us’ (Lamming 2016: 210). The unsatisfactory nature of this response—whereby the boat initially belongs to Ferdinand and only by two degrees of separation comes to include Teeton—is offset by Teeton’s feeling that the Old Dowager had been ‘so protective of his interests, that he felt no impulse to show displeasure’ though he does begin to perceive ‘a sense, deep and subtle and even dangerous, in which she had achieved some powerful hold on the roots of his emotion’ (211). Indeed, this attempt to include Teeton in the shared ownership of space (which he does not own) is a repeat of their ‘unspoken partnership’ at home and, in this context, finds its contradictions unveiled: the boat, then, becomes a metaphor for the attempt to start afresh without acknowledging the colonial violence—or breaking with the colonial relationship—that has brought them together.

By the end of the novel, such delicately balanced relationships begin to collapse as Teeton and the Old Dowager ‘demolished the rules of their private game; and now she was confirming that she didn’t care about their preservation anyway. [...] She was prepared to come out from behind their codes’ (255). Returning to his theme of Caliban lacking ‘Prospero’s magic’, Lamming depicts Teeton not knowing ‘what sound his tongue should make; what language he could make his own. But he wanted to speak [...] he had no

language; no tongue that he could call his own. [...] this total speechlessness which had now made him prisoner in his own dark and distorting consciousness' (256). Yet, as in John Berger's *G*, even without the language, Teeton 'can and does act', murdering the Old Dowager and burning her body; as he sails away from the island, Lamming depicts his thoughts: 'Calm, you are so calm. He was so calm. I am, he was struggling not to say, so calm. A trinity of voices came up from the floor of the ocean. Calm, Teeton was ready to move; and he was so calm' (274). Contrary to the previous discussion of Teeton's "triple-existence", there is a soothing concordance in the statements of the body, race and ancestors. Meanwhile, in contrast to the earlier passage's shift towards and dominance of interrogatory second and third-person interior mono/dialogue, this passage sees the move from second and third to the first person and then, finally, to the voice of a third-person heterodiegetic narrator: 'Calm, Teeton was ready to move; and he was so calm'. The clear break with the colonial relationship represented in the Old Dowager's murder has resolved the "triple-existence" of Teeton's interiority, allowing for its representation through the stability of third-person narration.

What Lamming's textual resolution suggests, then, is that the colonial relationship cannot be ended by benevolence or even a 'simple parting of ways' but rather by a decisive break even with 'a certain kind of violence in the breaking' (Lamming 2011: 164). For Lamming, coloniser and colonised cannot continue to awkwardly occupy the same boat, nor can independence be more than formal if an 'independent province' remains part of the coloniser's house. Teeton's decisive break in murdering the Old Dowager is therefore not one of personal enmity—as attested by his aforementioned calmness—but rather that the 'future had come between them' (Lamming 2016: 275); that is, the postcolonial, post-racial 'future'

glimpsed in his interactions with Myra, but which necessitated an active breaking from the ‘unspoken partnership’ of the past.

Yet it is equally significant to add that Lamming’s focus on breaking the colonial relationship is not focused only on the Caribbean but also the diaspora: asked in an interview as to whether Teeton’s revolutionary comrades will return to San Cristobal, Lamming responds: ‘I think no. [...] They are not going to return. What they will have to deal with now is the new reality in the experience – that is, the world – the increasing world of Blacks in England, rather than what they propose to do about the world on the island.’ (Lamming 2011: 168). Thus, it is significant that the novel closes with an image of Black anti-colonial revolutionaries struggling for justice in Britain: ‘the Gathering defied the nation with their furious arguing that Teeton was innocent. / They were all waiting for the trials to begin’ (276). Teeton’s “innocence” here is implied in the historic sense rather than in relation to his specific crime; that is, though guilty of the crime against the Old Dowager, he is ‘innocent’ in the sense of having done “nothing wrong” with regards to making the necessary break with the historic crime of colonialism. Meanwhile, the closing sentence works with a similar double-meaning of ‘trials’ as both court case, but also the future struggles in navigating, unpicking and, ultimately, breaking with the colonial relationship. Importantly, the ‘They’ of this passage can be read as relating to Black people in Britain—expanding on the outlines suggested by the ‘surprising ease’ with which Teeton defends the English against the ‘national middle class’ Jeremy—to indicate a diasporic anti-racism motivated by anti-colonialism and class analysis. Indeed, reading *Moses Ascending* and *Water with Berries* against each other it becomes clear that while both novelists write with an awareness of their relative detachment from the developments of contemporary Black British life and politics, their narrative strategies differ in how they relate to those developments and their detachment

