Fiction and Subversion in the 1930s

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Abstract

This thesis takes as its subject four British working-class writers—George Garrett, James Hanley, Jack Hilton and Jim Phelan—and examines a selection of the fiction they produced in the years roughly between the General Strike (1926) and the end of the Second World War. My aims are twofold: firstly, to show that these writers' works cannot be accurately categorised within generally-accepted conventions of 1930s working class writing such as proletarian naturalism or socialist realism; and secondly, to explore the alternative modes of expression these writers employed to subvert received ideas of class, gender and sexuality.

The first three chapters examine the writers' works in a political context, and show the various ways in which they resisted the literary dictates laid down by A. A. Zhdanov at the 1934 All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. Using the works of Georg Lukács as a principal theoretical model I illustrate that in subverting Zhdanovite socialist realism these writers typically departed from realist and naturalist modes, arriving at new and individual conceptions of working-class experience. I then expand this argument to examine their attitudes to mass protest, using George Rudé and Georges Sorel to show how similar modes of resistance to the Leninist and Right-Wing stances on crowd-violence are articulated in their writing.

I then explore various modernist engagements through which these writers arrive at new ways of presenting the working-class. The importance of the 1930s "panoramic" city-life novel is discussed, and I also show how Bakhtin's concept of polyphony allowed these writers to challenge the presentation of the working-class in the writing of earlier canonical literary figures. Modernist aesthetics and the important influence they held over working-class writers are explored in three chapters focusing on modern art and dance. Finally, I demonstrate how Arnold Van Gennep's theories of liminality, which were among the influences for Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance,* also helped define the works of the writers discussed.

This thesis is about four writers:

The Man who Could Not be Bought
GEORGE GARRETT
1896-1966

The Bold and Unique Solitary
JAMES HANLEY
1901-1985

The Modern Cobbett
JACK HILTON
1900-1983

The Silent Witness
JIM PHELAN
1895-1966

Statement of objectives:

The objective of this thesis is to contribute to existing knowledge of 1930s English literature in two areas. Firstly, I aim to show that George Garrett, James Hanley, Jack Hilton and Jim Phelan did not write, as has previously been assumed, in the socialist realist or "proletarian" mode commonly associated with 1930s working-class writers, and that to categorise their fiction in this manner reveals an inadequate understanding of their creative vision. Secondly, I hope to illustrate the wide range of modernist themes and ideas these writers engaged with, and through this to arrive at a more accurate and comprehensive overview of their works than has been attempted before.

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Segments of this thesis's second chapter appeared under the title '"Feeling is like poison and a certain kind of high explosive:" torture, homoeroticism and subversion in James Hanley's *The German Prisoner'*, in *The Penniless Press* 18 (Autumn 2003), pp. 2-14. In accordance with Regulation A13.5, a copy is included.

Contents

Introduction

> Oh yes, lots. Jack London's book *The Road,* Jack Hilton's *Caliban Shrieks,* Jim Phelan's prison books, George Garrett's sea stories, Private Richards's *Old Soldier Sahib,* James Hanley's *Grey Children*—to name just a few.[1]
>
> —George Orwell, 'The Proletarian Writer', 1940

> Virtually no writing of any importance came out of the working class during the decade.[2]
>
> —Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation,* 1976.

I

There seemed no more fitting way to open this thesis than with the two extracts quoted above. Hynes's generalisation on the working-class contribution to literature of the 1930s expresses with admirable concision the very viewpoint that I hope to refute in the pages that follow. Orwell's remark is from a BBC radio discussion with Desmond Hawkins, in which he was asked if he felt the contemporary interest in working-class writing has "left behind quite a lot of good books?"[3] His reply is probably the first recorded instance of the four writers who are the subject of this study being grouped together, for it is my intention to argue that Jack Hilton, Jim Phelan, George Garrett and James Hanley—all of whom came from a working-class background—did indeed produce writing of importance during the decade of the thirties.

The contentions Hynes makes in *The Auden Generation* have, happily, been challenged since that book's publication. John Lucas, Maroula Joannou, Andy Croft, H. Gustav Klaus, Janet Montefiore, Ken Worpole, John Fordham and Michael Murphy are among those who have produced studies that reassess the contribution of working-class writers to thirties literature, and one of the foremost aims of this thesis is to add to the corpus of knowledge they have already inaugurated. But Hynes's view is still representative of a certain mode of thought that continues to regard English literature as an exclusively middle-class territory, in which the role of the working class can be summed up as a footnote or at best a brief chapter. It is a kind

of modern manifestation of Virginia Woolf's oft-quoted remark in 'The Leaning Tower': "Take away all that the working class has contributed to English literature and that literature would scarcely suffer, take away all that the educated class has given and English literature would scarcely exist."[4]

The Auden Generation makes effectively the same point: "To write about the literary existence of a generation is to accept a necessary restriction of subject: you will be writing almost entirely about the middle-class members of the generation. English literature has been middle-class as long as there has been an English middle class, and the generation of the thirties was not different in this respect from its predecessors."[5] But to argue this is ignore a tradition of working-class writing that dates back to at least two hundred years before Hynes's time: E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* observes that the seventeenth century Levellers and the mid-eighteenth century self-taught labouring poets are examples of proletarian literary talents that existed even before the age of the Industrial Revolution, which decisively reorganised society and brought with it the first free education systems, making the working class aware of their situation and able to articulate it on a larger scale.[6]

Moreover, to imagine that "the generation of the thirties was not different…from its predecessors" in that it was a solely middle-class literary generation overlooks the substantial body of evidence that in the 1930s working-class writing enjoyed a rare and unique flourishing; that in that decade working-class writers were encouraged by the literary world in ways they had not been before, and that consequently they became able to develop their writing in new and innovative ways. For the sake of clarity the title of this thesis refers to "The 1930s," but the period I have chosen to study is better described as that which falls between the General Strike of 1926 and the end of the Second World War. Francis Mulhern in *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'* grasps the significance if these tumultuous years:

> …Parliament itself, as a mode of representative government, was being challenged by the newly founded Communist Party which, despite its numerical weakness, won considerable influence in the trades unions and among constituency activists, especially in the wake of the General Strike. The economic and political storms of the following decade drove the parliamentary parties still further into confusion. The international dissensions provoked by the formation of the national government left the Liberals weaker than ever. Labour, already sapped and torn by the crisis of 1931, was shaken further by inter-party disputes over foreign policy and by the emergence of

> strong forces on the Left, grouped around the standard of anti-fascism. As the European political crisis worsened, the Conservative leadership sank deeper into indecision and passivity. Thus, the inter-war period was one of almost continuous political crisis, determined variously by domestic and international conditions. With the collapse of the Liberal Party and the rise of Labour, the British political order passed into a crisis that was to last for nearly thirty years, until its recomposition in the election of 1945.[7]

Amid this climate of upheaval, working-class writing underwent creative experimentation never before seen, to the extent that in the 1930s it was no longer accurate to refer to a *single* school of working-class writing, or to use the term to safely encompass all writing produced by the working class. It is crucial to understand this if 1930s working-class writing is to be properly evaluated. From the style of documentary reportage that gave details about labour and living conditions, to the socialist realist mode prescribed by the 1934 All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, to the mode loosely known as "proletarian naturalism," and to the various writing styles that challenged prevailing ideologies, the diversity is wide indeed. And yet few sources seem prepared to acknowledge this, preferring to speak of working-class writing as if the social status of those who produced it was the most important factor in establishing the category, rather than the content of their works.

This is indicative of a danger particularly inherent in 1930s literary criticism. Michael Murphy observes that "Historical periods have a tendency to be associated with a single figure or...with a composite figure that tends to smooth out or ignore those points of difference and divergence that mark out writers of the same generation."[8] The composite figure of the thirties Murphy draws attention to is "Macspaunday," Roy Campbell's irreverent name for W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis, and it's also true that interest in the novelists of that time has focused overwhelmingly on a small group consisting of Isherwood, Upward, Orwell and their immediate contemporaries. Alison Light calls attention to this in the Preface to *Forever England* (1991):

> The inter-war years in Britain ought to provide an exciting focus for literary studies but unlike, perhaps, any other makeshift period in literary history, it has suffered from an inability on the part of its chroniclers to look across the culture as a whole. What comes as second nature to medievalists, as they move from chivalric romances to miracle plays, to students of the eighteenth century, as much at home in the coffee houses as in the court, and even to nineteenth century

> literary scholars, expected to have some knowledge of the mechanics of serial publication or of reading aloud, of the contemporary stage as well as journalism, if they are to make full sense of Dickens—the idea that there are many possible literary forms in circulation at any one time and that all of them repay attention and tell us something about each other—is still likely to be held as heretical by twentieth-century critics.[9]

It will be observed that the title to this thesis makes no mention of "working-class writers" or "working-class writing." This is deliberate, and hopefully the reason should now be clear. These terms are too heavily laden with ideological baggage, all too often suggesting writing of a kind that will not be examined in this study, and which draw attention away from and obfuscate the literary accomplishment of the 1930s working-class. What interests me here is discussing the subversive achievements of George Garrett, James Hanley, Jack Hilton and Jim Phelan's writing: the challenges they made not just to conceptions of class, but also to those of gender, sexuality and political allegiance, and how through this they developed a distinctive working-class voice that was entirely their own.

II

But why study Garrett, Hanley, Hilton and Phelan, of all the working-class writers active during the thirties? Andy Croft in *Red Letter Days* (1990) lists a huge assortment of working-class writers from across the British Isles, all of whom found publication during the period under study. Why limit the focus of this thesis to just four of the twenty of more Croft refers to?

The writers in question were no different in their background to countless other members of the working class during their time. They were born within five years of each other around the turn of the twentieth century, into poor families in Dublin (in Hanley and Phelan's case), Merseyside (Garrett) and Rochdale (Hilton). Geographically speaking, they represent just a small corner of North-Western Britain. Their lives followed a typical course: all left school around the age of fourteen and went into work, Phelan, Garrett and Hanley in the stokeholds of ships, Hilton in the cotton mills of his native Lancashire. The worsening economic conditions of the twenties and thirties led all four to side with the political Left, and all faced some of the harsher elements of life for the thirties working-class socialist: extreme poverty,

blacklisting, homelessness, police violence and prison. With the exception of Hanley, all married and raised families within the working-class communities of their birth, in which they stayed all their lives. There is little in their biographies that sets them apart from other working-class writers of their era.

Nor were they consciously part of any literary society or school. Garrett and Phelan were close friends, but they were no more than aware in passing of Hanley and Hilton's work, and there is no evidence that these two knew each other. Hilton and Garrett were both members of John Middleton-Murry's *Adelphi* Club and would have attended the same lectures and summer schools, but their contact seems to have been minimal. Creative exchange and the sharing of ideas cannot, therefore, be considered one of the reasons why these writers' works developed their unique value.

Their writing, too, does not on first appearances seem to be different to the kind working-class authors are commonly held to have produced during the thirties. The received view is that the working class were most at home when writing about personal experience, and that this resulted in bleak and gritty novels with a flavour of socialist politics, that focus on the hardships of workers in the mills, mines or docks, and whose priority is to show how human happiness is undermined and corrupted by impoverishment, hunger and dreadful living conditions. Compare this with some of the strikingly non-realist ideas that had already begun to appear in middle-class writing of the previous decade, as discussed by John Lucas in *The Radical Twenties* (1997): human-animal transformations in David Garnett's *Lady Into Fox* (1922);[10] a villain who is part vampire and part devil in Douglas Goldring's *The Merchant of Souls* (1926),[11] and semi-science fiction novels prophesising ominous future dystopias such as the Earl of Halsbury's *1944* (1926),[12] Storm Jameson's *In The Second Year* (1936) and Clemence Dane's *The Arrogant History of White Ben* (1939).[13] The working-class writers focused on in this study mostly resisted such fantastical motifs, grounding their works firmly in lived experience and day-to-day life. (Hanley did attempt a science fiction novel, 1946's *What Farrar Saw,* but it is one of his very worst.) What makes Garrett's forecastles or Hilton's textile mills more worthy of study than Bert L. Coombes's coal mines, Simon Blumenfield's East End markets, Walter Brierley's dole queues or Lewis Jones's Welsh villages?

The answer to all this is that I do not intend for one moment to argue that all the neglected writers described by Croft are not deserving of greater critical attention than they have so far received. Only when working-class writing of the 1930s is re-

evaluated in its entirety can we arrive at a full assessment of its literary achievement. But Garrett, Hanley, Hilton and Phelan are of especial significance here because they went further than their fellow working-class authors in subverting the conventions imposed upon them by the literary elites.

All four were aware of the climate in which they were writing. British Popular Front-ism of the thirties (the "grouping around the standard of anti-fascism" referred to by Mulhern) pioneered the notion that the middle and working classes could unite on the political Left and so stand in resistance to the totalitarianism emerging in Germany, Italy and Spain. Much of the encouragement and support that the middle-class offered working-class writers in their literary careers was a product of this mode of thought. It was in many ways through this that the 1930s proliferation and flourishing of working-class writing became possible, but there was a dual dimension to Popular Front endorsement: Jerry Dawson calls it the "whiff of patronage" with which such writers were urged "to get down on paper their 'reportages' of working-class life."[14] The middle-class literati, enjoying a privileged position in which they would never have to experience working-class lifestyles, can be seen to view writing on that subject from a lofty, detached, even voyeuristic vantage point. Storm Jameson, in her 1937 essay 'Documents', observed her own class's potential to stumble into this tendency even while Popular Front thought was still current:

> ...there is something very wrong when he [the middle-class writer] has to contort himself into knots in order to get to know a worker, man or woman. What is wrong in him, and he cannot blame on to his upbringing what is really a failure of his own will; it is still clenched on his idea of himself, given to him by his upbringing but now to be cast off as the first condition of growth. Too much of his energy runs away in an intense interest in and curiosity about his feelings. "What things I am seeing for the first time! What smells I am enduring! There is the woman raking ashes with her hands and I am watching her!"[15]

This is not to make condemnatory generalisations about the support given to the working-class writers discussed in this study. There is no reason to suppose that anything other than genuine admiration for the works of Garrett and Phelan motivated John Lehmann to publish them, and he lavishly praised both Garrett and Hanley in his essay 'The Man in the Street' (from *New Writing in Europe,* 1940). Fifteen years later, in his autobiography *The Whispering Gallery,* Lehmann also made a special point of including the heartfelt lines: "If George Garrett, Liverpool seaman and heroic

battler against impossible odds, should by any chance read these words, I should like him to know how much I have always regretted that he found it impossible to go on with what he had so vigorously begun; and I should like him to tell me what happened to him."[16] Similarly Hanley was deeply appreciative of the help extended to him by Lehmann and Nancy Cunard in the early days of his career, and Lehmann refused to take any credit for his success, writing "I published several short stories by that erratic genius James Hanley, but he had already made his name."[17] Phelan's literary relationship with H. G. Wells, though practically nothing of it has been documented, also seems to have been amicable. But there is a definite note of class condescension in Richard Aldington's pugnacious, overblown introductions to Hanley's *The German Prisoner* (1930) and *The Last Voyage* (1931): "Mr. Hanley has the great essential of a writer—he has lived, and he has something to say,"[18] and to Orwell's review of Hilton's 1935 autobiography *Caliban Shrieks:* "Books like this, which come from genuine workers and present a genuinely working-class outlook are exceedingly rare and correspondingly important."[19] The implication in these examples is that these books have more value because of what they tell us about working-class life than because of any intrinsic value they may have as books. It's worth noting that Garrett turned down a publishing contract from Tom Harisson, hoping perhaps to be remembered as more than a working-class Mass Observer,[20] and was also unimpressed by Orwell on their one meeting in 1936. Hilton, for his part, actively resisted friendship with Orwell, refusing him accommodation in his home when he visited the North to research *The Road to Wigan Pier.*[21] In *English Ways* (1950) Hilton also voiced a criticism of Orwell that we can imagine speaks for much of the 1930s working class:

> I once read a best-seller by a middle-class novelist. He was at particular pains to stress the acuteness of his sense of smell. Working-men stank. Sure they do. To see these moulders, labourers, and furnace men battling with *mind,* muscle, and natural aptitude to win good castings and draw wages, is to understand why they smell. They smell because they sweat. They sweat because they labour.[22]

If the four writers focused on in this thesis, then, appear unexperimental or conventionally proletarian in the subject matter of their books, the environment in which they wrote is a fair explanation why. For working-class writers of the thirties,

gritty realism and down-to-earth "prole" life were the safest means by which to ensure publication. But within the writing of Garrett, Hanley, Hilton and Phelan are a number of subtle reinventions of traditional realist and naturalist motifs that challenge and undermine those literary modes. Through these subversions many key social and political ideologies were attacked, while a variety of modernist approaches, many of them still regarded today as exclusively bourgeois territory, were engaged with. This twin dimension of the four writers' works will be mapped over the nine chapters that follow.

III

After Orwell in 1940, the next writer to observe a unique quality worthy of investigation in the writers discussed here was Ken Worpole. His *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading, Popular Writing,* published more than four decades after Orwell's radio interview, does not mention Hilton, but the chapter 'Expressionism and Working-Class Fiction' identifies "many similarities of theme, technical experimentation and acknowledgements of literary influences" in the works of Garrett, Hilton and Hanley, that makes it possible to discuss the three together as writers who "explore[d] non-realist forms of fictionalising working-class life."[23] Worpole's argument, that these writers stand apart from working-class conventions in their engagement with literary and artistic modernisms, became the cornerstone of John Fordham's lengthy and valuable study *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (2002):

> ...the most illuminating [theoretical model] for the present work is Ken Worpole's essay 'Expressionism and Working-Class Fiction' in his 1983 study. Here, Worpole identifies a loose "school" of Liverpool writers–James Hanley, Jim Phelan and George Garrett—whose common formal properties derive not from a conventional English "realism," but from a more broadly European "expressionist" style: the consequence of a wider access to a range of cultures during their years as merchant seamen.[24]

This thesis aims in particular to further the debate begun by Worpole and Fordham. I have added Jack Hilton to the three writers concentrated on in the seminal chapter of *Dockers and Detectives,* because although his works appear to conform more readily to a socialist realist perspective than Garrett, Hanley and Phelan's, there are

undercurrents throughout his two novels that demonstrate a capacity for modernist engagement and ideological subversion identical to that identified by Worpole. My sixth and seventh chapters place an especial emphasis on bringing these elements to light.

It should briefly be noted that this thesis does not pertain to be a full and comprehensive study of every book these four writers produced. A volume so weighty would, first and foremost, be far beyond the scope of the present work, but there is also a rationale behind my omissions. The decision to concentrate on fiction (save for a few exceptions) is straightforward enough, as the subversive experiments that are my subject were carried out primarily through fiction writing. My reasons for choosing the 1930s as my period of study have already been detailed. The absence of the autobiography and reportage produced by all four writers (which, in Phelan's case, constitutes a large proportion of his body of work) and of Phelan's writing from the 1950s and sixties, or Hanley's from the fifties, sixties, seventies and early eighties, is therefore explained by this.

Enthusiasts of Hanley, the most widely-read of the four writers, may be most surprised of all at the non-appearance of some of his most popular and commented-on works. It's true that I do not discuss *The Ocean* (1941), *Sailor's Song* (1943), *The Closed Harbour* (1952) or *A Woman in the Sky* (1973), or do more than touch upon the five novels of The Furys Chronicle. I do not dispute that these works have often been considered Hanley's best, but many of them fall outside the period of my study, and they have also been exhaustively discussed by Fordham, Edward Stokes and others. This latter factor has to a certain extent influenced my choice of works to concentrate on, passing over some of the better-known examples of Hanley's oeuvre for rarer works such as *Resurrexit Dominus* (1934) and *Stoker Bush* (1935).

But more than this, the object of my study is to pay special attention to writing that best illustrates these authors' subversions of 1930s political and ideological conventions, not to assess their respective bodies of work as a whole. There can be no doubt that detailed studies providing such assessment are needed for all four writers, for although Fordham's book on Hanley is admirable, and Stokes's *The Novels of James Hanley* (1969) useful if outdated, no critical volumes focusing on Hilton, Garrett or Phelan yet exist. I hope that they someday will, but I do not set out to provide them here. Rather, the following thesis aims to contribute to existing studies already commenced on these writers, comparing and analysing the key works of

fiction they produced in the 1930s, and from this draw new conclusions about their literary accomplishments.

Chapter One

The politico-ideological context: Zhdanov, literary dictatorship and socialist realism

1) The 1934 First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers

In August 1934, seventeen years after the Russian Revolution, many of the Soviet Union's most prominent literary figures including Maxim Gorky, Karl Radek, Nikolai Bukharin, A. I. Stetsky and Andrei Alexei Zhdanov converged on Moscow for the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. This was to become one of the most important international events of the 1930s for Left-Wing writers of all descriptions, whether they termed themselves Communist, socialist, Stalinist, Leninist, syndicalist, proletarian or, most significantly for the present study, working-class. Indeed, the reason this thesis takes the 1934 First All-Union Congress as its starting-point is that to properly contextualise the writing produced by the four working-class writers who are its subject, their work must be grounded from the outset in the ideological moment that emerged from this Congress.

For it was in 1934 that A. A. Zhdanov, then Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (C.P.S.U.), first publicly established the requirements for literature that conformed to and supported the Soviet ideal. To summarise the key points of his speech at the Congress, true Communist literature was, firstly, to depict the real world and reject the imaginary utopias of socialist writing from previous centuries:

> Our Soviet writer draws the material for his work, his subject matter and characters, his literary language and words, from the life and experience of the people of Dnieprostroi and Magnitostroi, from the heroic epic of the *Cheluskin* expedition, from the experience of our collective farms, from the creative work now in full swing in the four corners of our land.[1]

Secondly, it would conform to what Zhdanov calls the "Leninist principle of partisanship in literature," which is to say, it would demonstrate that politics and art

are inseparable. Socialist realism must be politically orientated, connecting the real world it depicted to the struggle for worldwide socialism that was taking place:

> Our Soviet literature is not afraid of being called tendentious, for in the epoch of class struggle there is not and cannot be any classless, non-tendentious and "apolitical" literature
>
> And it seems to me that any and every Soviet writer may say to any dull-witted bourgeois, to any philistine or to any bourgeois writers who speak of the tendentiousness of our literature: "Yes, our Soviet literature is tendentious and we are proud of it, for our tendentiousness is to free the working people—and the whole of mankind—from the yoke of capitalist slavery."[2]

And thirdly, above all else:

> Our literature is imbued with enthusiasm and heroism. It is an optimistic literature, not, it should be said, in any purely physical sense of "inner" feeling. It is a fundamentally optimistic literature, since it is the literature of the rising proletarian class, today the only progressive and advanced class. Our Soviet literature is strong because it serves a new cause—the cause of socialist construction.[3]

This was the birth of what is known as "socialist realism," a new literary form that was the cause of much controversy and debate among 1930s Left-Wing writers throughout the world. There is not enough space here to dwell on the numerous implications of socialist realism in the detail they deserve, but it should be clear enough simply from the passages quoted above that the literary form sought by Zhdanov decisively excludes two of the most prominent modes of thirties writing. One is modernism, which in all its myriad forms resisted the "truthfulness and historical exactitude of the artistic image"[4] demanded by socialist realism, in favour of abstraction, surrealist distortions of reality and the subjective view of the individual. The other is naturalism, mainly because it was seen to problematise the associated Zhdanovite stipulations that Soviet literature must be "linked with the task of ideological transformation, of the education of the working people in the spirit of socialism."[5] Since modernism was rejected out of hand by socialist realism as "decadent," articulating only "obscurantism" and "mysticism,"[6] the literary debate surrounding the demands of Zhdanovite writing is best understood in terms of the opposition between realism and naturalism on a broad scale. It is best that we arrive

at a definition for each of these often elusive and ambiguous terms before we continue.

Naturalism and realism can be interpreted as two different forms of *verisimilitude,* defined by Chris Baldick in The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms as "the semblance of truth or reality in literary works; or the literary principle that requires a consistent illusion of truth to life."[7] This is not to say that naturalist and realist literature must therefore be couched in unambiguous, straightforward language, as the written styles of acclaimed realists including Charles Dickens and George Eliot illustrate: intentionally down-to-earth writing is a more common trait of such forms as documentary, reportage and "slice-of-life." Modern criticism now accepts that realism and naturalism differ from these, for while both pertain to depict the "real world," without idealising it, portraying as beautiful things that are not or involving the supernatural and the fantastic, neither can be said to present a direct, impartial, objective representation of the world as it is. Rather, they construct a lifelike illusion of some real world outside the text by a series of conventions and narrative processes, and it is the difference between the conventions they employ that makes realism and naturalism opposing literary modes.

The preface to Guy de Maupassant's *Pierre et Jean* contains a quotation useful to understanding the nature of realism: "the realist will seek to give us not a photographic reproduction of life, but a vision of it that is fuller, more vivid, and more compellingly truthful than reality itself."[8] The same point is carried further by Georg Lukács, who has come to be regarded as a Leninist wholly supportive of socialist realism. It must be noted here, though, that Lukács and Zhdanov are not to be conflated, for though Lukács's commitment to the struggle against fascism motivated his Communist allegiance he did not agree with every aspect of Soviet policy. Indeed, as Rodney Livingstone and others have documented, Lukács worked under heavy pressure from the C.P.S.U. and admitted later in life that he often wrote with the objective of placating Zhdanov.[9] Nevertheless, Lukács produced one of the most detailed and comprehensive bodies of theoretical work on the debates surrounding socialist realism, and his studies are of great relevance to the present discussion.

In his essay 'Balzac: *The Peasants'* (c. 1938), Lukács describes a lengthy and eloquent passage from Balzac's novel spoken by Fourchon, a peasant character, and then remarks:

> It is obvious that an old French peasant in 1844 would not have used such words as these. And yet, the whole character and everything Balzac puts into his mouth are absolutely true to life, precisely because they go beyond the limits of a pedestrian copying of reality. All that Balzac does is to express on its potentially highest level what a peasant of the Fourchon type would dimly feel but would not be able to express clearly. Balzac speaks for those who are mute and who fight their battles in silence.[10]

That Lukács sees in realism a means whereby the underrepresented, exploited and poor can find the voice they have been denied plainly illustrates one of the reasons why the Soviets found that literary mode to be so in keeping with their ideology. But Maupassant and Lukács's words also demonstrate the mechanics of realist narrative in a wider sense, and make it clear that realism is not to be confused with reality. Rather, it creates an artifice of the real world, governed by rules and conventions that do not exist outside of the text.

Realist writing, best exemplified by the nineteenth century novel, conforms to a narrative pattern that has been variously described by different theorists: Karl Marx's structure of thesis – antithesis – synthesis; Tzvetan Todorov's five-point scheme that progresses from order to disequilibrium to the restoration of order; Catherine Belsey's detailed analysis of the requirements for "classic realist" narrative as laid down in *Critical Practice* (1980). But though interpretations vary, it is generally agreed that realist narratives follow a course from a prescribed starting-point, through plot development and to an ending that is necessarily closed, and normally conditioned by the terms of poetic justice. Writing that ends happily with virtue rewarded, villains defeated and subplots resolved was entirely in keeping with Zhdanov's demands for "a fundamentally optimistic literature" that would serve the political purpose of educating the masses in the spirit of socialism. (This is in itself indicative of a too-narrow interpretation of the realist mode, or alternately a deliberate reshaping of it to fit political agendas: the realist novels of Thomas Hardy, for example, can hardly be said to end happily or be "fundamentally optimistic.")

The chief difference between realism and naturalism is that while naturalism, like realism, takes as its objective the presentation of what is imagined to be the real world and rejects the romanticised and the supernatural, it does so specifically to articulate the philosophical viewpoint that the life of man is subject to natural and material forces rather than spiritual ones. Naturalist writing, the beginnings of which Lukács and others locate in the works of Émile Zola, is seen to concentrate on the ways in

which human happiness and freedom are obstructed by faults in the social environment or man's own internal inhibitions and conflicts, and attributes much human activity to basic drives such as hunger or the sexual urge. Because of these preoccupations, and because of the naturalist tendency to regard life as a downhill struggle ending only in the acceptance of sorrow or death, naturalism has earned a reputation as a bleak, gloomy and pessimistic literary form. Certainly this was how Zhdanov interpreted it, which led him to decry naturalism as the model for self-absorbed, melancholy writing that was counter to the aims of socialist realism.

Much of Lukács's writing in *The Historical Novel, Studies in European Realism* and elsewhere revolves around this debate. His controversial argument is that realism succeeds where naturalism fails because the latter is concerned only with narrating appearances, describing superficial emotions and recounting events in the form of "empty" anecdotes, and does not connect these to greater struggles or matters of higher significance. Realism, by contrast, penetrates deeper into the forces of history at work, sees their dynamism and drive, and ties upheavals of the past to relevant conflicts of the present day. In one of the many passages on this subject from *The Historical Novel,* Lukács critiques Gustav Flaubert's naturalist novel of Carthage, *Salammbô:*

> Flaubert takes delight in giving detailed and cruel pictures of the sufferings of the masses in and around Carthage. There is never any humanity in this suffering; it is simply horrible, senseless torment. No single member of the masses is individually characterised, the suffering yields no single conflict or action which might humanly interest or grip us.
>
> Here we may see the sharp opposition between the old and the new representation of history. The writers of the classical period of the historical novel were only interested in the cruel and terrible happening of previous history insofar as they were necessary expressions of definite forms of class struggle (e.g. the cruelty of the Chouans in Balzac) and also because they gave birth of a similar necessity to great human conflicts and passions etc. (the heroism of the Republican offices during the Chouans' massacre of them in the same novel).[11]

For Lukács, this debate between realist and naturalist forms was inextricably linked to the question of capitalist exploitation. A particularly significant essay is his 'Tolstoy and the Development of Realism'; collected in *Studies in European Realism* but written in 1936, two years after the first All-Union Congress and emerging directly from that ideological moment. Here Lukács shows his professed concord with

Zhdanov and socialist realism by equating naturalism with the damaging forces of capitalism, while arguing that the heroes of realist narrative, who for Lukács are always the unexceptional men that capitalist society produces, learn to exhibit the kind of heroism Zhdanov would approve of. "In naturalism capitalist prose triumphed over the poetry of life,"[12] Lukács writes, and the greatest crime committed by naturalist writers was to portray capitalism as one of the material forces that govern man and which he has no control over; an unalterable "hard fact" that the human subject must simply accept. True to his socialist principles Lukács argues that capitalist exploitation must instead be understood as an oppressive ideology that can be overcome by radical action, and that the great realists show how their mediocre heroes struggle against and eventually overcome capitalism. For Lukács the first writer to achieve this is Walter Scott, and he writes in *The Historical Novel* that while some including Hyppolyte Taine criticised Scott's use of such heroes, it is Scott's very conception of "a never heroic hero"[13] that gives him his revolutionary potential. Honoré Balzac is described as Scott's greatest admirer and his successor to this tradition of the middling hero, and such characters were also used skilfully by Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky, the latter of whom argued that class divisions are not predetermined but the invention of the bourgeoisie. Taine is among the naturalist writers Lukács critiques, along with Flaubert and, first and foremost, Zola, who is described by J. A. Cuddon as "the high priest of the naturalistic movement in literature."[14]

Naturalism's contention that the factors limiting man's happiness are ever-present and cannot be changed was interpreted by the Soviets as a pronouncement on the impossibility of radical change. Such a deterministic philosophy was in plain opposition to Zhdanovite socialist realism, and so was naturalism's assignment of human behaviour to animal cravings and biological necessities. This, it was felt, excluded the possibility that humans could act out of altruism or the philanthropic need to better the lot of all; in short, was counter to the spirit of an "heroic literature." It was for these various reasons that naturalism became the anathema to Soviet literary ideals, and the earlier mode from which naturalism emerged was seized upon in the conception of socialist realism.

It may initially seem strange that the revolutionary Soviets saw realism as the greatest expression of their classless, bourgeoisie-rejecting society, when that literary mode had up to that point been associated principally with middle-class writers such

as the English novelists of the nineteenth century. But the appropriation of the realist mode by pre-Revolution and Revolutionary Russia is easy enough to understand, given that by the early decades of the twentieth century the Soviets felt bourgeois writing had degenerated from realism into either the naturalism or modernism so castigated by Zhdanov. Realism's uncluttered, "no-nonsense" approach was the antithesis to the "decadent" modernisms socialist realism rejected, and furthermore, the nineteenth century novel had already provided a literary framework for presenting the poor and dispossessed which the Soviet writers were able to develop in the interests of their own work. Socialist realism writers might have preferred the dynamic worker-hero to the Cratchit family or the rustics of Wessex, but these earlier figures were still proletarian characters treated with sympathy and given a voice. Furthermore, the works of Russian writers from before the Revolution such as Belinsky, Dobrolubov, Plekhanov, Chernyshevsky and Saltykov-Shchedrin had already done much to develop established literary portrayals of the poor into a form more in alignment with the socialist ideal, and so translating bourgeois realism's middle-class ideologies to Soviet perspectives after 1917 was in many ways a natural progression. For Lukács, the measure of truly accomplished socialist realism was in its writer's ability to make the transition from the bourgeois mode to the Soviet, thereby enacting in literary terms the idea of unity between the classes that informed much Popular Front thinking. In Lukács's eulogy for Maxim Gorky, whose 1907 novel *The Mother* is described by Chris Baldick as the "approved model" for socialist realism,[15] he writes: "He is the first great master of socialist realism, for he demonstrated concretely, in his work as an artist, that the contradictions of bourgeois art can be overcome in socialist practice."[16]

And so socialist realism was taken up as the approved literary means of circulating Russia's post-revolution political agenda. Socialist realism, though, has not been remembered as one of the shining literary moments of the twentieth century. It's true, as Janet Montefiore points out, that the literary decisions made at the 1934 Congress only directly affected writers who were Communist Party members, but Zhdanov's dictates sparked huge debate in Britain over whether art and writing should be inseparable after his fashion.[17] Many non-Communist writers adopted the socialist realist form regardless of their personal politics, because they agreed it was the best means by which to articulate the aims of a more general socialism. Equally,

there were some who intentionally set out to subvert and undermine Zhdanov's dictates, seeing in them reasons for wariness or even outright fear.

Foremost among the reasons for this is that the repercussions of socialist realism were not confined to the literary sphere, and came to be responsible for persecution, suppression and even atrocities as the Soviet Union progressed steadily towards dictatorship and State control was imposed ruthlessly on all aspects of life. It is illuminating to read Zhdanov's speech at the 1934 Congress from this perspective, and even more so to study his later essay, 'Report on the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad'*. Though this piece, written in 1947, occurred after the period under study, it is of great relevance here and deserves to be examined in full.

'Report' is phrased wholly in the language of literary debate, as if Zhdanov's activities belonged exclusively to that realm, but in reality the essay is a damning attack on two Russian writers seen to have betrayed the Soviet ideal and a legitimation to deal mercilessly with all others like them. The writers, Mikhail Zoshchenko and Anna Andreevna Akhmatova (the latter of whom became a significant figure in the work of Pasternak) were modernists of different schools both derived from Hoffmann, practitioners of apolitical art-for-art's-sake, and were regarded by Zhdanov as circulators of literature that produced a "mood of boredom, despondency and loneliness"[18] that "can exert only a negative influence on our young people and are bound to poison their minds with a vicious spirit of empty-headedness, despondency and lack of political consciousness."[19] Throughout his report Zhdanov adopts the persona of an honest, sincere literary commentator bewildered and shocked by a decline in artistic values and political commitment. His stock phrases ("It is hard to understand why-"; "How could-?"; "Why did you allow-?"; "Why were-?" etcetera), questions that Zhdanov presents as rhetorical, are calculated to bring the reader into accord with his sentiments.

But there are sinister undercurrents at work in this artifice of a literary forum. When Zhdanov says of Zoshchenko "Quite unashamedly, he publicly exposes himself and states his political and literary views with the utmost frankness,"[20] he is taking as the norm that there should not be absolute freedom of speech. Zhdanov expects his readers to be as surprised as he is, or makes himself appear to be, at the thought of someone not being ashamed that his views contradict the Soviet ideal. This is then made more brutally direct:

> To make matters worse, Zoshchenko seems to have acquired so much power in the Leningrad writer's organisation that he even used to shout down those who disagreed with him and threaten to lampoon his critics in one of his forthcoming works. He became a sort of literary dictator surrounded by a group of admirers singing his praise.
>
> Well may one ask, on what grounds? Why did you allow such an unnatural and reactionary thing as this to occur?[21]

Again, Zhdanov's tone is one of astonishment that it could ever be acceptable for somebody like Zoshchenko to have the power to air his views. He is not arguing for greater restrictions on freedom of speech; he is assuming an utter absence of freedom of speech to be the status quo and expressing puzzlement as to why it is not. It is Zhdanov, not Zoshchenko, who has truly become "a sort of literary dictator."

Much of Zhdanov's character can be evaluated from his essays. In true propagandist style (Zhdanov, in his role of secretary to the Central Committee, was leader of propaganda and agitational work)[22] he makes politically motivated assertions to coerce others into accepting the ideologies he endorses. He is puritanical, expressing moral disgust at literature that involves "showgirls and adulterers"[23] and, in a 1947 speech at a conference of Soviet philosophical workers, attacking Jean Genet on the basis of his sexuality. ("Pimps and depraved criminals as philosophers—this is indeed the limit of decay and ruin.")[24] And he is an apologist, arguing that institutionalised suppression such as the cancellation and burning of the journal *Leningrad* is a clear-cut case of "set[ting] matters right,"[25] and that the Central Committee "has no right to deal gently with those who forget their duties with regard to the people, to the upbringing of our young people."[26]

It is worth taking a moment to recount what became of the writers Zhdanov criticises in 'Report'. Zoshchenko was expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers, which effectively ended his literary career, and State persecution led him into poverty and madness. He died in 1958, having been successfully made an example of.[27] Akhmatova, made of stronger stuff than her friend Zoshchenko, did not break under pressure as he did, but she suffered censorship from 1925 to 1940 and again from 1946 to 1956, which left her penniless as she could make no money from her writing. She was also persecuted and placed under constant surveillance by Comintern spies.[28] Of the two other well-known Russian writers Zhdanov castigates in 'Report', D. S. Merezhkovskiy had before Zhdanov's time been forced to flee his homeland to escape arrest, and died in Paris in 1941.[29] Osip Mandelstam was shut down as a writer,

exiled, then arrested, sentenced to five years' hard labour for counter-revolutionary activities, and died in a transit camp in 1938.[30]

This is the true face of Zhdanov's high-sounding effusions on the "tendentiousness" of socialist realism's "enthusiasm and heroism" and its glorious mission "to free the working people—and the whole of mankind—from the yoke of capitalist slavery."[31] The literary form that seemed to many in 1930s Britain to support an idealistic putting-aside of class differences to battle the fascist regimes of Spain and Germany, ultimately became the tool of a dictatorship just as insidious and bloody as Hitler's or Franco's. And if socialist realism was rejected by Left-Wing writers, including some of those focused on in this study, this may have been because they already saw the abuses and oppressions Zhdanov's principles would inevitably lead to.