therewith: Selvon responds with comic farce and a satiric hostility aimed at a Black British youth for whom he seems to hold a combination of fascination and competitiveness; whereas, by contrast, Lamming seems cognisant that his generation of older Caribbean migrants are moving into the past and the necessity to make space for—rather than satirise—the struggles of the new Black diaspora to break with the colonial relationship and fundamentally transform society beyond a mere ‘exchange of ownership’.

## Conclusion

The widespread struggles during the late-1960s and 1970s—whether against class exploitation, patriarchy, white supremacy or some combination of the three—saw the rise of some of the most powerful social movements since the 1920s. These movements challenged not only the rule of both capital and the state but also those institutions of working-class political representation whose role it is to mediate class antagonism in society and, by extension, are predicated on the continued existence of a society based on class antagonism.

This period also saw the diffusion of experimental fiction which frequently engaged with the forces of antagonism challenging both class society and working-class political representation. This is not to say that all fiction from the period experimenting with literary form was necessarily rooted in such antagonism nor that all fiction rooted in antagonistic subject positions or social movements were necessarily experimental: Zoë Fairbairns’ *Benefits*, for instance, successfully dramatises the feminist movement debates around paying women for domestic labour but, as a realist ‘novel of ideas’ focusing on social policy, tended to de-emphasise other aspects of the women’s liberation movement which ruptured more profoundly with established modes of political representation—such as the politics of the interpersonal, which may lend itself more readily to non-realist literary forms emphasising

interiority, fragmentation, and so on—in favour of a reestablished welfare state reinforced by the political representation of women in a single unitary representational institution.

Rather, what is being argued here is that where novels rooted in antagonistic subject positions seek to transcend the boundaries of established representational political forms and/or the fundamental structures of society upon which those forms are based, those texts will tend to draw on experimental aesthetic modes. This is evident in the works emerging from the avant-garde literary milieu and feminist ‘counter-public sphere’, both of which are considered within the context of this thesis as ‘proletarian literary formations’ due to their roots in a broadly-defined working-class movement (such as the avant-garde’s connections to the left-leaning counter-culture and feminist fiction’s roots in a women’s liberation movement often formulating—gendered—class demands). As such, what becomes clear reading *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* by BS Johnson or *G.* by John Berger is the centring of antagonistic class-subjects in narratives deploying radical textual strategies to draw out the ineradicability of class antagonism and fundamentally undermine the ‘density and solidity of what is’. Similarly, in *A Piece of the Night*, Michèle Roberts uses free indirect style and fragmentary form to produce her self-discovery narrative rooted in an intersectional class-based feminism and drawing out precisely those aspects of women’s liberation which most fully challenged established modes of working-class political representation.