Even when socialist realism is shorn of this dimension, if indeed it ever rightfully can be, the view of most commentators is that its successes are to be found only in writing that experimented with or reworked Zhdanov's impositions. J. A. Cuddon cites Alexander Fadeyev and Mikhail Sholokhov as among the handful who achieved this,[32] and the two "outstanding" socialist realism novels mentioned by Chris Baldick, Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* and Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Grey Granite* (oddly, Cuddon does not mention the preceding two books in Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* trilogy) both succeed because they depart somewhat from the strict socialist realism mode.[33] And for every successful literary work produced by socialist realism, a great many more substandard ones appear: Cuddon mentions the group pejoratively known as the smithy poets, who wrote "crude verse as a sort of jingoistic propaganda,"[34] and the militant *proletarskya kul'tura* ("proletarian culture," later shortened to "proletkult") movement whose publications were contributed to principally by "pick-and-shovel hack writers."[35] Valentine Cunningham said of socialist realism that it "helped smash up modernism especially in the novel, thus pushing the novel back beyond Henry James and into the arms of bourgeois naturalism."[36] The next chapter will discuss James's relevance to this debate in more detail, but in a general capacity Cunningham's remark succinctly expresses the almost universal conclusion on socialist realism: that forcing writers to conform to its strict regulations ultimately stifled their creative energy and hindered their literary achievement.

One of the most important socialist writers who resisted Zhdanov's stipulations is Bertolt Brecht, whose influence on the writers discussed in this thesis will be fully

explored in Chapter Two. In Britain, resistance to socialist realism from within the Communist movement came principally from the Left-Wing literary circle consisting of Edgell Rickword, Montagu Slater, Randall Swingler, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Amabel Williams-Ellis, Alick West and T. H. Wintringham, who believed the "boilersuit poems and promised lands"[37] of Zhdanovite literature drew attention away from serious injustices, exploitations and imbalances of wealth that socialism should address. As Arnold Rattenbury notes, this group's stance against socialist realism has, typically, been ignored or misunderstood: Julian Symons in *The Thirties: A Dream Resolved,* for example, bundles them along with "Communist helots"[38] just because they considered art and left-wing politics to be inseparable. Symons' failure to observe the fact that Rickword and his circle adopted a position of firm resistance to the Communist helots recalls a point made by Janet Montefiore, that writers on the thirties have passed overgeneralisng judgements too swiftly on the literary moment of socialist realism.[39]

Rickword had previously founded and co-edited the 1920s journal *Calendar of Modern Letters,* and in the thirties he and his associates edited between them the seminal *Left Review* for all fifty-one issues of its original run. Of the four writers discussed in the present study, James Hanley, George Garrett and Jim Phelan all subverted the dictates of socialist realism and were published in *Left Review,* their submissions ranging from complete short stories to segments of then-unfinished novels. Chapters from Hanley's *The Furys* (1935), *The Secret Journey* (1936) and *Hollow Sea* (1938), and Phelan's *Green Volcano* (1938), first appeared in the pages of that journal some years before the publication of the novels in which they featured. The fourth writer, Jack Hilton, also submitted two chapters of his 1938 novel *Champion* to *Left Review,* but the literary style of his two published fictional works owes much more to Zhdanovite socialist realism than the writing of Hanley, Garrett, Phelan or the *Left Review* publishers. Hilton's novels, the other one of which is *Laugh at Polonius; or, Yet There is Woman* (1942), are valuable models of socialist realism because they illustrate how that literary form was taken up by the British working-class, and also show its successes and failures when it was so used.

2) "Why couldn't she understand that he was a man?" The socialist realism novels of Jack Hilton.

It is regrettable that the first book by Jack Hilton discussed in this study is also his weakest. *Champion* is a novel in which the failings of socialist realism as a literary model are most apparent. Its low quality is not representative of Hilton's other works, for though his autobiography *Caliban Shrieks* (1935) is uneven, *English Ways* (1940) and *English Ribbon* (1950) are hugely informative and significant accounts of working-class life during the thirties and forties, superior in many ways to the far better-known *Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), while *Laugh at Polonius* and Hilton's contribution to Jack Common's essay collection *Seven Shifts* (1938), are also strong. Furthermore, *Champion's* seventh chapter 'Elsie' is one of the finest moments in Hilton's writing, if not the finest. (A full discussion of its success and importance can be found in Chapter Seven of this thesis.) However, the other twenty-five chapters of Hilton's sprawling 350-page novel do not live up to the standard this small segment sets.

Champion is a *Bildungsroman* that begins when its two working-class protagonists are children and follows their interconnected story as they grow to adulthood. The plot itself is interesting, for while specific chronological dates are rarely given, the novel spans the period roughly between 1914 and 1928 and so takes in the Great War, the Armistice, the widespread unemployment of the twenties, and the National Union of Unemployed Workers' protest marches on London that began in 1922. (George Garrett, another writer discussed by this thesis, led the Liverpool contingent on the first of these.) *Champion's* descriptions of working-class family life, sports (primarily boxing), vagrancy, menial work such as sandwich board advertising on the streets of London, and Chapter Nineteen's spectacular description of the Epsom Derby are all drawn from Hilton's personal experience and make for valuable social documents on life between-the-wars for the working man. These sections are a kind of trial run for *English Ways,* and are the most noteworthy and significant parts of an otherwise patchy novel.

Champion opens when its hero Jimmy Watkins is twelve, and his sickly, effeminate brother Freddy fourteen. As they grow up Jimmy begins his quest to succeed as a professional boxer, while demonstrating all the qualities of good, decent young working-class manhood that Hilton firmly believed in: looking after his mother, giving her his prize money, keeping the home running while his father is away soldiering in World War One. ("Jimmy was the life force of the home; besides doing his work, he did all the things that a man should do in the home,"[40] Hilton

remarks, in the first of a number of gender-based generalisations which will be discussed later.) Freddy, however, becomes ill with consumption and is taken to hospital, where we are introduced to Charlie Smith, another frail boy receiving treatment in the same ward. Freddy dies, but Charlie pulls through to reappear later in the novel as its second protagonist.

As the 1920s begin economic conditions worsen, and Jimmy, now married to a pretty and honest girl named Elsie, finds himself out of work, while Charlie becomes the leader of a local unemployed workers' movement. The two men meet and become friends, though Jimmy is initially unconvinced by Charlie's belief that socialist politics can better the lot of the workers, choosing instead to use his boxing skills to escape poverty. Here Hilton engages with a widespread 1930s preoccupation with the boxer as specifically working-class hero. For many youths from underprivileged families during that period boxing was regarded as one of the few feasible routes to wealth and status, and Jimmy's rags-to-riches story parallels the experiences of such real sporting celebrities as middleweight champion Jack McAvoy, who was personally known to Hilton.[41] Furthermore, the strength, vitality and physical fitness embodied in the working-class boxer could be seen as a gesture of defiance to contemporary eugenicist conceptualisations of the proletariat as lumpen, primitive sub-humans. Hilton reveals in *Caliban Shrieks* that he dabbled in eugenics early in adulthood, and that the experience left him profoundly disturbed. *Champion's* portrayal of honest working-class virility through the figure of Jimmy can be interpreted as a form of catharsis for this disillusionment.

Jimmy battles his way to the rank of regional champion, overcoming corrupt or "dirty-fighting" contenders by playing fair at all times. Soon his money worries are over and he can afford to move to a large house in the country with his wife, his infant son and, of course, his mother. The dilemma of whether a working-class man can remain true to his proletarian credentials once he has become moneyed and propertied is not touched upon by Hilton: Jimmy's assertion that "There's good things in this life and we've a right to them"[42] seems to be all the engagement with this question the author considers necessary.

Charlie, meanwhile, has had to watch his organised protests degenerating into riots when the unemployed movement's demands are not met, and for his part in the debacle is sent to prison. On his release, disillusioned, contemplating suicide and close to madness, Charlie becomes a tramp and spends some time aimlessly

wandering the country. In certain respects his experiences in this part of the novel mirror Hilton's own, though it must be observed that much of *Champion's* semi-autobiographical narrative is ill-advised. A problem with the novel unconnected to its socialist realism is the intermittent note of self-indulgence. Charlie is rather too flattering a self-portrait: he accepts a prison sentence of three months after refusing to be bound over, reasoning that to accept the milder punishment would be to tacitly admit guilt when his only crime was to protest for civil rights. This compares unfavourably with the corresponding experience of Hilton, who spent just twelve days in jail and accepted being bound over.[43] (This did not stop him dedicating a whole chapter of *Caliban Shrieks* to describing his suffering during those twelve days; it might be argued that Jim Phelan, who spent fifteen years in prison, was in a better position to produce such writing.) There is also a feel of paranoid self-justification in the novel's extended project to equate the political campaigning of Charlie with the physical sport-fighting of Jimmy; to show how Charlie's acts are "another kind of battling" (which is the title to Chapter Fifteen). A defensive note is detectable in Hilton's comment during an interview with Andy Croft: he "intended to show how the political worker suffers and the physical fighter wins. Two kinds of champion,"[44] as if he is aware he does not live up to his own conception of rugged virility but is desperately casting about for ways in which he can seem to do so. And is it absolutely necessary for Hilton to give Jimmy a two-page long speech in Chapter Fifteen heaping praise on the myriad virtues of Charlie, or to include in it the line "I felt in his way of talking something of what I thought Christ would be?"[45]

Eventually arriving in London, Charlie is reunited with Jimmy who is there for the title fight. The victorious boxer brings his old friend home and helps him recover himself, while, in a kind of fair exchange, Charlie finally succeeds in showing Jimmy that socialism is the way ahead. They open a children's hospital and socialist school with Jimmy's winnings, and Charlie at last gains the confidence to run for Labour M.P. Backed by the famous Jimmy, who is now a much-loved sports hero in the region, Charlie brings his exceptional political skills to bear and wins the local elections. And so the novel ends with the bright prospect of things to come.

Hilton was not a Communist Party member, but *Champion* is nonetheless a socialist realism novel in the definitive mode. It is not without departures from the strict Zhdanovite form: Hilton is cynical about mass protest and violence as effective means of propagating socialism, about which more later; he engages occasionally

with some of the modernist literary practices that Zhdanov railed against; and the political debate of Chapter Twenty-Three would have been different had Hilton been a committed Communist—here instead he shows, through the conversation of Jimmy and Charlie, that all the established Left-Wing parties have their faults, and argues in favour of a completely new interpretation of socialism. (There is a similar section in Chapter Thirteen of *Caliban Shrieks,* titled 'They Call Themselves Comrades', and both passages from Hilton recall sections in Part Two of *The Road to Wigan Pier.)* But even taking these aspects into account, *Champion* remains a novel in which literature and history are intertwined, a mood of optimism about the cause of socialism prevails, and everyday mediocre characters discover and realize their potential for heroism. What one comes away with most of all is an overwhelming feeling of having read a didactic socialist novel, one that encourages readers to believe they will meet similar success if they too battle for socialism. Hilton was later to become more cynical and ambivalent about these ideas; here, they go unquestioned for the most part.

And in *Champion* we see how socialist realism can fail as a literary form, which is not to say it must necessarily fail: how far *Champion's* unevenness is due to its Zhdnovite convictions, or to the fact it is a first novel by a relatively inexperienced writer, is debatable. (Yvonne Cloud in *Left Review,* for example, tends to the latter interpretation when she critiques *Champion's* "false lyricism...laboured poetical effects...loose construction, [and] stilted and over-decorated prose" as "signs that proletarian fiction must learn to stand on its own feet and speak with its own voice, neither clinging to the worst of D. H. Lawrence nor thinly echoing its own bourgeois ancestry.")[46] But Hilton does demonstrate the ways in which Zhdanov's requirements for socialist literature can lead to most uninspired and flawed writing, and such problems were not uncommon. For example, one prominent issue is that *Champion's* continual linking of its fictional events to political aspects of the real world results in a number of passages on socialism that feel as if they have been grafted onto the narrative, the worst of these being the conversation referred to earlier between Charlie and Jimmy in Chapter Twenty-Three. This section consists of Charlie exhaustively detailing Hilton's own views about the Left as he sees it, with Jimmy interjecting the necessary questions to move the sermon along, and it is glaringly unconvincing as dialogue. Another problem is that the novel's unremittingly optimistic tone becomes wearying after the first few chapters. Hilton shows us repeatedly, and in a heavy-

handed way, that the traditional working-class values of standing by one's family, striving hard and being fair and upright in all things will always triumph over vice, slovenliness and underhandedness. Consequently when the characters find themselves in difficult times, such as during the trade depression or the episode of Charlie's arrest and breakdown, the change of tone is almost a relief, and even then the reader is never in any real doubt that these troubles will pass. By the middle of the book it is clear Jimmy will win all his fights and Charlie's socialist politics will conquer all, so much so that the compulsion to carry on reading to the end begins to wane. The final scene's attempt to create suspense, by narrating how Charlie only wins the election after demanding a recount, is laughable in the face of all that has gone before. Again, socialist realist writing need not be like this, but Hilton's novel shows how an overemphasis on optimism can disastrously weaken a story, effectively doing away with such essentials as tension, mystery and poignancy, reducing the whole affair to uninspiring predictability.

The heroism in *Champion* leads to problems too. Certainly its instances of everyday, "average" working-class people displaying altruism and philanthropy when the need arises are very much in the Lukácian mode, and show convincingly the importance of human kindness and support in difficult situations. (Jimmy selflessly giving his last threepence ha'penny to a vagrant woman, when he himself is unemployed, is a particularly effective moment and manages to avoid straying into the sentimental.) But Hilton's conception of the heroism Jimmy embodies is overburdened with a number of gender assumptions and stereotypes: he expects the reader to identify with Jimmy simply because he is manly, and also to understand that Elsie's love for him is genuine for the same reason. The text is littered with value judgements that associate heroism with virility, from the passage quoted earlier about the young Jimmy "doing everything a man should," to his contention in Chapter Twelve that boxing "makes men men because it is fair,"[47] to Jimmy's father in Chapter One struggling to make his wife see why he must go and fight in the War: "Why couldn't she understand that he was a man, and men had to roll their sleeves up and put things right when there was a bit of bother?"[48] (And yes, the fact that *Champion* was published in 1938, by which time it was accepted that a second worldwide conflict was inevitable, does partially inform the politics of this. But it is the presuppositions about gender contained in these lines that is of interest here.) *Champion* does not allow for the possibility of an unmanly man performing acts of

heroism: Charlie only becomes heroic when he overcomes his physical and mental infirmities, and Jimmy's brother Freddy is portrayed as nothing more than a comic effeminate boy, too delicate to play football and sneaking on Jimmy for not washing his hands before tea. (Because of this discriminatory "toughism," Freddy's death has little of the impact Hilton presumably intends—Hanley's *Boy* and Phelan's *Ten-a-Penny People* contain much more sympathetic portrayals of boys who do not live up to their working-class communities' expectations of manliness, and whom we consequently pity much more.)

For women it is even harder to be heroic, and *Champion's* two major female characters, Jimmy's mother and Elsie, seem to contribute to the good fight mostly by being suitably feminine and sitting quietly in the background while the men do the important work. Elsie fares particularly badly, for after her superb introduction in Chapter Seven and a brief glimpse into her vivid imagination in Chapter Nine (which is included primarily as a tribute to the poet Francis Thompson, to whom the novel is partially dedicated, and makes no gesture towards developing Elsie's character or indeed any aspect of the plot) she swiftly marries and does practically nothing for the rest of the novel except bear Jimmy a son and offer wifely support when needed. Of course, the continuity of family values is a key theme in working-class literature of the thirties and such ideas were an important part of Hilton's view, but all the same it's difficult to believe that the free-spirited girl dancing on the moor in Chapter Seven could find happiness in such a life. There is an emetic passage at the end of Chapter Nine: "After tea Jimmy smoked his pipe like a man, and Elsie cleared the things from the table and washed up like a woman,"[49] which encapsulates the entire novel's cheerful and unquestioning acceptance of stereotypical working-class gender roles.

Kate Millett, in her discussion of George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879) from *Sexual Politics* (1969), makes an observation of the author that actually applies much more fittingly to Hilton in *Champion* than it does to Meredith:

> A life [for the heroine] more occupied and interesting than mere mating—for good or ill—never seems to have occurred to him in connection with an intelligent young woman. This is a notably deficient and rather tritely masculine attitude...[50]

A novel like *Champion* reveals the danger of an heroic literature viewing heroism as exclusively male territory. Gorky overcomes this problem in his influential *The*

Mother, which is about a strong woman recognising her strength and joining the battle for socialism, but other male writers following Zhdanov's structure ran the risk of producing texts in which a macho envisaging of heroism shunted female characters aside, and tacitly reinforced gender inequalities.

By 1942 Hilton's novel-writing had developed considerably, and *Laugh at Polonius* improves on many of *Champion's* flaws. Another work of socialist realism and another *Bildungsroman,* though this time the focus is on a sole working-class man, *Polonius* treads much of the same territory as Hilton's earlier novel. But this time the girlfriend-then-wife character Sheila is stronger and more complex than Elsie and features in the novel more prominently, and the overdone manliness of *Champion's* protagonist Jimmy Watkins is replaced by a more believable, insecure and often vulnerable hero in Leslie Stott. While in *Champion* Hilton made the mistake of depicting Jimmy as an honest, decent and upstanding working-class male from the very moment his twelve-year-old self is introduced, one whose values never falter as he grows up, Leslie's character genuinely develops as the reader follows him from childhood through adolescence and into early manhood. *Laugh at Polonius* is a touching tale that sensitively depicts an essentially wholesome boy's journey from a harmful, repressive Methodist background (Hilton had little patience with Methodists, considering them "queer, unlovable blighters")[51] into the world of work, where he discovers the joys of love, music and recreation, wrestles with his deeply-ingrained inhibitions, faces political disillusionment, struggles to overcome the dogma of hidebound authority (hence the novel's title), but, shortly before his premature death during the retreat from Dunkirk, finds a place for himself in the world and discovers how he can be happy and at peace. It all makes for markedly more enjoyable reading than *Champion.*

Polonius succeeds because, while it can only really be described as socialist realism writing, its Zhdanovite elements are played down where they were strikingly apparent in Hilton's previous novel. This may have much to do with the fact that *Champion* was published just four years after the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers: 1934 would have seemed much further away by 1942, and *Polonius* bears the signs that Hilton's political commitment had mellowed just as his writing style had matured. The way in which his second novel does not posit socialist conversion and political victory as part of the triumphal conclusion helps to make its left-wing agenda less intrusive and laboured than *Champion's,* as does the fact that its critiques of

organised socialism are taken further than they are in the other work. But the true strength of *Laugh at Polonius* is that the happy ending of traditional socialist realist narrative is replaced by a much more downbeat conclusion, partly because heroic deaths in battle like Leslie's were a key element of Second World War novels, but which nonetheless brings the tale to a hugely satisfying and moving close. Leslie's fate is cleverly prefigured in a symbolic moment at the end of the second chapter, which instils in the reader from the outset a lingering doubt that all will resolve itself happily at the climax. Looking at the full moon from her backyard one night, Mrs. Stott is reminded of an expensive gold watch her son earlier expressed a liking for, and which she promised to buy for him on his twenty-first birthday. "She was a believer in signs," writes Hilton; "The future was going to be better. Her Leslie would have his gold watch some day. She smiled at the moon, and it smiled back, and lit up the street."[52] Meanwhile two stray cats are courting in the nearby alley, and a neighbour, disturbed by the noise, abruptly pours a tub of water out of an upstairs window:

> The mewing ceased, the cats vanished, the moon became hidden by some clouds. Mrs. Stott felt chilled, and, shuddering, she backed into her house, went upstairs, and was soon close up to her son Leslie.[53]

The ironic point of this scene is, of course, that Mrs. Stott is quite right to believe in signs—but the moon and the gold watch-face are not the ones she should be looking at. Leslie will not live to be twenty-one and receive his gift: like the male cat, he will find love but then be suddenly "doused," extinguished. Hence Sheila's reaction when she hears of her husband's death, and is unable to believe she didn't sense his passing when it happened: "Love had premonitions! It had! It had!"[54] We the readers know this, having seen such a premonition earlier in the book, but we have also been shown how it is possible to miss them.

The optimism in *Laugh at Polonius'* ending is to be found in its philosophical acceptance of greater powers and its motif of hope that though Leslie has died, he is survived by his wife and son. It is not conventional socialist realism; indeed, the narrative tone owes much more to naturalism's idea of unchangeable forces dictating the fate of man. ("Life was like that. Daughters took over from mothers the peopling of the earth.")[55] But the ending of *Laugh at Polonius* nonetheless exudes optimism

and warmth, from Sheila's father reflecting on the sorrow of Leslie's mother: "Then he thought of the baby. She was its grandmother. Her son's flesh and blood was there living,"[56] to Sheila's own cry: "I've some part of you still here, Leslie!"[57] Again, this is comforting writing in a decade when the death of soldier-fathers and husbands was a common occurrence, but it also succeeds as a subtle reinvention of socialist realism in which hope and peace are found not in worldly political triumph, but in the recognition of greater governing forces that man cannot master. The final paragraph of the novel runs thus:

> Space may have been something which has always existed. Pain may be the only purpose of life. Defunctus may be the happy exodus. But in space, prior to pain, prior to exodus, the love of woman exists. It exists and manifests itself as beautifully as the white clouds flowing across the silver of the Milky Way. It has been so, it must be so. In the beauty of the womanly heart is the creative power which germinates the love-stream, making possible that temporal, momentary, yet continuous experience known as living. Its wholesome purity has the odour of the rose, its lips are as warm as a summer's night, it has the temperament that is of the humour of the heavens.
>
> The pendulum of time swings right, swings left. A babe is born, its father dies. Yet woman is there. She is the force of life; a beautiful, lovely functionary to compel love. She is ever moving ahead of that ghoulish, pursuing thing, death, trying to recreate before defunctus.[58]

The influence of D. H. Lawrence in *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1921) is evident here, as it is in the ending to Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Grey Granite* which *Polonius's* conclusion also recalls. Grassic Gibbon's hero Ewan has joined the Communist Party and set off on a National Hunger March to fight for a better future, providing the obligatory note of socialist triumphalism, but a parallel plot dealing with his mother Chris and her struggle for peace of mind simultaneously resolves itself with the same thoughtful fusion of realist and naturalist ideologies that brings such power to the *dénouement* of *Laugh at Polonius:*

> Covered with mists, Bennachie was walking into the night, and Chris moved and sat with her knees hand-clasped, looking far on that world across the plain and the day that did not die there but went east, on and on, over all the world till the morning came, the unending morning somewhere on the world. No twilight land anywhere for shade, sun or night the portion of all, her little shelter in Cairndhu a dream of no-life that could not endure. And that was the best deliverance of all, she saw it now, sitting here quiet—that that Change who ruled the earth and the sky and the waters underneath the earth, Change whose face she'd once feared to see, whose right hand was death and

> whose left hand Life, might be stayed by none of the dreams of men, love, hate, compassion, anger or pity, gods or devils or wild crying to the sky. He passed and repassed in the ways of the wind, Deliverer, Destroyer and Friend in one.[59]

Laugh at Polonius, however, does not escape from one of the major failings it shares with *Champion,* which is that the two novels' near complete rejection of modernist techniques means there is no potential to look at their working-class setting in any detached, abstract or objective way. Take the following passage, which describes Leslie walking his mother home from her charing job on a Saturday night:

> Most of the people were elated, some to such an extent that they lurched or staggered a little as they moved along. Here and there, as a pub was reached, they passed groups of people standing about outside. It was because of this that Mrs. Stott had had Leslie meeting her on Saturday nights ever since he was twelve years old. Drunken men had accosted her, called her "Dear," and she had been too inoffensive to upbraid them. Drunken men always seemed to be filled with the insistence to get a woman of some sort on Saturday nights. But she found that such men were not thoroughly bad, and by having Leslie with her she was immune from the leers and pesterings.
>
> Saturday nights were the nights when the working folk of the town let themselves go. They would have let themselves go oftener had they been able to afford it. The tripe shops and the chip shops were all at their busiest. Tripe and chips are good on top of a few glasses of ale.[60]

Now compare the following part of a long sequence in James Hanley's first novel *Drift* (1930), in which the hero Joe Rourke is loitering despondently on Liverpool's Lime Street:

> More people coming into the street. The picture palaces have opened. See the sheik carrying off the maiden! Ha! Ha! Line up! Man playing a fiddle in the doorway of a public house. An old man playing on two spoons for accompaniment. Much laughter from the crowd when the old man starts to sing. A big man going into the pub. A nice young woman after him. He stares at the young woman. She smiles. She has a pretty face. "Hello, Nelly."
>
> "Hello."
>
> They disappear into the house. Policeman holding up his hands and dropping them again. Man shouting out at the top of his voice—
>
> "This way for the big winner. Threepence each."
>
> Boy standing at the edge of the parapet watching men who have dirty faces. Only dirty faces. That means they are coming from work.
>
> "Any bread left, sir?"
>
> On walks the dirty face.[61]

What is missing from Hilton's description of a busy working-class thoroughfare is the expressionist impact Hanley's writing conveys. Ken Worpole observes of the latter novel that "Hanley obviously wanted to emphasize Joe's helpless position for which the expressionistic style was most suitable. And expressionism is a way of portraying the process of crisis, not a way of formulating possible solutions."[62] It is the ideal approach for a novel with the tone of *Drift,* but allowing a character to impotently regard his native milieu as such a "parade of misery and ugliness" where "society is a deranged nightmare"[63] would resonate too closely with Zhdanov's despised "mood of despondency, boredom and loneliness" for a socialist realist text like *Laugh at Polonius*. The result of this is that both Hilton's novels present an unchallenging, claustrophobic view of the working-class communities in which they are set, because of their refusal to critique those communities or try to step outside them. Hilton's belief in the redeeming strength of his own traditional values makes him well-suited for writing optimistically about the liberation of his social class, but his reluctance to be objective about those values stifles his creative experiment and prevents his books from developing in directions that might have been rewarding.

One example of this is that in both *Champion* and *Laugh at Polonius* is an interesting suggestion of unusual closeness between the male protagonists Jimmy and Leslie and their respective mothers, in the manner of Paul and Mrs. Morel. Hilton read Lawrence and would have been familiar with the novel, and one can only suppose it was on his mind when, in *Champion's* eighth chapter, he produces exchanges between Jimmy and his mother such as:

> "I suppose Elsie has taken what little place I had in your heart?" she would say with that maddening half-mock.
>
> "No she hasn't, and you know it," he would snap back. [64]

And on Leslie in *Laugh at Polonius:*

> The complete isolation of his mother's world, which was confined to her adoration of him, and her constant concern for his moral well-being, had no reference to the physical and emotional stirrings that have an existence in a young fellow's make-up.[65]

And:

> If he couldn't be constantly in his mother's company, then the best thing would be to work where there was not such an unsettling influence.[66]

It's interesting too that Sheila, when she first appears in *Laugh at Polonius* as a teenage girl, is invested with untrammelled flower imagery just as Mrs. Stott is when she is introduced in Chapter One. This may suggest that Leslie settles with Sheila because she reminds him of his mother, for whom he has especial sublimated desires (although it should be noted that as this is a novel by Jack Hilton, virtually every young female character is likened to an untrammelled flower at some point). But whatever might be implied by these curious passages, we will never learn exactly what was Hilton's intent, for he does not allow them to develop into anything more than vague and uncertain suggestions. To do so would have been to subvert and question the traditional working-class values that are an essential part of his optimistic and heroic socialist realism.

So however successful this literary form may have been in spreading the cause of worldwide socialism, Hilton's two novels illustrate its principal flaw as a means of producing entertaining literature: that in the 1930s, when the new and experimental ways of writing pioneered by James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and other modernists were already well-established, one could not expect a literary form that denied all these innovations to succeed. In an age of experimentation and development in the written form, there can have been little impetus for readers to pursue works of literature in which it was known from the outset no such experimentation and development would be involved. Socialist realism clung to outdated modes that had already evolved into something new, and the ultimate failure of that written style may have had less to do with the politics it endorsed, and more with its assumption that its readers could be expected to return to literary conventions that had already passed.

Chapter Two

George Garrett and James Hanley: examples of resistance to socialist realism

1) The short stories of George Garrett: ambiguity and subversion through experimentation with narrative closure

In this reflection on *Champion* and *Laugh at Polonius,* we engage with a greater question somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis, but which must be at least touched upon. Which approach, of realism or naturalism, is more conducive to the task of articulating socialist politics? There are obvious counter-arguments to the Zhdanovite contention that realism conforms to Soviet ideals because it is optimistic and naturalism fails to do so because it is pessimistic: the assertions that a radical writer such as Zola does not engage adequately with the question of class struggle, or that realism lends itself best to happy endings, are contentious and can easily be critiqued. But of more concern to Zhdanov was the fact that naturalism denies agency. Its philosophy, that man acts only in response to forces over which he has no control, and that he cannot consciously change the difficult circumstances of his social environment, is anathema to the idea of socialist realism as an "heroic literature" that prizes individual altruism and seeks to illustrate how the independent bravery and endeavour of the few can radically change the world.

Zhdanov's argument is valid, and yet naturalism's denial of agency does not necessarily mean that that literary mode is of no value to the struggle for socialist reform. A possible response to the Zhdanovite line is that the optimistic, closed conclusions of socialist realist narratives are themselves an obstruction to the cause of propagating worldwide Communism rather than an aid to it. Describing the glorious triumph of socialist politics in an age where such a victory had not yet happened and was not guaranteed can seem naïve or blinkered, celebrating imaginary success rather than taking action to achieve it in reality. Naturalist writing avoids such endings and the drawbacks that accompany them. If we pursue this debate we can view the unremitting hardships and bleakness of naturalist prose as not necessarily conveying a message of hopelessness and the unfeasibility of radical change, but rather

encouraging radical change by starkly impressing upon the reader the urgency with which it is needed. Portraying working-class suffering and not resolving it with a triumphal conclusion as socialist realism does can make naturalism appear the more pragmatic, didactic approach: the problems depicted by naturalist prose have not yet been resolved in the real world, and since such injustices are still occurring, there is a pressing need to take action against them.

Proletarian novelists who wrote in the naturalist mode, such as Walter Greenwood, Bert L. Coombes, Lewis Jones, Walter Brierley and Harold Heslop, certainly felt they were writing to socialist political purpose even though their works would have been discarded as counterproductive by Zhdanov. Catherine Belsey touches upon these ideas in *Critical Practice* when, calling upon the work of Steve Neale, she discusses her theory of the "imperative text." This is described as writing or art that discards the resolved, rounded-off closure of traditional realist narrative, in favour of:

> ...a mode of address which invites the reader to adopt a position of struggle, rather than stability, specifically struggle vis-à-vis something which is marked in the text as non-fictional, as existing outside discourse, in the world—sin, the Conservative Party, Russia. The imperative text...aligns the reader "as in identification with one set of discourses and practices and as in opposition to others...maintaining that identification and opposition and...not resolving it but rather holding it as the position of closure.[1]

Belsey does not pursue this idea to its fullest, which would be to apply it to literary texts rather than imagining, as she does, that these conventions belong only in the realm of "propaganda."[2] But Belsey's terminology in *Critical Practice* is nonetheless useful in discussing our next writer, George Garrett. Garrett was not a Communist, though George Orwell misidentifies him as one in 'The Road to Wigan Pier Diary';[3] the Merseyside working-class writer himself said of the extreme Left that "Another sort of Pope was in the offing. I had already dumped one off my back; there was no point in humping a second."[4] Brought up to strict Roman Catholic and Irish Republican beliefs by his domineering mother, Garrett cast off both convictions in adulthood. Politically a syndicalist and member of the Industrial Workers of the World (the "Wobblies"), whose commitment to the cause Millie Toole describes as "emotional,"[5] the focus of Garrett's writing was always on the spheres he recognised and could write about in detail and with sensitivity. His short stories are set in the

working-class communities, homes, schools and boarding-houses of his native Liverpool, and also at sea where he spent much of his working life. The higher political ramifications of the Soviet Union were too far removed from his plane to impose a direction on the writing he produced, and Garrett also seems to have been in agreement with his friend Jack Braddock (husband of the greatly-loved Liverpool Labour M.P. Bessie Braddock, another of Garrett's close personal friends), who travelled to Russia and reported his disillusionment with the post-Revolution social order. ("'The poor working-class stiffs are getting it in the neck,' he said, and he tore up his C.P. membership card," writes Toole.)[6] We can detect a similar sentiment in Garrett's writing, which does not just reject Zhdanovite socialist realism, but contains a number of intricate subversions of it.

On a first reading, Garrett's short fiction stories seem to represent a stylistic mix, with some heroic socialist realism in the Zhdanovite mode and considerably more pessimistic naturalism of the kind post-1934 Soviet literature rejected. Certainly two of this latter group, 'Pent' (first published 1935) and 'The Pond' (1936) can accurately be described in those terms and so form a useful comparison with the kind of realist mode Hilton conforms to in *Champion.* Garrett's two stories follow similar and equally grim plots, in which a working-class woman struggles financially all her life, tries without success to raise her status to a more comfortable position, and dies penniless, senile and alone. Jessie Pentony in 'Pent' (the abbreviated surname by which she is known forms the title of the story, in which, of course, she is constantly 'pent' in inescapable poverty) acquires a house for herself and her husband after eight years of fruitless searching, only to find that her life becomes an endless battle to afford a fixed abode and keep from returning to back-room renting or ending up in the workhouse. Nell Dunn in 'The Pond' makes a cross-class marriage to try and escape the crumbling pit-village she was born in, but a trade depression and the introduction of new technology strip her husband of his job and plunge her back into a bare malnourished existence.

Pent and Nell, throughout their respective stories, do not offer any voice of resistance to the hardships they suffer: they accept the forces opposing their happiness and the ever-worsening privations they bring as if they were inevitable and unalterable. But this sort of writing, which can arguably be categorised as "proletarian naturalism," does have an imperative quality as Belsey suggests. In exposing the very existence of human suffering caused by these problems the author

argues for the urgency of change, and provides the reader with an impetus to question the perceived fixedness and intractability of social forces. Thus Garrett shows the oppressions that ultimately destroy his two heroines to be not inevitable at all, not part of a deterministic view. One can certainly argue that stories such as these are more successful in compelling readers to question the world around them than a socialist realist novel like *Champion,* whose triumphal and resolved conclusion obscures the pressing need with which work still needs to be done.

Garrett's two stories have their faults too, however, and as with *Champion* these have to do with the presentation of gender. Nell and Jessie suffer throughout the course of their respective stories, but there is nothing about their hardships that can be identified with the specific problems a working-class woman encounters when trying to make her way in a male-dominated world. 'Pent' and 'The Pond' depict the suffering of women as a consequence of a social and economic structure that oppresses working-class men and women alike. The male characters of these stories suffer under poverty, unemployment and squalor just as the heroines do; for example Nell's husband, "bent under a wearisome stoop...dead-old at forty"[7] from prolonged unemployment, is meant to be pitied just as much as Nell is. In writing produced by socialist men, feminist agendas have always been treated with caution. Despite the huge bulk of feminist-socialist literature that begins with the Wollstonecraftian radicalism of the 1790s, was continued in the Owenite feminism of Anna Wheeler, Eleanor Marx and their contemporaries, and went on to inform to the Women's Suffrage movement of the early twentieth century,[8] many male socialists considered feminism to be a predominantly bourgeois issue that turned attention away from the true struggle of the workers and threatened to become a divisive force, and often felt that it would be best to "defer the woman question until after the revolution."[9] (Marie Mulvey-Roberts and Tamae Mizuta, from whose 1993 study *The Reformers: Socialist Feminism* the last remark is taken, provide an illuminating analysis of this tendency among male-dominated 1930s working-class socialism.) And so the proletarian naturalist tone of Garrett's 'Pent' and 'The Pond' unavoidably leads those stories into the limitations Janet Montefiore describes thus:

> Whereas the stories about working-class men...characteristically emphasise their growth to class-conscious enlightenment, the female victims can only signify misery, not understand it.

> Their used, degraded bodies represent the suffering of their class, just as their narrow minds represent its emotional deprivations.[10]

Garrett was markedly more confident and successful when writing about men than women, and his other stories, none of which feature a female principal character and most of which contain an all-male cast, overcome many of the problems seen in 'Pent' and 'The Pond'. Furthermore, his two stories 'The Redcap' (1935) and 'Swords into Ploughshares' (first published posthumously in 1980) adopt a different approach to subvert key dictates of socialist realism. On first impressions both read like conventional fiction in the Soviet mode: their main characters, sailors named McMahon and Mangor respectively, are unexceptional workingmen-turned heroes who rise up against corrupt, overbearing authority and defeat it. But none of the works listed here are actual engagements with conventions of proletarian writing; rather, they present tacit subversions of the dictates and preconceptions associated with it.

For all that the optimistic endings of 'The Redcap' and 'Swords into Ploughshares' may make for cheering reading and satisfying working-class wish-fulfilment, they simply do not stand up to close scrutiny as didactic, informative pieces on worker solidarity. It is essential to remember that one of Zhdanov's demands for socialist realism was that it should have an educational quality, instructing young people about the Soviet cause and teaching practical lessons in overthrowing the bourgeoisie. But although Michael Murphy remarks that stories such as 'The Redcap'...and 'Swords into Ploughshares' can be seen as instructing the reader in tactics for renouncing oppressive authority,"[11] a close reading of these tales causes problems for that interpretation. 'Ploughshares' relates how the hero Mangor convinces the ship's doctor to relieve him of duty by pretending to be insane, acting in a delusional manner, and tricking the pompous Chief Engineer into handling a package of his own excrement. Outrageously enjoyable escapist writing for a working-class target audience to be sure; but it seems Garrett quite deliberately undermines any possibility for Mangor's technique to be interpreted didactically, as a means of overcoming oppression that could be used in the real world. Firstly it is difficult indeed to imagine such a ploy ever working at all, and it surely could not do so more that once. Furthermore, Mangor's victory is made to feel all the less believable if we recall, as Murphy does, Garrett's literary source for the story. As

with many of his other works, 'Swords into Ploughshares' alludes to classic Greek mythology, and Mangor's escape through feigned lunacy recalls Odysseus' unsuccessful bid to do the same.[12] By reminding us of this earlier, more famous attempt that ended in failure, Garrett casts further doubt and uncertainty on the plausibility of Mangor's success. This is extremely effective wish-fulfilment writing, and an accomplished piece of comedy, but it is plainly not meant to be taken seriously.