Moreover, even where such formations did not exist—such as around the fiction of Black British writers—similar tendencies can be observed: see, for instance, the limited scope for action in Buchi Emecheta’s documentary realist *In the Ditch*, compared with George Lamming’s overtly avant-gardist *Water with Berries*. Yet such distinctions should not be taken to be descriptive of unambiguously discrete and dichotomous categories, but rather

exist along a continuum in which the texts in question make use of literary materials which have their own 'specific weight' and upon use 'retain a certain autonomy' with regards to their reaffirmation of or resistance to representational political practices. For instance, *Moses Ascending* is veritably heteroglossic in its integration of a range of registers and styles in its satirisation of novelistic convention, but the 'certain autonomy' of these conventions nonetheless leave their mark on Selvon's novel to produce a text distinctly more realist-inflected—and, equally, more limited in its political horizons—than *The Lonely Londoners*. Thus, as with previous chapters, where realist techniques tend towards the production of texts which, while remaining oppositional strategies, find themselves unable to transform the structural boundaries of the form, the deployment of avant-garde techniques in texts rooted in class antagonism finds such avant-gardism transformed into a 'galvanic force' challenging the 'density and solidity of what is'.

# Conclusion: the homology of working-class representations

The aim of this thesis has been twofold: firstly, to outline, problematise and interrogate the structures of working-class representation in both literature and politics in order to demonstrate the structural homology between them; and secondly, to contribute to the past century of Marxist literary critical debate with the intention of remedying the curious absence of the working class as both a literary and political subject within their analytical frameworks. Indeed, related to this second aim, this thesis has also attempted to expand the concept of “working-class writing” or “working-class literature” beyond the—often pedantic—haggling over the respective backgrounds, affiliations and trajectories of specific writers to a focus on broader literary formations rooted in broadly-defined ‘proletarian’ social formations relevant to an intersectionally-conceived working-class movement.

With regards to the first aim, this thesis has attempted to theorise the relationship between realism and the tradition of aesthetic experimentation from modernism onwards to those political practices which variously reaffirm, challenge or rupture with working-class representation. As discussed in the introduction, while Gąsiorek is correct to complicate notions of a singular, static realism, what he calls its ‘general cognitive stance *vis-à-vis* the world’ as well as a ‘mimetic impulse’ and ‘commitment to some form of referentiality’ nonetheless forms a core of principles which informs the relationship between that aesthetic mode—despite internal heterogeneity—with the social world and, specifically, the practices of working-class political representation. This thesis has therefore attempted to tease out the relationship between political and aesthetic forms of representation, described by Rancière as rooted in their shared implication in the ‘distribution of the sensible’, whereby aesthetics

serves to delimit ‘the visible and the invisible’ that ‘simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience’ while politics ‘revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it’ (2011: 13). Drawing on Rancière, then, this thesis has theorised the tensions within aesthetic and political practices—that is, between realism and avant-gardism, and representation and its rupture—as producing varied interventions in the distribution of the sensible, their varying aesthetic and political strategies serving to make visible (or not) particular experiences as well as what can (or cannot) be said about them.

This relationship between political and aesthetic forms of representation has therefore been described in this thesis as structurally homologous because their functioning is not simply an instance of similar or parallel phenomena. While Eisenzweig is correct to indicate the ‘common resistance to the principle of representation’ of symbolists and anarchists during France’s ‘era of bombings’ (1995: 81), the relationship between form and working-class politics can be discerned as far more profound through an interrogation of the structural functioning of both representational modes. What Gąsiorek describes as realism’s ‘general cognitive stance *vis-à-vis* the world’ can be reconfigured, in Jameson’s words, as ‘an epistemological claim’ masquerading ‘as an aesthetic ideal’ (2015: 5) of access to the social world “as it is”. The result of this is twofold: the first is that—with caveats discussed already in this thesis and which will be outlined again below—realism lends itself more readily to a politics of stability, with Jameson describing the realist novelist as having ‘a vested interest, an ontological stake, in the solidity of social reality’ (5). The application of a supposedly “neutral” language to fulfil the ‘mimetic impulse’ of depicting the social world “as it is” is a specific intervention in the distribution of the sensible that reaffirms the apparent ontological necessity of that world and, as such, lends itself more readily to a politics rooted in that ontological necessity. However, it is not the argument of this thesis that realist novels exist

merely to reaffirm the world they depict (the discussions in Chapter One of Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* and Wilkinson's *Clash* would clearly contradict such a notion). Rather, realism in working-class writing remains 'an oppositional strategy in itself' (Fox 1994: 47), its texts what Jameson may term individual *paroles* within a class *langue* in dialogue with hegemonic cultural practices (2002: 70); however, this oppositional strategy is one which exists 'without necessarily transforming [the] structural boundaries' of the novel (Snee 1979: 169) as an artistic form emerging from within class society.