And here lies the great strength of 'Swords into Ploughshares': its apparent complicity with the kind of triumphalist worker-solidarity fiction that proletarian authors were expected to produce crumbles under close scrutiny, to reveal a parody of such writing. Garrett preserves the optimism and heroism of Zhdanovite socialist realism while making ridiculous the educational elements of that form. 'Ploughshares' is the satirical work of a non-believer in the Soviet ideal who seeks to expose the failures of that ideology's chosen literary style. Sylvia Townsend Warner and John Lehmann are among those who openly admired Garrett's talent for humour,[13] and 'Swords into Ploughshares' demonstrates this skill to its greatest effect.

The victory of 'The Redcap's' hero, "Old Soldier" McMahon, is considerably more disturbing for he overcomes the unjust authority of the eponymous military policeman by unceremoniously killing him. ("McMahon jumped. With a dull squashy thud his two heavily-tipped heels landed unerringly on the redcap's skull.")[14] This act raises moral ambiguities that are immediately apparent even upon the first reading, and problematise greatly any sense of an uncomplicated happy ending. It's true that the redcap's behaviour towards McMahon and his shipmates throughout the story is unfair and oppressive, and he is undoubtedly one of Garrett's most despicable characters—a petty, officious bully with an overblown opinion of his own power. We would also expect McMahon's acts to be looked on favourably by the author as he is one of his most compelling heroes, based on the Boer War veteran with whom Garrett co-organised the Liverpool National Marchers in 1922, and a man he liked and respected. But is doing cold-blooded murder, and in such a graphic and unpleasant way, really the way for a hero to act or a punishment commensurate with the villain's offences? Murphy argues that "McMahon's experience of the hardships, and hard knocks, of war leads him to equate justice with summary execution,"[15] and it's true that the story has a First World War setting, but McMahon is now a civilian seaman and it is doubtful whether his brand of justice can comfortably belong in the world

outside military service. Debates over the deployment of violence as a form of protest have important resonances with the subject of socialist realism, and were taken up by Lukács and other writers in this area. The third chapter of this thesis will focus on that particular issue, and as we will see when we discuss Garrett's complex attitude towards violent protest and direct confrontation as a means to effect political change, it is impossible to read McMahon's acts in 'The Redcap' as ones the author would ever have unconditionally supported.

This, then, is not a straightforward and untroubled literature of optimism and heroism. Garrett takes the model for socialist realism and, rather than discarding it entirely, subtly undermines and reinvents it to produce narratives with disturbing elements. It is a critique of socialist realism that shows how the happy resolutions demanded by that literary form do not exist in the real world, and just as Garrett expands on and problematises the realist mode, he also sets out to illustrate that naturalist writing need not be as flatly bleak and pessimistic as has been imagined. A prime example of a text that achieves this is 'Firstborn' (1934), his earliest published short story and arguably his best. Michael Murphy, who feels that "Garrett's vision is often unremittingly bleak, especially when he analyses gender relations,"[16] comments on 'Firstborn's' "images of decay, poverty and corrupted sexuality"[17] and states that "It is difficult to find any possibility of redemption in the harsh necessities portrayed." My intention is not to argue that Murphy is wrong: 'Firstborn', like many of Garrett's stories, is so deliberately ambiguous that the author's intended reading is impossible to determine conclusively. Murphy's interpretation of the text is a valid one; I simply wish to point out that it is not the only valid interpretation.

Certainly the decay, corruption and harsh necessities are the most noticeable parts of 'Firstborn', which is presented as a typically grim and defeatist piece of proletarian fiction. Throughout the story the suffering of sewer-cleaner Harry Marsden and his wife Marie is linked to financial hardship: they struggle to find accommodation and work, they must abstain from consummating their marriage (the only reliable form of birth control available to working-class families in the thirties) and they must do without the luxuries that middle-class couples take for granted. Furthermore, when Harry encounters the rotting corpse of a human baby blocking a sewer pipe, it is economic necessity that forces him to remove it himself: Garrett explains that to report the matter would mean attending an inquest and losing a day's wages, and to leave the pipe blocked would mean losing his job. This experience is the most

nightmarishly disturbing moment in Garrett's whole body of work, and afterwards Harry's trauma is deep. The story ends a few days later, when he is in a shop with a woman customer and her child:

> Unobserved, the little girl gradually edged her way along the counter. Suddenly she thrust an adventurous hand into Harry's.
>
> "Hello, mister," she said.
>
> Startled, he gave the child a terrified push. "Get away! For God's sake! Don't touch me!" he roared.
>
> The irate mother ran to the doorstep. "You big brute! If I see a policeman I'll give you in charge."
>
> His contrition was pathetic. "Really, I'm sorry, missus. Really! My nerves are gone," he stammered, as he fumbled for a coin. Obeying its parent, the weeping child flung the sixpence into the street, where it rolled steadily towards a grid.[18]

It's difficult to see from all this how 'Firstborn' can be considered an optimistic tale, but there are ways in which it can. To begin with, the first half of the story is considerably more light-hearted than the second, with a number of moments that are either humorous or warm and touching. Of course, it's possible to argue that Garrett uses these parts purely to make the story's shocking moments the more appalling: the horrific sewer scene has more impact for being at odds with the story's tone up to that point. But 'Firstborn's' more tender moments, even the ones depicting apparently trivial goings-on such as Harry and Marie sharing toffees, or Marie oiling Harry's sickly chest even though she is ill herself, contribute to the impression that theirs is a genuinely loving relationship that endures despite financial difficulty. Garrett also shows that Marie is strong, and not as easily downtrodden by hard circumstances as the heroines of 'Pent' and 'The Pond': the fact that it is she who makes the important decisions regarding family planning and living arrangements is proof enough of that. All this seems to suggest that Garrett, in illustrating the strength of Harry and Marie's marriage, is leaving it possible for us to imagine that Harry can overcome his ordeal through the love and support of his wife.

Pamela A. Fox draws close to ideas such as these in her essay 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's "Revolt of the Gentle:" Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working-Class Women's Writing', in which she argues that love and romance can be presented as redeeming forces that overcome social hardship and economic privation.

She has presumably not read Garrett and concentrates on Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, a working-class writer who was active slightly before the period focused on by this thesis, but we can use the theoretical framework she provides to understand how Garrett, through the character of Marie in 'Firstborn', "defies assumptions about working-class politics and literary practice."[19] Fox observes that "British proletarian fiction traditionally operates as a masculine genre, largely concerned with public or transformative experience,"[20] and women characters in such works "operate generally as female subjects within a specific class culture."[21] The privileging of individual love over collective experience "comes into play not only to convey a longing for relations based on tenderness rather than exploitation, but also to represent a utopian private arena where one is valued for one's *gendered* 'self' alone."[22] Fox states:

> Romance provides, it seems to me, a most revealing angle of entry into discussions of working-class political narrative; it functions as a complex resistance strategy for women writers, as well as a more obvious reinscription of a dominant convention governing class, gender and literary relations.[23]

It is possible, under this interpretation, to see how the love Marie brings to Harry in 'Firstborn' empowers those characters to "detach…[themselves]…from (stigmatizing) class markers and confinements."[24] The new subject positions they take on stand in opposition to the forces of decay and suffering associated with their class.

The child that Marie bears Harry also conveys an implicit message of hope through the story's title. Certainly the word "firstborn" carries a grim implication in the context of the Biblical plagues of Egypt, and it's true that infant mortality, suggested by this interpretation, is a central part of Garrett's story. But "firstborn" here refers to the Harry and Marie's daughter, born around the middle of the tale, who does not die. Child-death appears later, in the form of the dead baby wedged into a sewer pipe. Here Garrett uses expressionistic imagery to suggest a birth: the child is a dead, decomposing object, apparently abandoned because its mother could not afford to feed it, and the channels of the body have been replaced by the unfeeling manmade tubes of the sewer. (This type of transformation from organic to mechanical and industrial imagery, popular in much modernist art, emerges repeatedly in working-class writing of the thirties and will be discussed fully in this study's sixth chapter.) But the dead baby is the second-born of the story, and so Garrett's choice of the title

'Firstborn' can be interpreted as implicitly privileging the natural daughter of Harry and Marie's love, suggesting that the forces embodied in her are more powerful than the decay, death, poverty and inhuman coldness associated with the other baby.

And then, most significantly, there is the story's ending. On the one hand, the image of hard-earned wealth trundling drainwards seems a clear enough naturalistic metaphor for the working-class suffering portrayed in this story: however much the poor struggle and aspire to a better existence, this is where their lives will always end up. The image also suggests a bleak symbolic interpretation: the drain leads back to the sewer, and so the lost coin becomes Harry's oblation or penance for not reporting the baby's death. However—and here is to be found a feature common to most of Garrett's short stories—its open nature rejects traditional narrative closure and prevents the reader from arriving at any decisive conclusion. Many of Garrett's works end with frozen, snapshot images such as this one, rather than a more conventional rounding-off; indeed, 'Pent' and 'The Pond' are quite atypical for concluding with an event as final as the principal character's death. ('Fishmeal', 1936, is his only other story that ends in this way.) In his subversions of closure Garrett shows himself to be in the modernist tradition of E. M. Forster who, like Garrett, sought out ways to prevent his characters from "going dead" at the conclusion.[25] In *Aspects of the Novel,* Forster wrote:

> In the losing battle that the plot fights with the characters, it often takes a cowardly revenge. Nearly all novels are feeble at the end. This is because the plot requires to be wound up...
>
> [The novelist] has to round things off, and usually the characters go dead while he is at work, and our final impression of them is through deadness...Incidents and people that occurred at first for their own sake now have to contribute to the *dénouement.*[26]

This observation is used by William R. Thickstun in his study *Visionary Closure in the Modern Novel* (1988), which discusses how "the English modernists" (a contentious umbrella term used to describe Forster, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner) all conducted literary experiments to produce narratives with endings designed to leave the reader wondering what happens to the characters after the final chapter, rather than providing the rounded-off and closed endings Forster criticises. It is significant that for Thickstun the first writer to question this conventional form was Henry James, who dismissed such endings as "a

distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks,"[27] and in his later years produced texts such as *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Golden Bowl* (1905) that subverted novelistic closure and attempted open-ended, unresolved conclusions. Valentine Cunningham is in agreement with Thickstun on James' importance when, in the statement quoted in the previous chapter, he asserts that socialist realism's denunciation of literary modernism returned the novel to its bourgeois nineteenth century roots, pushing it "back beyond Henry James." In participating in the modernist experiments with narrative closure, Garrett instils in his short stories not just a critique of middle-class literary conventions, but of the Zhdanovite form too.

In Garrett's stories, then, we are able and indeed compelled to imagine how the characters' lives continue after their tale comes to an end. It's true that sometimes this method can be seen as a way of enforcing the mood of sombre pessimism: 'The Jonah' (1935) and 'Apostate' (1936), for example, end before their protagonists can find any way of overcoming the persecution and violence they face in everyday life, thus giving the impression their suffering will go on indefinitely. But by their very open-endedness their conclusions refuse to exclude completely the possibility of change for the better. Likewise in 'Firstborn', the absence of narrative closure allows for hope. We can imagine that Marie will help Harry through his ordeal simply because the ending reminds us that their lives do continue after the story's end. And change, which can include improvement, is a constant in life.

George Garrett was neither a pessimist nor one who romanticised the lives and hardships of working-class people. He recognised there were no easy solutions to the problems society faced but never gave up hope, finding it renewed when he saw solidarity and tolerance. No fool, he was well aware that any procrustean reading of his works that tried to bend and shape them to a specific political alignment would be doomed to crumble into ambivalence and irresolution. By taking modernist techniques as the model for his writing, an approach forbidden by Zhdanov, and weaving them into his works under the guise of proletarian literary conventions, Garrett powerfully identifies himself as an author who resists the impediments to creative expression imposed by political dogma.

2) Torture, homoeroticism and subversion in James Hanley's The German Prisoner.

Resistance to the conventions and expectations surrounding working-class and socialist writing is carried yet further by James Hanley's thirty-six page novella *The German Prisoner* (1930), privately published as a luxury edition in a print run of just 500 copies and reprinted only once, in The Harvill Press's Hanley collection *The Last Voyage and Other Stories* (1997) which is also now out of print. The premise of *The German Prisoner* is as straightforward as it is shocking. Two British working-class infantrymen in the First World War become separated from their patrol in the trenches of France and capture a young, unarmed German soldier, who they savagely attack, sexually torture and murder, shortly before they themselves die during a bombing raid. The story's excesses of horror, squalor and depravity are representative of a tendency towards "gothic" extremes in Hanley's early writing, which is also detectable in the novels *Boy* (1931) and *Resurrexit Dominus* (1934). Anne Rice, in her excellent essay '"A Peculiar Power about Rottenness: Annihilating Desire in James Hanley's *The German Prisoner'*, remarks that the story bears "a disturbing resemblance to postwar narratives that glorify an aesthetic of violence."[28] But Rice, who is one of the few to produce a detailed critical work on this particular early piece by Hanley, also recognises its quality and significance. For although *The German Prisoner* is one of Hanley's first published works, it is also one of his best, if not the best.

Hanley served in the Great War as a crewman on troopships during the Gallipoli campaign, and his 1931 epic short story 'Narrative', also known as 'Victory' and 'Men in Darkness', and the 1938 novel *Hollow Sea* are partially fictionalised accounts of these experiences. He also fought in the infantry of the 236th Canadian Battalion for over a year before being invalided back to Britain after a gas attack,[29] but *The German Prisoner* is the only one of his works to deal with trench warfare and the battlefield. (A non-fiction journal of his Battalion days was apparently commenced, but Hanley destroyed the manuscript before completion.)[30] Given the importance and high quality of *The German Prisoner* it is unfortunate Hanley did not produce any more works dealing with its themes, especially since the 1931 short story is now all but forgotten and was not widely read on its release (inevitably, given its extremely limited availability). At the time of its publication, however, Arnold Bennett, T. E. Lawrence and Richard Aldington all expressed their high regard for the story.

Certainly it is in some ways an unpolished work, and betrays its status as an early piece by a novice author, as Edward Stokes observes:

> *The German Prisoner* suffers from the faults common in Hanley's early work. The tone of the prose is uncertain—sometimes hysterically high-pitched or turgidly rhetorical, occasionally platitudinously sententiousness...the dialogue too is occasionally unconvincingly literary. O'Garra is an illiterate slum-dweller; he has, we are told, an "atrophied mind," yet he is credited with such utterances as these: "After all the end of man is rather ignominious. No. I don't blame even the simplest of men for endeavouring to go down to the grave in a blaze of glory."[31]

There are many texts from later in Hanley's long career that are more professional and complete as books: these include *The Ocean* (1941) and *Sailor's Song* (1943), regarded by most (Hanley included) as his greatest works,[32] and the highly acclaimed late novel *A Woman in the Sky* (1973). But *The German Prisoner* represents the creative peak of an all-too-brief moment at the very start of Hanley's life as a writer, when he pursued his creative vision freely and without restraint. In this period he produced four books, all necessarily privately published in tiny print runs owing to their explicit content, which are exceptional in their explorations of gender and sexuality and their subversions of key stereotypes and assumptions surrounding class, masculinities, religion and society. *The German Prisoner* is the strongest of the four; *A Passion Before Death* (1930) is probably the most uneven; and the other two, *Resurrexit Dominus* (1934) and *Boy* (1931), are discussed fully in later chapters of this thesis.

The creative development begun by Hanley in these texts was brought to an abrupt halt in 1934 when *Boy,* the only one of the four to have been published as a trade edition after its original private release, was seized by police and banned early the following year as an obscene libel. The legal case itself is a clear illustration of Jack Lindsay's judgement on publication in the thirties as expressed in *Fanfrolico and After* (1962), that "Those who did not live through the period would find it hard to realize the oppressive atmosphere or to understand the power wielded by windy neurotics."[33] It seems from reports that the wife of a Bury taxi driver, who had never read the book, complained to the Police about the cover of the fourth edition.[34] From this arose nationwide moral outrage, public burnings of the novel, and the received view that *Boy* was pornographic pulp, which described and revelled in acts of homosexual depravity. (*Boy* is indeed an important text on gay life at sea, but it's

tragically ironic that the persecution began with the fourth edition's cover, which plays up exclusively to the novel's heterosexual content.) The book remained suppressed until 1990, and publishers Boriswood were fined sufficient sums to ruin them. The whole affair was a 1930s manifestation of the "Jix" censorship D. H. Lawrence had suffered in the twenties. ("Jix" after Sir William Joyson-Hicks, Home Secretary from 1924 to 1929, a devoutly religious man obsessed with defending the morals of Britain who was responsible for most of the legal action taken against the works of Lawrence.)[35] Indeed, *Boy's* trial is noteworthy in that it both recalls the earlier affairs of *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) and anticipates the *Lady Chatterley* trial that was to come in 1960. E. M. Forster, who championed Hanley's novel and used it as an example with which to castigate the literary establishment's reactionary paranoia and out-of-control censorship, performed an identical role to the one he would take twenty-five years later when defending Lawrence's work.

Hanley himself had broken with Boriswood early in 1934 after a series of disagreements and so did not have to appear in court,[36] but such an experience was nonetheless devastating for a writer at the beginning of his career, who had suffered rejection after rejection all through the 1920s, and who, unlike many others in his profession, could not fall back on a financially independent background. The incident of *Boy's* prosecution effectively put a stop to the daring, subversive experimentation that made Hanley's early privately-published writing so significant, shattering the young author's confidence and apparently leaving lasting scars. His son, the London-based artist Liam Hanley, included the following recollection in his foreword to Andre Deutsch's 1990 reprint of *Boy:*

> So deep at times were the wounds inflicted by the case about *Boy* that my father destroyed some of his other work. For instance, the only evidence of *The German Prisoner* (privately published in 1930 with an introduction by Richard Aldington) in the library at home was a pile of covers, into which I inserted my own childish stories. The text, and, alas, a drawing by William Roberts, had been torn out.[37]

Nearly twenty years later in a 1953 essay, Hanley himself dismissed *Boy* as "So shapeless and crude and overburdened with feelings,"[38] claiming untruthfully that he wrote it in ten days out of financial necessity, and as late as 1981 he refused Horizon

Books the right to issue a reprint.[39] From 1934 onward Hanley wrote nothing that compares to *Boy, The German Prisoner* and their associated works in their challenging, innovative subversions, and made a conspicuous gesture to produce books that brought him "back to the workers." Such texts as *No Directions* (1943) and the five novels of "The Furys Chronicle" (1935-1958) never stray from the bounds of conventional proletarian naturalism, focusing mainly on the day-to-day dramas and relationships of working people, and these publications were interspersed with reportage books and autobiographical accounts such as *Grey Children* (1937), *Broken Water* (1937) and *Between the Tides* (1939). None of this is to denigrate Hanley's post-1934 work, some of which is excellent. But it is clear that the banning of *Boy* so affected Hanley that he abandoned the direction he initially chose for his writing and shifted into a different vein, one considered less likely to cause controversy or raise the damaging ire of the literary establishment. Consequently *The German Prisoner* remains the greatest accomplishment of Hanley's art in its uncompromised, untainted state, and we will never know what higher achievements might have succeeded this story had events followed a different course.

Certainly there is nothing in *The German Prisoner* to suggest it was written in accordance with the agendas of socialist realism; indeed, the few who have commented on the story in recent years have expressed astonishment over what an extraordinary piece of writing it is for an author of Hanley's social origin and political allegiance to have produced. Not only do the pair of working-class infantrymen perform acts of horrendous violence in the torture scene itself, but they are also presented as thoroughly revolting human beings. Of the two, the Irishman Peter O'Garra is the one we learn more about and it is from his perspective that the majority of the story is told. On page eight Hanley presents us with a list of no fewer than twenty-three terms of insult by which O'Garra has been known over the last fifteen years, including "Belfast bastard," "misanthrope," "sucker," "blasted sod," "strange man," "toad" and "pervert."[40] This last one is clearly justified even if the others are not, for we are told that O'Garra has a habit of stalking and frightening women back home in Ireland. (There are two references to his "lonely nights, those fruitless endeavours beneath the clock in Middle Abbey Street.")[41] But unsavoury as O'Garra seems, his Mancunian crony and squadron-mate Elston is even worse. Apparently, "When he [O'Garra] had first set eyes on Elston, he had despised him, there was something in this man entirely repugnant to him."[42] One hardly likes to think what

kind of "something" could be so appalling to a man like O'Garra. The duo are reminiscent of other unwholesome double-acts in Hanley's writing, such as the murdering seamen Horrigan and Scully in the short story 'Feud' (1931) and wretched below-decks scavengers Williams and Vesuvius (the latter so nicknamed because of his acne-ravaged face) in *Hollow Sea,* all of whom are working-class and irredeemably repulsive. John Fordham's comment on *The German Prisoner:* "It is a curious story from one whose writer's sense of mission derives from a desire for working-class emancipation, since its two soldier protagonists from the ranks are represented as unspeakably sadistic,"[43] is to the point.

Richard Aldington, in the introduction to the first edition referred to earlier, attempts to address these issues. Aldington's financial assistance was essential in producing *The German Prisoner's* print run of five hundred, and his warmth and respect for Hanley are not to be questioned, especially since the latter's preference for powerful, hard-hitting writing over bourgeois art-for-art's-sake recalls the sentiments expressed in Aldington's own novel of World War One, *The Death of a Hero* (1929). But all the same, a feel of apologetics pervades his introduction and one detects an endeavour to fit an acceptable reading onto Hanley's puzzlingly dark portrayal of his own class. Aldington writes:

> Here we see human nature ruthlessly exposed in its most abject and terrible circumstances; we see the unspeakable wrong which is worked upon human souls by those who are supposed to be its guardians and guides. Why are these men in this hell? Mr. Hanley leaves us to find the answer. But what force and vitality there are in this presentation of men driven to madness under the inconceivable stress of modern war…
>
> "But," it will be said, "there are so many dreadful dirty words in the talk of these two men. Even though they are tortured to madness, we cannot sympathise with men who talk like that."
>
> Well, you ought to. You were not afraid to send men to that hell, you did everything you could to get them there, and congratulated yourselves on your patriotic fervour.[44]

This assessment of Hanley's story raises what is known in general terms as the "nature-nurture debate:" which is to say, the question of whether human characteristics are the result of inherent unalterable tendencies or the consequence of environment and circumstance. Socialist writing has tended towards the latter interpretation when explaining how underprivileged but essentially good people can turn to sloth, immorality and wickedness, placing the blame on the social hardships

and institutionalised oppressions they face. But to apply such ideas to *The German Prisoner* as Aldington does, and assume Elston and O'Garra's "dreadful dirty words" are the result of being "tortured to madness" after having to fight in a terrible war for others' sakes, is to ignore Hanley's implication that Elston and O'Garra are inherently debased and foul. There is an abundance of animal-imagery in the descriptive passages about the two men, suggesting they were born into less-than-human status: Elston has teeth "like a horse's"[45] and is called a "weasel,"[46] O'Garra is referred to as a "rat,"[47] and the two men maul their prisoner's body "like mad dogs."[48] The resonance of Hanley's preferred adjectives in describing the infantrymen, particularly "rotten" and "pesty" which occur repeatedly, conveys the impression that it is Elston and O'Garra's nature to be this way rather than a condition imposed on them during their military service. Consider, for example, the passage below:

> There is a peculiar power about rottenness in that it feeds on itself, borrows from itself; and its tendency is always downward. That very action had seized the polluted imagination of the Irishman. He was helpless. Rottenness called to him; called to him from the pesty frame of Elston.[49]

The narrator's authoritative tone here establishes this "rottenness" as a constant, a "given," a quality inherent and unchanging that is simply to be expected in men like O'Garra and Elston. Stokes is in agreement with this reading when he writes: "it seems to me that in their vicious sadism they act not against, but in accordance with their true natures...They are, in fact, less than human; their behaviour, compared even with that of characters like Vesuvius and Williams in *Hollow Sea,* has no psychological or moral interest."[50] And Anne Rice critiques Aldington's introduction thus:

> Praising Hanley for the "force and vitality" with which he depicts "the unspeakable wrong...worked on human souls by those who are supposed to be its guardians and guides," Aldington reconstructs O'Garra and Elston as suffering innocents who are driven and "tortured" to madness. Rounding up the usual suspects—old men and women distributing white feathers—Aldington rebuffs their objections to the "dreadful dirty words" these characters use: "If you were not ashamed to send men into the war, why should you blush to read what they said in it? ...Though the world will little note nor long remember what they did there, perhaps it will not hurt you to know a little of what they said and suffered." In his insistence on what the men "said" and "suffered," Aldington himself seems to have difficulty remembering "What they did there." By

> refusing to acknowledge that they are rapists and murderers, Aldington recuperates a fantasy of sacrificial victims purified through suffering that works to perpetuate the mythology of war.[51]

If, then, we are to arrive at a proper understanding of Hanley's intent in this novella, we must abandon conventional ways of understanding working-class or socialist writing and engage with the text in a more considered way. This in itself is not easy, owing to the scenes of torture which at times become difficult to read. But if we do look beyond these aspects, we can observe two important elements that contribute much to the deeper meanings of this story. The first has to do with the political and psychological dimensions behind the act of torture itself.

Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* provides an attempt to theorise the politics of torture. She begins by arguing that "To have pain is to have *certainty;* "[52] or to put it another way, pain is one of the most vivid and indisputable emotional states. Somebody in pain will be in no doubt as to whether they are in pain, and though they may be able to convince others that they are not, the sufferer cannot fool him or herself in this way.[53] For Scarry, the undeniable reality of pain is at the core of the political intent behind the act of torture:

> The physical pain [of the victim] is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of "incontestable reality" on that power that has brought it into being. It is, of course, precisely because the reality of that power is so highly contestable, the regime so unstable, that torture is being used.[54]

This interpretation is useful in understanding the activities of Elston and O'Garra as they set about inflicting agonies upon the prisoner, Otto Reiburg of Muenchen. The two British soldiers repeatedly announce their opposition to Reiburg's leaders, countrymen and nation, thereby associating themselves with Britain and her allies in the War's greater scheme. Elston's cry to Reiburg: "We're trapped here. Through you. Through you and your bloody lot. If only you hadn't come,"[55] is an example of this process in operation, and Rice observes that "such behaviour announces the success of Elston's military training."[56] Calling partly upon the work of Eric Leed, she writes:

> "To escape the low and painful status of victim," the soldier must identify with the aggressor. Such identification enables "the soldier's activity in war—all the shooting, maiming and killing—

> to be perceived as moral, legitimate, and meaningful." The complex system of division by which society operates becomes intensified in wartime, firmly fixing categories of good and evil. Because O'Garra and Elston do not initially blame the German prisoner for their predicament, we can see how "evil" is constructed and what it takes to assume the mantle of aggressor.[57]

Thus in perverting the role of "defenders of the nation" Elston and O'Garra can be seen to legitimate the atrocities they commit upon Reiburg, convincing themselves that their acts of violence are carried out in the name of King and country. Their torture of Reiburg is a key component of this, for according to Scarry, one of the principal functions of that activity is to establish just such a framework of allegiance, opposition and legitimation:

> Pain is a purely physical experience of negation, an immediate sensory rendering of "against," of something being against one, of something one must be against. Even though it occurs within oneself, it is at once identified as "not oneself," "not me," as something so alien it must right now be gotten rid of...it is the very nature of torture to in each present moment identify, announce, act out in brutality, accusation, and challenge the state of its own otherness, the state of being against, the fact of being the enemy.[58]

It's true that the rhetoric of war, by its very nature, endlessly legitimises brutality, but the faction that Elston and O'Garra ally themselves with can be seen as a "contestable power" or "unstable regime" in two ways. Firstly, their assertions that their deeds are only what their nation demands of them in wartime are tenuous, to say the least. They are simply two rogue soldiers in a trench, separated from all their commanding officers, acting without the orders or approval of any higher-ranking figure. What power they have over the situation in a non-military sense is also dubious, for although they successfully dominate their prisoner, both know that an untold number of enemies, hidden in the fog, have them surrounded. Their torture of Reiburg can be seen as a desperate attempt to cling to some illusion of power over the opposing faction, whilst both British troopers steadily descend into madness caused by their terrible fear for their lives. Hanley portrays their breakdown into paranoia and delusion in every graphic detail: their repeated and obsessive cries that there is no escape, their verbal and physical fights with each other, and their increasingly deranged view that Reiburg is the one personally responsible for the War and all their

suffering. Just before the final torture scene in which Reiburg is killed, Elston screams at him:

> Make the funkin' fog rise and we'll give you anything. Everything. Make the blasted war stop, now, right away. Make all this mud and shite vanish. Will you. You bastards started it. Will you now. See! We are both going mad. We are going to kill ourselves.[59]

The defenders of Britain and all her values are in reality no more than two madmen dreading death, which duly comes to them in the story's final paragraph. But the power they claim to represent is unstable for another reason, and that is because the very idea of nineteenth-century British values and the politics of Empire were thrown into question by the events of the Great War. New technology and new methods of fighting changed the way in which battles were fought, and made it clear that wars such as those previously won by the British Empire would not come again. The world had changed, and a new form of combat now brought fatality statistics so high that men were reduced to nothing but numbers. For many, a telling symbol that the old order had passed and a new, darker age was beginning was the enormous losses that were suffered among the younger generation, such as in 1916 when thousands of British youths were unceremoniously slaughtered during the Battle of the Somme. (Hanley's elder brother Joe was among them.)[60] Events such as this led to a growing fear that the natural order had been sacrificed, and continuity and social stability were now under threat from the new, advancing class of Yeatsian "rough beasts."

Otto Reiburg can be seen as such an image of doomed youth after Wilfred Owen's fashion, calling to mind particularly the dead boy of 'Strange Meeting', while Hanley's descriptions of O'Garra and Elston portray them as brutal and physically repellent. This is often achieved by direct contrasts drawn between the prisoner and his captors, such as in the descriptive passage that contains the words: "Nature had hewn him [Elston] differently, had denied him the young German's grace of body, the fair hair, the fine clear eyes that seemed to reflect all the beauty and music and rhythm of the Rhine." In this way *The German Prisoner* is similar to Hanley's later short story 'Feud', in which once again an old order represented by a beautiful youth is crushed by two coarse and savage men. When O'Garra (who is marginally more sympathetic than Elston) bursts into tears upon first seeing "the stream of blood gush forth from the German's mouth,"[61] his weeping can be interpreted as an unconscious

response to the death of civility that he is enacting. And in participating in this shift to barbarism, thereby undermining the values they claim to be upholding, the two British soldiers render the power they represent all the more contentious.

The second significant aspect of *The German Prisoner* is its homosexual overtones, which are never made explicit as they are in *Boy* and *A Passion Before Death,* but are no less powerful for it. A useful angle of entry into this aspect of Hanley's novella is provided Elston's curious fluctuations between hatred of Reiburg and self-hate. ("You bastards started it. Will you now. See! We are both going mad. We are going to kill ourselves.") Rice's assertion: "*The German Prisoner* reminds us why men are sent to war—to kill and maim each other—demonstrating how ethnic and class divisions, homophobia and misogyny help make this carnage possible,"[62] is supported by an analysis of Elston and O'Garra's relationship that explains its oddness (they are disgusted by each other and yet inseparable) by understanding it as homosexual attraction twisted into hate by the ingrained prejudices of society and the army. As working-class slum-dwellers (and possibly in O'Garra's case colonised other, though the text does not reveal whether he is Catholic or Protestant) the two have become accustomed to thinking of themselves as filthy, corrupted, inadequate specimens of manhood. In this interpretation, Rice's remark of O'Garra that "Self-hatred translates his attraction to Elston into hate at first sight"[63] makes sense, and supports an argument made by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in Chapter Four of *Epistemology of the Closet.* Sedgwick writes that the response to "male homosexual panic" can be characterised as a dual state in the masculine subject: "first, the acute *mutability,* through the fear of one's own 'homosexuality', of acculturated men; and second, a reservoir of potential for *violence* caused by the self-ignorance this regime constitutively enforces."[64] Sedgwick goes on to argue that in the armed forces, "where both men's manipulability and their potential for violence are at the highest possible premium, the *pre*scription of the most intimate male bonding and the *pro*scription of (the remarkably cognate) 'homosexuality' are both stronger than in civilian society—are, in fact, close to absolute."[65]

Certainly this distorted attraction between the two soldiers is perceptible throughout *The German Prisoner.* Consider the moment below, when Elston and O'Garra are fleeing from the attack that will separate them from their squadron and land them in the fateful trench:

> And now every sound and movement seemed to strike some responsive chord in the Irishman's nature. He hung desperately onto the Manchester man. For some reason or other he dreaded losing contact with him. He could not understand this sudden desire for Elston's company. But the desire overwhelmed him.[66]

When Otto Reiburg stumbles into Elston and O'Garra clutches, the story's homosexual elements take on a stronger and much more loathsome form. Perhaps because of the unrealisable, taboo desire between the two British troopers, or perhaps because O'Garra (as we know from the accounts of his activities on Middle Abbey Street) is already sexually frustrated, their torture of Reiburg rapidly becomes as lascivious as it is violent. From his first appearance, perceived through the eyes of Elston and O'Garra, Reiburg is described in romantic, sensuous terms: Hanley dwells upon his body, "as graceful as a young sapling," his hair, "as fair as ripe corn," his "blue eyes, and finely moulded features."[67] As the torture progresses, Hanley remarks of Elston that "There was something terrible stirring in this weasel's blood. He knew not what it was. But there was a strange and powerful force possessing him, and it was going to use him as its instrument."[68] We see this force at work during Elston and Reiburg's moments of physical contact during the violence, which are strongly erotic in tone. ("Elston, on making contact with the youth's soft skin, became almost demented. The velvety touch of the flesh infuriated him.")[69] What follows is the final segment of the torture scene, in which the death-blow is finally struck:

> O'Garra shouted out:
>
> "PULL his bloody trousers down."
>
> With a wild movement Elston tore down the prisoner's trousers.
>
> In complete silence O'Garra pulled out his bayonet and stuck it up the youth's anus. The German screamed.
>
> Elston laughed and said: "I'd like to back-scuttle the bugger."
>
> "Go ahead," shouted O'Garra.
>
> "I tell you what," said Elston. "Let's stick this horse-hair up his penis."
>
> So they stuck the horse-hair up his penis. Both men laughed shrilly.
>
> A strange silence followed.
>
> "Kill the bugger," screamed O'Garra.
>
> Suddenly, as if instinctively, both men fell away from the prisoner, who rolled over, emitting a soft sigh—Ah——. His face was buried in the soft mud.[70]

Here the climax of the torture scene parallels the climax in a sexual act. Overt gay elements are prominent: the repeated use of the word "bugger," the fixation on Reiburg's anus and penis, and Elston's remark about "back-scuttling" leave us in no doubt that homosexual desire looms large here. (Shortly after this scene, Elston remarks, apropos of nothing: "The last time I fell asleep I did it in my pants. It made me get mad with that bugger down there."[71] Though we're not told what exactly he did in his pants, the most likely suggestion for a man Elston's age would be a nocturnal emission, prompted by his attraction to Reiburg, which was either repressed or enacted by the torture that followed.) The scene also contains more oblique symbolism: the bayonet "enters" Reiburg as a phallus would, and the event that this leads to—his death—is described in language that recalls the "little death," or orgasm. Hanley presents the violence committed by Elston and O'Garra in a manner that acts out, with monstrous transformations, the practice of homosexual congress.

In *The Body in Pain,* Scarry describes this transformation as one of the key elements of torture. To objectify the disappearance of anything in the world external to the victim's pain, "Everything human and inhuman that is either physically or verbally, actually or elusively present...become[s] part of the glutted realm of weaponry; weaponry that can refer equally to pain or power."[72] The human body can become a weapon against itself if contorted or abused; language becomes a weapon through verbal connection with non-present objects (there are torture methods called "the submarine," "the Vietnamese tiger cages," "the parrot's perch" etc.),[73] and torturers are known for taking everyday objects not intended for violent purposes and using them as instruments for doing harm.[74] We see this in Elston and O'Garra's use of the horse-hair; and it's also possible to detect something of the transformation Scarry describes in the death-blow struck with a bayonet. On the one hand this is already an object designed to cause injury, but the symbolic metamorphosis whereby the male phallus becomes a steel blade transforms an organ that should allow the ultimate sharing of human experience (the sensations of sexual intercourse) into the bringer of a completely internal experience that the two other men do not share (Reiburg's pain).