The second result of realism's 'epistemological claim' is that in claiming an access to the social world "as it is", the author uses literary techniques which—to use Spivak's terminology—sees them 'represent themselves as transparent' (1988: 274). Such claims to transparency are themselves a site of self-interest, concealing the subject-position of those representing the world "as it is". Indeed, parallels with Spivak can be discerned with MacCabe's discussion of the 'classic realist text' and its 'metalanguage' which seeks to let 'the identity of things shine through the window of words' (1983: 35). The result is the construction of a hierarchy between the discourses of the metalanguage able to 'state all the truths in the object language – those words held in inverted commas – and can also explain the relation of this object to the real' (35); that is, between Spivak and MacCabe, there becomes discernible within the structure of the relationship of the mimetic impulse to the world being represented, a tendency to diminish precisely its own representational function.

The structural homology between the literary and political practices of working-class representation exists (beyond the aforementioned similarity or parallel) because the corresponding components of their representational relationships are structured in order to perform the same function between represented and those representing. As discussed in the

introduction, in both scholarship on the labour movement and, indeed, its own rhetoric ('the members are the union'), that distinction is frequently effaced. For instance, in Erik Olin Wright's terminological conflation between 'working-class power' and 'working-class associational power' there is an elision of the distinction between workers and their associations: 'associational power' is configured in terms of the *formation of associations* (rather than the *act of association*) while, even more curiously, 'workers' power' is depicted as predicated on workers being 'sufficiently well organised' for their associations to discipline their own members (again, with no exploration of the implications this may suggest in the distinction between the two). Just as the realist aesthetic function relies on presenting itself as an "immaterial" 'window of words' through which 'the identity of things shine through', so too does the function of working-class political representation rely on eliding the distinction between officialdom and base, representatives and represented.

Meanwhile, the genesis and function of working-class political representation in the mediation of class antagonism in society—and, as such, its structural necessity upon the continuity of class society itself—is a phenomenon long-noted within various traditions of the workers' movement from a young Antonio Gramsci to the Argentine anarchist union, the FORA. However, the issue here is not related to the "insufficient" radicalism of social democratic institutions, but rather that the structure of working-class representation presupposes the continuation of class society. As Przeworski explains (and the experiences of the CPUSA and CPGB show), the 'relation of representation is thus imposed upon the class by the very nature of capitalist democratic institutions. [...] In this manner participation demobilised the masses' (2002: 14), the political radicalism of individuals in representative positions being less significant than the continuation of class society, which is a structural necessity for working-class representational institutions. This, obviously, does not mean that

working-class political representation is “bad” or, even more crudely, a “trick” diverting workers from their “historic mission”. Rather, while it is undoubtedly ‘an oppositional strategy in itself’, it remains one which exists ‘without necessarily transforming [the] structural boundaries’ of representation as a political form emerging from within class society and that, from a structural perspective, the working-class representational institution has ‘a vested interest [...] in the solidity of social reality’ even when it seeks change within it.-

As such, from this homology between literary and political modes of working-class representation, this thesis has argued three points with regards to the working-class literature of this period: firstly, that those working-class texts most closely adhering to the strategies and techniques associated with realism have lent themselves more readily to—or been more readily appropriated by—a politics more firmly rooted in working-class political representation. This tendency is visible in the novels of the interwar realist working-class authors discussed in Chapter One: for instance, Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole*, while artfully making the case for societal reorganisation, nonetheless frequently seeks to contain working-class radicalism. This occurs principally via what MacCabe calls the ‘hierarchy amongst the discourses’, which in Greenwood’s novel privileges his socialist lead, Larry Meath.

Meanwhile, Ellen Wilkinson’s General Strike novel, *Clash*, focalises its narrative of mass working-class collective action through its union representative protagonist, Joan Craig, resulting in the symbolic elision of the distinction between them typical of representational politics (while simultaneously maintaining a satiric hostility for Communists and their flimsy relationship to the ‘solidity of what is’). Similarly, the postwar restabilisation of class society via the integration of a (gendered and racialised) working class into welfare capitalism found its literary embodiment in the texts of the Angry Young Men discussed in Chapter Two: these novels follow their white, male, working-class autodiegetic narrators as they navigate

postwar affluence (such as Barstow's *A Kind of Loving*) and social mobility (such as Braine's *Room at the Top*). Not only does the monological dominance of their protagonists reproduce the distinctly racialised and gendered conceptions of class of postwar British social democracy, but their motifs of navigating affluence and social mobility accept an immutability of class society, transforming class into primarily a sociological category of cultural difference rather than a relational understanding of social antagonism. Thus, while working-class writing has often been assumed to be synonymous with or a subcategory of realism, this thesis has argued it is not definitive of working-class writing as a whole; rather, realism is one literary strategy within the wider *langue* of working-class writing as a class discourse, a strategy which functions as the aesthetic form par excellence of working-class political representation.

Secondly, those working-class texts most closely adhering to the strategies associated with the avant-garde (for instance, around fragmentation, emphasis on interiority, reflexive narration, among others) have lent themselves more readily to—or been more readily appropriated by—a politics more aligned with those tendencies extending, challenging or rupturing entirely with working-class representational politics. This tendency is evident in Chapter One's reading of Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* and Hanley's *The Furrys*, both novels which collapse the traditional boundary between commitment and avant-gardism to produce Rancièrian 'democratic history' overtly influenced by modernism and whose experimentalism functions precisely to destabilise the positions of working-class political representatives and elevate the subjectivities of the wider working class. Indeed, such tendencies towards the destabilisation of established political forms of working-class representation can be observed in Chapter Two's appraisal of the postwar *Caribbean Voices* literary formation and Chapter Three's discussion of the (often overlapping) 1970s avant-

garde and feminist fiction. Focusing on Lamming's *The Emigrants* and Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Chapter Two noted these works to be far more avant-gardist than their angry young contemporaries, reaffirming their respective antagonistic "outsider" statuses through the valorisation of non-Standard English speech patterns and addressing the structural oppression of Black migrants to Britain who were excluded from the postwar integration of working-class institutions. Meanwhile, the avant-garde and feminist literary formations of the 1970s, both of which were rooted in movements and countercultures connected to an expanded post-1968 working-class movement, drew on modernist textual strategies to expand what Pamela Fox might refer to as the 'political terrain' of their novels: the focus on interiority, fragmented form and reflexive narration in the novels of BS Johnson, John Berger and Michèle Roberts allow them to engage with issues—such as alienation and feminism's "personal" politics—most resistant to established modes of working-class political representation. What becomes discernible in this sweep of Britain's "long" mid-century literary history is a distinct tradition of what Denning calls 'social modernism' (2010: 122); oft-neglected in literary criticism, this fusion of avant-gardism with the politics of class antagonism sees its formal strategies transformed into a 'galvanic force, fuelled by the released energy of social oppression' (Fordham 2002: 100), also collapsing the artificial binary between political commitment and artistic autonomy.