Of course, as Hanley is well aware, during the First World War homosexuality played an important part in the lives of many British soldiers and informed much of the writing they produced. Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* is a widely-used text on the historical moment in question, but it betrays a number of

inadequacies in its treatment of this particular area. For though Fussell rightly observes that "the war sanctioned an expression more overt than ever before"[75] that men could be in love with other men, and that wartime writing is "replete with what we can call the homoerotic,"[76] he goes on to assert that this consists of nothing more than sublimated, temporary love felt between young middle- and upper-class officers.[77] Front-line homoeroticism in Fussell's terms owes more to the mode of thought identified by Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* as "homosocial;" the view that it is "the most natural thing in the world that people of the same gender, people grouped together under the single most determinative diacritical mark of social organisation, people whose economic, institutional, emotional, physical needs and knowledges may have so much in common, should bond together also on the axis of sexual desire."[78] Fussell also believes that wartime homoerotic crushes were never consummated, stating that "Of the active, unsublimated kind [of homosexuality] there was very little at the front."[79] He is contradicted in this by Rice, who cites statistical evidence that between 1914 and 1919, "twenty-two officers and 270 other ranks were court-martialled for 'indecency' with another man."[80]

Gay writers of the Great War called upon a pre-existing literary tradition that portrayed soldiers as homosexually desirable, dwelling on their youth, virility, cleanliness and heroism, and which originates in the Classical texts of ancient Greece and Rome. Its modern-world equivalent began with Walt Whitman and was brought to England in the pre-War years by Edward Carpenter, a poet whom Whitman greatly influenced.[81] The poetic sentiments of soldier-love expressed in such collections as *Drum Taps* were then taken up by Gerard Manley Hopkins, A. E. Housman and other members of the Aesthetic movement, and the Uranians. (Carpenter himself counted himself among the Uranians and was involved in their official body, the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology.)[82] This literary tradition emphasising boy-love and the romantic attractions of soldiers informed the front-line homoeroticism identified by Fussell, which he recognises as a purely bourgeois interest. There is very little sense of class in *The Great War and Modern Memory:* Fussell remarks briefly that high-ranking soldiers were occasionally attracted to working-class infantrymen, but he concentrates almost exclusively on the relationships between officers alone, arguing that "It was largely members of the upper and upper-middle classes who were prepared by public-school training to experience such crushes."[83]

The German Prisoner focuses on a very different social class, and a very different type of homosexual activity, to the one Fussell devotes his attentions to. Sexuality here is more reminiscent of the mingled desire and hatred that Claggart directs at the eponymous character in Herman Melville's 'Billy Budd',[84] a text which bears a number of similarities to *The German Prisoner* and which we can safely assume that Hanley, who greatly admired Melville, would have been familiar with. However, there's a strong suggestion in Reiburg himself of the young, desirable and chaste soldier ideal sought by the Aesthetics and Uranians: he is blond (the Uranians seized upon the Victorian notion of fair-haired youths being particularly virtuous, brave and desirable),[85] he is physically beautiful, and—at least prior to his encounter with Elston and O'Garra—he appears pure and unsullied. All these attributes place him firmly within the tradition of the pre-War homoerotic literati and the wartime writers who took up their ideas, and the attention frequently drawn to Reiburg's physical form and face suggests in particular the poetry of Wilfred Owen. By presenting the young German as an object not of some romantic, unfulfilled desire but rather of a violent passion that manifests itself in physical brutality and murder, it's as if Hanley is challenging the sexual ideals associated with upper-class officers just as he challenges the ideals they were supposed to be fighting for. *The German Prisoner* is a story that overturns many assumptions about the Great War and the men who fought in it, providing a working-class perspective that is very different; so different it is often unsettling to read, but which remains unflinchingly expressive throughout.

Thus we see the flaws in Richard Aldington's view that Hanley's story presents the working class simply as victims; innocent pawns unspeakably corrupted when forced to endure hell in the name of the social order above them. Rather, Hanley's work is deliberately subversive—it unbalances established bourgeois beliefs about the War and presents the experiences of those whose voices have been excluded from histories of the event, which have for the most part been documented by and for the middle and upper classes. Hanley's working class soldiers are not pleasant men to read about, but it is not his point that they should be, any more than he intended for us to see them as sufferers under a higher power. How far, indeed, Elston and O'Garra can be interpreted as representative of their class is debatable, as in many ways they seem detached from it. But Hanley nonetheless succeeds in articulating through them an authentically working-class voice, one that we may not always want to hear, but which will nonetheless be heard over the bourgeois voices that surround it. In pursuit

of this goal Hanley is prepared to cast out both realist and naturalist conventions, and distance his work from any archetypal formula of working-class writing. *The German Prisoner* cannot rightly be described as a socialist or proletarian story in any accepted sense: rather, it reflects the author's own growing ambivalence to those politics, and supports Fordham's contention that in his writing of the thirties, Hanley "had reached the point of development where the social mission of his works was threatened by absorption in a private and inaccessible world…[and his] pursuit of a monist aesthetic was in danger of placing him at odds with the very class on behalf of which he claimed to speak."[86] To fully understand Hanley's achievement in a work such as *The German Prisoner,* then, we must consciously set him apart from the baggage of ideas, both political and aesthetic, that have come to surround the working-class writing of his time.

Chapter Three

Mass protest and "the mob:" resistance to prescribed modes of thought

There is one final element to be considered when discussing the subversions of established socialist and proletarian thought found in the four writers focused on in this study. The area, which might broadly be termed "mass protest" or "mass violence," emerges in works by Hilton, Garrett, Hanley and Phelan and is also considered by Lukács. To put the matter in oversimplified terms, there have been two main interpretations throughout history of the "crowd," which is usually thought to consist exclusively of working-class people: one is that mass protest occurs spontaneously, without organisation, and is a reaction to immediate material deprivations such as food shortages or wage reductions; and the other suggests the crowd is itself mindless and can be galvanised into activity only by higher thinkers, usually middle- or upper-class ones, who exploit the proletariat's potential for violence as a means of achieving their own personal ideological agendas. One of the most accomplished scholars of mass protest is George Rudé, the colleague of Albert Soboul and Richard Cobb and student of Georges Lefebvre. Henry J. Kaye argues that Rudé's especial strength, along with his critique of the notion that crowds are always working-class movements, is that he demonstrates the link between particular political perspectives and the received views of violent protest that have come to be accepted:

> The problem, Rudé observes, is that conservatives and "Republicans alike had projected their own political aspirations, fantasies and / or fears onto the crowd without having asked the basic historical questions"...law-and-order conservatives, he complains, see all protest as a "crime against established society;" liberal writers have tended to comprehend all crimes as a form of protest.[1]

The perspective adopted by the Soviets, which is generally termed the "Leninist" view, is that the revolutionary activities of the crowd must always be governed and controlled by upper-class leadership. The alternative, Leninists argued, is anarchy; the most extreme descriptions of which are to be found in Edmund Burke's

presentation of the rioting crowd as a "swinish multitude" in *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* and Hyppolyte Taine's perception of revolutionary action as a breeding-ground for "dregs of society:" "bandits," "thieves," "savages," "beggars" and "prostitutes."[2] The Leninist perspective should be understood as a key ingredient of Comintern prescriptions for political action, intended from the outset to facilitate the Party's substitution of itself for the class it ostensibly represented. As with Zhdanov's literary single-mindedness and intolerance, this is symptomatic of the decay of Soviet utopianism into Stalinist dictatorship. But Rudé does, in his earlier writings, tend towards classic Leninism, such as in his discussion of the *sans-culottes* when he concludes that they "were on their own capable of nothing more than *economic* motivation ("trade-union consciousness"); movement beyond that required the leadership and *political* ideas developed by bourgeois intellectuals."[3] Later Rudé came to question this model when he recognised the lower social orders had ideas and motivations of their own that stood apart from those of the organising bourgeoisie.[4]

At the very opposite extreme to Rudé's original stance lies Georges Sorel. In his controversial and disturbing study *Reflections on Violence* Sorel adopts a strongly anti-Leninist perspective, turning to the French Revolution as Rudé does but using it as an example by which to illustrate how State-sponsored violence only replaces one corrupt authority with another. The real solution to exploitation and suffering lies, for Sorel, in violence carried out by the proletariat for the proletariat, free of the ideological constraints of bourgeois theorists. ("The abuses of the revolutionary bourgeois force of '93 should not be confused with the violence of our revolutionary syndicalists.")[5] Sorel's syndicalism is of an extreme sort, inspired by the French syndicalist movements of the late 1890s and also the 1902 *Confédération Générale du Travail* strikes, though the C.G.T. was later to adopt a Communist stance.[6] Crucially, Sorel does not see in spontaneous protest the anarchy feared by Leninist thought; rather, he considers proletarian violence "a very fine and heroic thing" serving "the immemorial interests of civilisation."[7] Jeremy Jennings writes that Sorel's conception of violence draws on a Classical Greek conception of war, which imagines conflict as "unselfish, heroic, disciplined, devoid of all material considerations...informed by ethical values engendering 'an entirely epic state of mind'."[8] There is also a Catholic mysticism underlying Sorelian thought; an anti-secular and anti-rationalist notion of "blood justice."

It's certainly true that Sorel was influential on Marxists, and his pro-confrontation approach has resonances with other writers on violent protest. This is evident in Rudé's assertion that "conflict is both a normal and a salutary means of achieving social progress,"[9] and as we will see later, part of Lukács's critique of Zola stems from the former's perception of violent struggle as a force more valuable and productive than the latter imagines it to be. But much that distresses in *Reflections on Violence* comes from its author's refusal to consider the potential drawbacks and dangers inherent in his Classical model for violence. Sorel grudgingly admits "It may be conceded to those in favour of mild methods that violence may hamper economic progress and even, when it goes beyond a certain limit, that it may be a danger to morality,"[10] but does not give any further thought to the limits and dangers he refers to. Thus, while the ideas of *Reflections on Violence* pervaded many of the early anarcho-syndicalist movements such as the Industrial Workers of the World, the Right-Wing Sorel was seized upon with equal readiness by the Nazis and his study came to inform much fascist thought. Two of the writers focused on in this thesis include segments in their novels that critique the perception of violence Sorel endorses. Jack Hilton and Jim Phelan were probably not familiar with *Reflections on Violence,* as no English language edition was available until T. E. Hulme's translation was published in 1950, but in their works they explore more fully than Sorel does the potential for harm that lies within his theories.

The twenty-sixth chapter of Phelan's exceptional novel *Ten-a-Penny People* (1938) contains a lengthy account of strike action at the local factory that leads to violent protest, which itself degenerates into chaos and disorder. Riots, blacklegging and picketing are seen from the outset, interspersed with moments of internal strife within the union itself and in clashes between men of different unions and workplaces. Phelan recognises in his scenes of mass protest that violence can occur without full solidarity among the protesters or a clear and universal understanding of their political aims, and when it does it inevitably degenerates into mob rule that achieves little. The author saw this in Dublin in 1916 while living through Easter Uprising, and recurring images from his autobiographical reminisces of that time appear in the chapter's strike scenes (particularly prominent is the one of strike-breakers concealing long iron bars in their sleeves), indicating Phelan's fear that the violent protests of organised socialism in England are repeating the mistakes of Ireland's earlier troubles. This sentiment is underscored by the fact that although

most of *Ten-a-Penny People's* protagonists and more likeable characters are devout Communists, they resist the call for public disorder and chaos. The demonstration descending into widespread chaos at the end of the chapter, with the police accidentally clubbing the blacklegs they are meant to be protecting, is a particularly effective moment. Two of Phelan's main sources for *Ten-a-Penny* are *Mary Barton* and *Hard Times,* and these two novels' wariness about mob action is mirrored by the later work.

Hilton's *Laugh at Polonius* contains a similar sequence in which the Sorelian idea that proletarian violence is "very fine and heroic" is put under scrutiny. Much of the criticism here is to be found in the character Harold Schofield, a "book-learned" socialist who expounds on Julian Huxley (another instance of Hilton voicing the embitterment he felt towards eugenicist theory) and Tom Paine. The author seems to have little regard for Schofield, who is perhaps the grandson of Dickens's union leader Slackbridge: socially irresponsible, vainglorious and a rabble-rouser, he "put revolutionary fervour"[11] into the strikers at Leslie Stott's mill and in so doing "made them cease to be people."[12] His willingness to let ten thousand workers die with him before accepting defeat is the most graphic illustration of Hilton's scorn for such protesters. One is reminded of the lengthy passage at the end of his autobiography *Caliban Shrieks* referred to in Chapter One, where Hilton, like Orwell in the second half of *The Road to Wigan Pier,* voices his doubts on the nation's left-wing campaigners. Organised socialists "lack human nature," "are merely book socialists," "are as useful...as a group of feminine sissies when playing caveman stuff" (a gender conception typical of Hilton); the Independent Labour Party are all talk, have no understanding of the workingman's problems, and should be called the "Inflated Little Pawns;" socialist extremists are too radical and not trusting enough; the Parliamentary Labour Party is inept and prioritises appeasing the bosses above all else; and Trade Unions are only out to make money and are built on "it's-who-you-know" mentality.[13] Much of this, particularly the attack on the I.L.P., is flagrantly unfair as Hilton's judgements tend to be—there are good reasons why *Caliban Shrieks* has not been remembered as one of the great 1930s autobiographies. But the strike scenes in *Laugh at Polonius* reflect this growing cynicism Hilton felt towards socialist organisers and the effectiveness of the protests they instigate.

Phelan and Hilton had both been involved in mob action and were writing from experience, rather than imposing their own ideological perspectives on events they did

not live through as Sorel does with the French Revolution. They both knew the pitfalls and the ways in which mass protest could go awry, if it was riven by internal disputes, dictated by the egotism of glory-hog organisers, or allowed to degenerate into an ugly free-for-all. In neither *Laugh at Polonius* nor *Ten-a-Penny People* is mass violence presented as any sort of solution to the problems of exploitation and hardship faced by the workers. Phelan in his novel is ambiguous about where, if anywhere, such a solution lies; while Hilton's writing displays something of his socialist realist commitment in its adherence to a version of the Leninist line. For though Hilton had no time for any of the existing manifestations of organised socialism, if we consider *Polonius'* disastrous and damaging crowd violence in the light of the optimistic conclusion brought about a socialist candidate's election to local government in his other novel, *Champion,* we can see at least a semblance of Leninist ideology: specifically, a rejection of anarchism and a belief that progress lies in State socialism.

In their writings on violent protest, both Hilton and Phelan see violence of that nature as one of the problems caused by the exploitation of the working-class; a symptom that must be cured like all these problems rather than the cure in itself. A parallel is to be found here in Zola's *Germinal,* one of the novels Lukács uses to critique Zola's status as a radical writer. Certainly it's true that one such as Lukács, who expressed Soviet allegiance, can find aspects of that writer to criticise: Brian Nelson remarks that "Zola was deeply sceptical of mass class action, revolutionary idealists and professional social reformers," and "portrays socialists and revolutionaries as either naïve utopian dreamers or cynical opportunists."[14] Nelson goes on to show how Zola, through the character of Etienne Lantier, demonstrates to his own satisfaction that the idea of proletarian leadership cannot realistically work.[15] Many of Lukács's denunciations of Zola as bourgeois, conservative and non-revolutionary come from parts of his novels like this. Lukács makes a favourable comparison with Walter Scott because, he argues, Scott's writings on mass protest are superior for showing the connection between spontaneous mass reaction and the historical consciousness of the masses' leaders. Lukács writes:

> Scott portrays the great transformations of history as transformations of popular life. He always starts by showing how important historical changes affect everyday life, the effect of material and psychological changes upon people who react immediately and violently to them, without

> understanding their causes. Only by working up from this basis does he portray the complicated ideological, political and moral movements to which such changes inevitably give rise. The popular character of Scott's art, therefore, does not consist in an exclusive portrayal of the oppressed and exploited classes. That would be a narrow interpretation. Like every great popular writer, Scott aims at portraying the totality of national life in its complex interaction between "above" and below;" his vigorous popular character is expressed in the fact that "below" is seen as the material basis and artistic expression for what happens "above."[16]

Lukács finds Zola guilty of such a "narrow interpretation" because, although he presents the hardships of the working-class with sensitivity and sympathy, he concentrates on engendering pity for them and does not believe the violence they become involved in has any potential to remedy their problems. Elliott M. Grant, in his discussion of *Germinal's* clash between miners and the authorities in the last chapter of Part Six, concludes: "The struggle forecast in the initial chapter comes to a great climax here. With it come compassion and pity for these human beings caught in a conflict which they seem powerless to avoid."[17] Hilton and Phelan both recall Zola in their own presentations of violent struggle, with their focus not on the revolutionary power of those confrontations, but on how the working-class are swept up as one by the tide of bloodshed and left with only increased suffering in its wake.

Hanley's sizeable 1935 novel *The Furys* (part one of The Furys Chronicle) contains two scenes of mass violence which seem to make a similar point. The second of these, which describes a night-time disturbance in which rioting and looting break out during a demonstration against police brutality, is one of the author's most memorable. The young hero, Peter Fury, is on his way home when he is caught up in the riot. Amid the confusion he is taken under the wing of a man who is probably Hanley's most bizarre creation: R. H. Titmouse, self-proclaimed professor of anthropology, who, half-nightmare figure and half-pantomime villain, is ludicrously out of place in a novel cycle that otherwise sets out to realistically portray everyday workers and real historical events. Hanley informs us the Professor "stood over six feet in height and was almost as broad as he was long,"[18] so would be noticeable enough in a crowd even if he were not bizarrely clad in a tailcoat and deerstalker cap. Titmouse, another of Hanley's monstrous predatory homosexuals, is quite mad, carries a shred of black satin torn from a woman's blouse to use as a handkerchief, wears a solid gold fob-watch tied to a piece of string, has a duelling scar on his cheek, and speaks in ranting dialogue that seems to belong to the melodrama of an earlier

age. ("'Ha ha!' Professor Titmouse laughed. 'Did you think I was going to eat you?'")[19] Even John Fordham's description of Titmouse as a Dickensian grotesque[20] does not quite do justice to the otherworldliness of this figure. The scene where he leads Peter to the top of a stone lion in the Town Square and shows him the unquiet crowd spread out below them, with its strange suggestion of the final temptation of Christ in the wilderness, implies that the character is invested with a spiritual significance and transcendence of the mortal realm that no other character in the novel possesses.

It is in this scene that Professor Titmouse holds forth on his own responses to the mass violence taking place, and, as Edward Stokes observes, "through his lunatic rhetoric is somewhat equivocally conveyed what one assumes to be Hanley's own view."[21] Quite why Hanley chose to voice his own perspectives through a creature like Titmouse we may never know, but it is to be assumed that his larger-than-life status exists to provide impact and authoritativeness, turning his mad oratory into the conclusive verdict of a being who is, both figuratively and literally, above the rest of the cast. When Peter contends that the crowd are there "to protest against the brutality of the authorities,"[22] Titmouse responds:

> "Fiddlesticks! To protest? That is wrong, my boy. They do not know why they are here. Understand me. They are a lot of sheep. Look!" he said. "Would you say that action constitutes a protest against brutality? Brutality. They do not know what the word means. Look!" he repeated. "just below you. There is brutality. Real brutality. Wicked. Look at the child! She is crying. She is being crushed. Her mother holds her to her breast, but she is being crushed by the crowd. What right has that woman to bring her child here? To stew for hours, suffocated by sheer weight, by the smell of sweating bodies, of mouldy clothes. Does that constitute a protest against brutality? No, my boy."[23]

In this scene as in many others throughout his writing of the thirties, Hanley illustrates that although his interest in portraying the lives of his own class of society places him in accord with some of the conventions of proletarian writing, about organised socialism he has little faith and is becoming increasingly distant from all Left-Wing politics. *The Furys's* other protest scene does, however, shift the responsibility for chaos and suffering to the ruling authorities and away from the protesting masses. This may have much to do with the fact that the episode, which portrays a Sunday

afternoon protest descending into carnage when mounted police become involved, is based on a true event.

It's difficult to work out when exactly the five books of The Furys Chronicle are set, as they contain a number of contradictory historical markers, but Edward Stokes's conclusion that *The Furys* takes place in 1911 does make sense.[24] (Certainly more so than the back-cover blurb on 1983 Penguin reprint, which claims the book takes place "during the General Strike"—that writer has evidently not read, or heard of, the third instalment in the sequence which is set in the middle of World War One.) If Stokes's dating is correct, and since *The Furys* is set in Liverpool (or at least a fictionalised version of that city, which Hanley names "Gelton), it's fair to assume that the first of its two mass violence scenes is based on the events of August the 13th 1911, known as the "Liverpool Peterloo" or the English equivalent of Bloody Sunday. This was the day the 1911 Transport Workers' Strike was crushed after growing to national proportions that gave Parliament cause for fear. This episode in Merseyside's history of working-class struggle is fully described in Harold Hikins's book *Strike: The Liverpool General Transport Strike 1911* (Liverpool: Toulouse Press, 1980) and so need not be dwelled on here, other than to note that there are too many similarities between Hanley's scene in *The Furys* and the real event for it to be coincidence. The Liverpool Peterloo came about when a mass gathering of strike supporters in St. George's Plateau were ordered to disperse by local authorities, and then, with no more warning than this, police on horseback charged and turned a peaceful protest into a bloodbath. All these details are replicated in Hanley's novel (though he renames the Plateau "Powell Square") and it is clear he intends for this scene to operate in the manner of Walter Scott's historical novels as described at length by Lukács: a crossing-over of real events into the fictive world of his characters.