However, as previously stated, it has not been the aim of this thesis to reheat the "modernism-versus-realism" debates of the twentieth century, but with more references to the minutiae of trade union history. Rather, this thesis has attempted to collapse aesthetic dichotomies, taking texts to be composed of techniques with their own 'specific weight' (Macherey 2006: 47). These techniques retain such 'specific weight' even as they are blended into the totality of the text, lending themselves more or less readily to specific practices of working-class political

representation. Indeed, in neither literature nor politics can such strict dichotomies be tenably maintained: just as many texts incorporated some combination of realist or experimental literary modes—such as Barke’s *Major Operation* or Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*—so too can the experience of the CUB at Milan’s Pirelli factory or the wildcat strikes of union members against TUC-agreed wage restraint during the Winter of Discontent be understood to simultaneously contain elements of both rupture and representation. While texts may broadly be organised between those tending towards avant-gardism and those tending towards realism, the intention has not been the construction of a dichotomy between “avant-gardism” (good) and “realism” (bad); instead, such categorical distinctions should be understood as ideal types between which there is no strict binary but rather a continuum upon which individual texts exist as they intervene in the distribution of the sensible in various ways.

The third point of this thesis relates to the context within which such texts are produced: that is, those historical periods defined by political upheaval undermining the ‘solidity of social reality’ were accompanied by the proliferation of a heterogeneous literary culture whose texts similarly extended, challenged and ruptured with ‘the density and solidity of what is’.

Conversely, more stable historical moments tended towards a literary culture more steeped in realism. These social-historical tensions were at work on the literature of the CPGB-aligned uneasy avant-garde discussed in Chapter One, whose texts—particularly *Major Operation* and *Journey to the Border*—manifested aesthetically the dual political function of the party as agitator-from-below and representative-from-above in a period when established working-class political representation, like the class society upon which it is predicated, was in crisis. Similarly, while postwar stability saw the development of a working-class literature steeped in realism explored in Chapter Two, Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*

exemplifies a novel in which the antagonistic class-subject is able to indicate the limits of consensus without itself quite being able to imagine beyond it. These limits, such as the ineradicable experience of alienated labour and rejection of the social mobility narrative, are indicated through integration techniques associated with avant-gardism, though without rupturing entirely with the aesthetics of realism.

It is necessary at this point to discuss Chapter Three's examination of Black British fiction of the 1970s which, despite the tumultuous period in which it was written, nonetheless tends towards realism. This is due to two main reasons: firstly, the collapse of "proletarian literary formations", whether that around *Caribbean Voices* or the later Caribbean Artists Movement, could no doubt have played a big part. The second reason is, however, more significant (to the extent of potentially being the causal factor of the first): that 1970s Black British fiction was not written by what Sivanandan describes as the period's 'vanguard of black struggle'. Whereas the interwar working-class avant-garde was rooted in the working-class political and literary formations and 1970s feminist fiction was rooted in the writers' groups linked to the women's movement, the generational disconnect between Black authors in the 1970s (mostly older migrants) and 'the vanguard of black struggle' (British-born Black youth) meant that writers were similarly disconnected from the antagonisms and social formations which sustained other—often more heterogeneous—proletarian literary formations discussed in this thesis.

This Black British proletarian literary formation would only develop beyond the cut off point of this thesis, in a period which coincides with the beginning of class decomposition during the Thatcher years as well as the diminishing importance of the novel relative to other cultural forms (such as drama and poetry but also film, music and, specific to the Black

British experience, forms which blend generic modes such as dub poetry). Though the oft-threatened “death of the novel” never quite happens, as the twentieth century progressed, the novel undoubtedly seems to consistently carry less weight as an artistic form. One interesting potential line of enquiry, then, lying just outside the scope of this thesis would be to engage with how the Thatcher-era/post-Thatcher proletarian literary formations might be conceived as being constituted given the shifting relationships between artistic forms (not to mention a working class whose social forms seem—at least so far—in terminal decline).

The *longue durée* of this thesis has attempted to highlight how shifts in working-class composition—around economic changes, ethnic and gender workforce demographics, etc— affect not only its relationship to both the state and capital but also its relationship to its own political representation and that, moreover, this relationship to political representation finds itself embodied also in its literary representation. Marxist literary criticism has often focused on the aesthetics of canonical works while studies of one period of working-class writing may note similarities or differences with another. However, what is frequently missed—and which this thesis has sought to address—is how working-class writers and their literary formations, emerging from and responding to the various compositions and recompositions of the class according to and against the needs of capital, have produced a literature which variously reaffirms, challenges or ruptures the boundaries of working-class representation as a literary and political practice.

Yet while the historical period under discussion in this thesis—bookended as it is by two highpoints of class conflict in Britain—deals with structural homology between literary and political modes of working-class representation in its various compositions and recompositions during a period of relative strength, this thesis’ termination in 1979 means

that the implications of this homology in our lengthy period of class *decomposition* have not been explored. Indeed, the assumption underpinning much of the thinking around the homology between literary and political representational practices has been that working-class political representation functions to contain practices which threaten to overspill its boundaries. Today, however, the crisis of working-class political representation, rather than coming from an excess of struggle instead comes from the lack thereof: 2018 saw the lowest number of working days lost to strike action since records began and the second-lowest number of workers involved in strike action since 1893 (Office of National Statistics 2019: 2). Trade union membership in 2018 was almost half that of 1979 (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy 2019: 6). And it would seem remiss not to mention the 2019 election which saw the Labour Party's biggest electoral defeat since 1935. The issue, then, is not of working-class political representation unable to demobilise its members, but of struggling to recruit any, let alone mobilise them; social democratic institutions as all institutionality and no social base.

Meanwhile, the distinction between the techniques of particular literary modes and their specific weights nonetheless seems to retain its significance. Zadie Smith, in her essay 'Two Directions for the Novel', outlines these two directions as between the 'constructive deconstruction' of avant-garde novelists and the 'Balzac-Flaubert model of lyrical Realism'. The former, Smith characterises as literary equivalents to socialism in Fukuyama's *The End of History*: that is, as providing noble—but ultimately failed—critiques and experiments aimed at surpassing older forms. The latter, meanwhile, Smith describes as being like liberal capitalism: the 'last man standing' even if due only to 'extraordinary persistence'. Yet nonetheless, Smith writes, 'the critiques persist, too.'

Yet whether these aesthetic distinctions maintain the same political import in the working-class writing of the last decade as they did in the period examined in this thesis is less clear. On the one hand, there exists the avant-gardism of Smith's own *NW* (2012) using its collage of realism, modernism and postmodernism to depict various working-class characters as they navigate post-industrial, post-crisis North-West London or James Kelman's *Mo Said She Was Quirky* (2012), with its Beckett-inspired stream of consciousness portraying his protagonist's anxieties as a precarious night-shift worker and mother. Meanwhile, on the other, Anthony Cartwright's *Iron Towns* (2016) and *The Cut* (2017) highlight the social realist concerns of former Labour heartlands ravaged by deindustrialisation while Kerry Hudson's fusion of memoir and investigative reporting in *Lowborn* (2019) captures the struggles of Britain's present-day working class. Yet without what Marx calls 'the real movement which abolishes the present state of things' (1932), the urgency of the structural homology which pushed these aesthetic practices in divergent political directions is diminished; the antagonistic class-subject in contemporary literature has become the domain of the historical novel (or speculative fiction). The same aesthetic and political tensions may remain, but buried under the common themes of the contemporary working-class novel: stasis, loss, remembrance, uncertainty.

Yet beyond such bleakness, these texts also provide a positive function: they remain oppositional strategies providing counter-narratives of working-class experience in an era when such experience is instrumentalised primarily towards reactionary political ends and when 'it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism' (Fisher 2009: 1). Between realism and avant-gardism, these distinct modes of working-class literary representation creatively (re)imagine working-class experience and—in different ways—the possibilities for positive social transformation.

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