But what is particularly interesting about Hanley's inclusion of the Liverpool Peterloo in *The Furys* is that George Garrett, another of the writers focused on in this thesis, was involved in the event itself—it was in fact his fifteenth birthday, and the young Garrett, who had attended to show his support for the strikers, was dealt a broken nose and lost several teeth to a police baton when order disintegrated. One of the most intriguing thoughts generated by this entire study is that Garrett and Hanley's characters "shared" the event, the real writer-to-be somehow standing shoulder-to shoulder with Hanley's fictitious Desmond Fury and Andrew Postlethwaite at St. George's Plateau. It is also indicative of the significance of this

incident that both Hanley and Garrett were influenced by it in their writing: the former in *The Furys,* the latter in *Liverpool 1920-1922.*

In a thesis titled *Fiction and Subversion* the presence of a non-fiction work such as Garrett's *Liverpool 1921-1922* requires some explanation. It's certainly true that the piece, first published in 1949, is of huge importance as a documentary report as it is probably the most comprehensive eye-witness description of Merseyside's working-class struggles during those two eventful years. Both Millie Toole and Jack and Mary Braddock call upon it extensively in their own histories of the period (though Toole, it must be added, does not always cite Garrett as her source). But while *Liverpool 1921-1922* is first and foremost reportage, it is framed by the conventions of fictional narrative both in its construction—Garrett deliberately pares away extraneous details and focuses on dialogue and events that move the plot along, providing a recounting of actual occurrences that is faster-paced and more coherent as a story than those occurrences were—and also in its substitution of individual names for character "types," including "The Spiritualist," "The Old Police Striker," "The Woman Organiser," "The Young Seaman and "The Syndicalist," the latter two being characters based on Garrett himself. (This device is a commonplace of Industrial Workers of the World Writing, revealing the Wobblies' influence on Garrett personally and on Merseyside syndicalism generally, and also has important resonances with Lukácian theory.) *Liverpool 1921-1922* is perhaps best understood as "socialist writing" in the terms Storm Jameson, a writer with a similar stance on naturalism to Lukács's own, expressed in her essay 'Documents' (first published in *Fact,* 1936): couched in terse language, rejecting strong feeling and sentimentality, not "emotionally dishonest."[25] Garrett fictionalises reality only in so far as he imposes structure on it to bring intelligibility and fluidity to his account. This is close to the type of writing Jameson appeals for when she writes:

> The narrative must be sharp, compressed, concrete. Dialogue must be short—a seizing of the significant, the revealing word. The emotion should spring directly from the fact. It must not be squeezed from it by the writer, running forward with a "When I saw this, I felt, I suffered, I rejoiced..." His job is not to tell us what he felt, but to be coldly and industriously presenting, arranging, selecting, discarding from the mass of his material to get the significant detail, which leaves no more to be said, and implies everything.[26]

There can be no doubt that in Garrett's account of Liverpool from 1921 to 1922, the writer calls upon his own experience of institutionalised violence ten years previously. The report begins by describing the gradual development of a Merseyside division of Wal Hannington's National Unemployed Workers' Movement, of which Garrett, along with many other prominent names from Liverpool's Labour history, was a member. He goes on to relate their attempt to lobby the city authorities on the pressing need for "work or full maintenance" for the working-class, their subsequent use of peaceful demonstrations and nuisance marches (intended to block traffic and disrupt local services) when their demands were ignored, and follows with the savage unprovoked attack by police in the Walker Art Gallery on the Twelfth of September 1921, which led to widespread injury, arrests and the suppression of the movement.

Garrett, as noted earlier, was a syndicalist and I.W.W. member, and as such displays two political influences that informed much of the development of Liverpool's Labour movements. Bob Holton observes that "British syndicalists...shared common feelings with the I.W.W.,"[27] and shows how the regular sea traffic from Merseyside to the United States was used to convey messages to Wobblies in America, and sometimes to smuggle members to England when they were wanted by police in their home country. (Liverpool played a similar role for the rebels in Dublin, as Phelan describes in his 1938 novel *Green Volcano.)* Jack Braddock and his brother Wilf set up a Merseyside branch of the I.W.W. during the First World War,[28] and Wobbly leader "Big" Bill Haywood spoke in Liverpool in Autumn 1910 and Spring 1911, suggesting a direct influence on the Transport Workers' Strike of the latter year.[29] Syndicalism itself is defined by Holton thus:

> ...the term carries revolutionary overtones in the English use. Syndicalist groups in Britain shared in common a belief in revolutionary industrial organisation and action as the central means for the overthrow of capitalism. They stressed direct action rather than State-sponsored legislation as the main agency of social emancipation.[30]

Syndicalists, Holton writes, "used the sympathetic strike and the general strike as weapons of class conflict,"[31] and rejected the idea of social reform through parliament as they "felt that the Parliamentary atmosphere only emasculated the drive of Labour's elected representatives."[32] The resonances with Sorel, who considered his pro-violence philosophy a form of syndicalism, are apparent here. Holton also

illustrates that Merseyside syndicalism and the anarchism resisted by Leninist politics were closely allied, especially during the slow beginnings of syndicalism on Merseyside in the years leading up to 1910. Holton asserts that an anarcho-syndicalist network was visible in Liverpool as early as 1907,[33] and its influences remained detectable as syndicalist movements grew rapidly during the years of "Labour unrest" between 1910 and 1914.[34] Syndicalism is best understood as a mode of thought rather than a single exclusive organisation, and its influences were visible in a number of clubs and unions of the time: Holton lists seven of these, many of which were brought together by the Independent Syndicalist Education League (I.S.E.L.) of Tom Mann, one of the most famous syndicalists.[35] After the War years these influences were still detectable in a number of Merseyside workers' movements such as the N.U.W.M and the Seamen's Vigilance Committee, both of which Garrett belonged to.

Because of Syndicalism's links to Anarchism and its common ground with certain pro-violence aspects of Sorelian theory, one might expect *Liverpool 1921-1922* to be a vehemently anti-Leninist text arguing against State socialism and lauding working-class violence as the one route to revolution and emancipation. Certainly it's possible to read such elements into Garrett's work. The situation presented, in which the unemployed are flatly let down by governing authorities, can be seen to suggest it is time for the crowd to take matters into their own hands, and Garrett seems to lead us into this interpretation both with the result of the N.U.W.M.'s first appeal to City Hall ("Apart from the stock promise, "We'll do what we can," the deputation had gained nothing of value")[36] and the narrative's memorable opening:

> It is noteworthy that during a period of mass-hunger some top-ranking figure will utter a remark as remote from reality as the notorious "no bread; let them eat cake." In Britain in the post-war years 1920-21, with the "Homes from Heroes" illusion already exploded; two million brooding unemployed; second-hand shops glutted with furniture surrendered cheaply for rent and bread; and the pawnshop windows piled with medals, now so much worthless junk; Sir Alfred Mond, Minister of Health, posed the fatuous question: "Is anyone starving?"[37]

This argument is further borne out by the story's depiction of a non-violent working-class demonstration met by ruthless violence on the part of the authorities at the Walker Art Gallery, echoing the events of 1911. What place can peaceful protest have in a world where the ruling bodies resort to atrocious methods time and again, Garrett seems to ask? Surely the only solution is to meet them on their own terms? It

is possible to see such a call for violence conveyed by the horrific bloodshed wrought at the Gallery, where men who had committed no wrong and held principles of peace were mercilessly batoned and bundled off to jail. Readers could interpret this as an outright denouncement of the effectiveness of non-violent protest methods and a declaration that there is nothing left to do but go on the offensive.

But that call for violence is not really there in *Liverpool 1921-1922;* neither explicitly nor even implicitly. In his N.U.W.M membership, his co-organising of Liverpool's 1922 contribution to the First National March on London, his work with the Seamen's Vigilance Committee and Merseyside Unity Theatre, and all his other battles for workers' rights up to the part he played in the seamen's strikes of 1966, the year of his death, George Garrett was, as Michael Murphy puts it, "an advocate—a militant advocate—of tolerance."[38] *Liverpool 1921-1922* articulates his sorrow at his home city's history of peaceful protest disrupted by State violence, but does not argue that workers must take their cue from this to swing to the opposite pole. During the scene in which the ill-fated nuisance march to the Walker Art Gallery is discussed by the N.U.W.M, Garrett describes a debate in which several committee men voice their fears over the response of the police to their recent protests: "It was very suspicious. They seemed to be acting too quiet; acting as if they were waiting for the first opportunity to run amok and baton down as many unemployed as possible."[39] This leads many to recommend stronger tactics, but the movement's leader Robert Tisseyman remains steadfastly on the side of registering their protest without provoking disorder. Tisseyman announces earlier in the account that "I'll not be a party to any violence,"[40] and when warned again at the end of the scene that the consequence of his approach will be that strikers' "heads will get bashed in all the sooner" the next day, he replies encouragingly: "It won't happen. You take my word."[41]

Tisseyman is wrong in this, as we learn soon afterwards, but all the same Garrett's sympathy and respect lie squarely with him. The ex-police officer earned Garrett's admiration for the sacrifices he made for the unemployed (he resigned from the force just months before retirement, forsaking his pension in the process, in order to show his support),[42] and his belief in progress through non-violent means closely paralleled Garrett's own. It is the younger and more militant firebrands of the N.U.W.M. over whom Garrett casts a warier eye, highlighting their prejudice and mistrust towards their tireless and principled leader ("In the opinion of the young men listeners, he was

deliberately keeping the crowd in order, and confirming the suspicions about him: once a policeman, always a policeman")[43] and their dangerous, smouldering resentment of authority. When Garrett describes how certain elements of the movement had to be dissuaded from turning to more extreme tactics during the nuisance marches that would only have given the impression that "the unemployed were an organised band of thieves,"[44] it's clear he is referring to these dissenters. If *Liverpool 1921-1922* can be said to convey any message or meaning at all, then it has to do with the importance of standing firm and upholding one's principles in the face of hardship, rather than allowing oneself to be lowered to the same level as the oppressors.

Here, then, Garrett shows himself to be primarily a Lukácian realist, with his use of character "types" and unexceptional heroes, his decision to foreground human drama in preference to the historical events he also narrates, and his insistence on showing all sides of the struggle. For Lukács, the strength of the great realist writers was in their ability to engage with the forces of history and describe them in a comprehensive and balanced way; a vital element he believed missing from the work of naturalists like Zola. When Lukács illustrates how the classic realist writers were able to portray human lives "plastically and poetically, because in their work all social forces still took the form of human relationships,"[45] and goes on to say how inferior a literary form is that of the naturalists who "seize upon the prose and place it at the centre of literature, but they only fix and perpetuate its withered features, limiting their picture to a description of the 'thing-like' milieu,"[46] he articulates the approach to writing best suited to Garrett's *Liverpool 1921-1922.* Here too, social forces and the human condition are inextricably linked, and no resolution arrives to bring harmony between the characters and their social world. Garrett expressed through his entire body of work the limitations and dangers of any form of totalising closure, and used *Liverpool 1921-1922* to discuss dilemmas that he himself could not resolve, and which remained unresolved when he produced the work.

As Garrett, Hanley, Hilton and Phelan's various responses to socialist ideologies both in the individual and collective spheres should illustrate, it is impossible to tie down or categorise their work in terms of any specific political agenda defined in the past by any specific theorist. And yet the overriding tendency in the study of English literature has always been to speak of working-class writing as within categories that imply a strict conformity to one or other of these political formulae. It has been my

intention in these last three chapters to show that terms such as "proletarian realism," "socialist realism," "proletarian naturalism," "Soviet writing," "proletarian novel" and their equivalents limit and impede our full understanding of 1930s working-class writing's complexities for two reasons: firstly, because they can imply that all working-class writing was produced with the aim of fulfilling an homogenised "socialist" agenda that does not consider the broadness and diversity that exist within Left-Wing politics; and secondly, because even when the variety of different theories of socialism is recognised, it is still a damaging assumption that any piece of working-class literature can be comfortably situated somewhere within one of these many facets. As I have endeavoured to illustrate, the strength and uniqueness of Garrett, Hanley, Hilton and Phelan's work lie in those writers' ability to subvert the political demands of Left-Wing allegiance and create uniquely working-class voices that stand apart from prescribed ideologies and agendas.

Chapter Four

Brechtian epic theatre and the 1930s "panoramic" city-life novel: new ways of presenting the working class in the writing of Jim Phelan

1) The life, writing and continued neglect of Jim Phelan

The aim of the following two chapters is to explore ways in which the writers discussed subvert existing literary or sociological conceptions of their native working class. I shall first consider Jim Phelan's *Ten-a-Penny-People,* which uses Brechtian modernisms and the contemporary form of the panoptic city-life novel to challenge nineteenth-century realism's portrayals of this social stratum, changing its members from mute victims who must be spoken for into a diverse mass who have a distinct voice all their own.

Of the working-class writers examined in this thesis, time has used Jim Phelan the hardest. All four of them disappeared from the literary world after the end of the Second World War and their works fell into neglect, even though Phelan and Hanley continued to write to the years of their deaths in 1966 and 1985 respectively, but for Hanley and Garrett a process of recovery seems to be in place. Garrett enjoyed a brief return to popularity in the early eighties with a reprint of *Liverpool 1921-1922* and the publication of *Out of Liverpool: Stories of Land and Sea,* the first collected volume of his works, and in 1999 the Trent Editions *Collected George Garrett* brought new interest in the writer. Hanley's rediscovery has been even more extensive in recent years: a steady stream of posthumous reprints began with Andre Deutsch's *Boy* and *An End and a Beginning* in 1990, followed by another reprint of the former, along with *The Furys,* two years later by Penguin Modern Classics, and continued with the Harvill Press' short story collection *The Last Voyage and Other Stories* in 1997, William Kimber's reprint of *Sailor's Song* that same year, and Harvill's reprint of *The Ocean* in 1999. At present the publication rights to fourteen of Hanley's most popular and widely-known books, including *Boy, Sailor's Song* and all five novels of The Furys Chronicle appear to be held by House of Stratus, who have announced new editions of all of these. Furthermore, the long-overdue continuation of critical

assessment of Hanley's works, begun by Edward Stokes's *The Novels of James Hanley* in 1969, finally arrived in 2001 with John Fordham's impressive and extensive study *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working-Class.* All this suggests a widespread resurgence of interest in Hanley's work that is destined to go on.

The same cannot be said of Phelan. It's true that in some ways he and Jack Hilton share a similar plight, in that copies of their books are now difficult to find, neither author's works have ever been reprinted in any serious capacity, and neither has ever received any dedicated critical attention. (The Jack Hilton *festschrift* edited by Andy Croft and Clive Fleay, published as the 1985 edition of the *Middlesex Polytechnic History Journal,* is a fine piece of work and invaluable reading for the Hilton scholar, but copies of it exist in such tiny numbers today that it is all but impossible to find.) However, the advantage Hilton holds over Phelan is that the full scale of his achievement seems to be understood, at least by those who have looked over his works and mention him in their studies. That Hilton produced a relatively small body of writing in his lifetime—two novels, two works of reportage, one autobiography and one essay in a published book—has probably helped to make this so. And while it may not be commonly known that he left behind two unfinished works (a satirical novel called *There's Coal in the Cellar* and a second autobiography with the curious title *Caliban Boswelling)*[1] it is fairly well-recognised that he was the author of *Champion* and *Laugh at Polonius,* and his non-fiction works *English Ways* and *English Ribbon* are, rightfully, acknowledged among the small group of writers in Hilton's area as significant and accomplished texts.

With Phelan, by contrast, it is more the case that almost no-one is fully aware of the scale of his achievement. He wrote twenty-two books in total (the novels *Museum* and *Banshee Harvest,* published only in America, are retitled and slightly altered versions of *Lifer* and *...And Blackthorns* respectively and so should not be counted as individual works in their own right) but nowhere is to be found a comprehensive list of all these works. *Lifer* (1938), a very slightly fictionalised account of Phelan's prison experience (hence the title, which is jail slang for a prisoner serving a life sentence) seems to be his best-known book and the one most readily associated with the author, perhaps because it is one of the few works by Phelan to be reprinted: cheap editions were produced in 1957 by Ace Books and in 1966 by Panther, who had published similar copies of Hanley's *Hollow Sea* and *Captain Bottell* the previous year. Here he has the advantage over Hilton, none of whose works ever made it to a

second impression, and yet it is Phelan who seems the more forgotten writer now. The few whose studies of 1930s literature have featured Phelan's name, and this list does not extend far beyond Andy Croft, David Smith, Ken Worpole, Adrian Wright and John Fordham, would perhaps be surprised to learn just how extensive was Phelan's catalogue of published works.

There may be a number of reasons for this. The fact that three of Phelan's books were only available in the United States is presumably one, as is the fact that he, like Hanley, was published by a widely diverse range of houses during his literary career, and his tendency to publish variously under the names of Jim Phelan, James Leo Phelan and James L. Phelan may have resulted in some uncertainly as to whether all his books were by the same writer. But Phelan has also been tragically ill-fated in that his most obscure and forgotten books are by and large his best, and the ones he is remembered for are his worst. The four superb novels *Green Volcano, ...And Blackthorns* (1945), *Moon in the River* (1946) and *Ten-a-Penny People* have effectively vanished, and those of his works that have survived are mostly autobiographical and non-fictional ones such as *The Name's Phelan* (1948) and *We Follow the Roads* (1949). (Strangely, 1940's *Jail Journey,* the second part of his autobiography, though written earlier than its prequel *The Name's Phelan,* has become one of his very rarest books.) *Lifer* is strictly speaking a novel and a good one, though not Phelan's best, but its grounding in lived experience means it sits more easily alongside the author's published memoirs. This seems to have led to an impression that Phelan was not a writer of fiction at all, but concentrated his energies on producing autobiography.

In many ways this is a typical conception of any author who led a life that was in any way unconventional, where "unconventional" can be read as "not middle-class." Phelan was a tramp and a prisoner, so what could he reasonably be expected to write other than autobiographical accounts of vagrant and jail life? It is essentially the same mode of thought that argues working-class writers can only produce gritty and true-to-life stories of textile mills and unsanitary back-to-back housing, simply because they are working-class. W. H. Davies, who led a similar life to Phelan and whose *Autobiography of a Super Tramp* (1908) he refers to more than once, seems to have avoided such totalising categorisation, perhaps because he is also highly regarded as a poet. Phelan, by contrast, has come to be defined by the fact he led the life of a

transient, perceived as an author whose works are necessarily inseparable from that life, and described too often as a "tramp-writer" rather than simply a writer.

Moreover, as an autobiographer Jim Phelan is no W. H. Davies. His non-fiction works could have been valuable indeed as social and historical documents, since Phelan's perpetual tramping across Britain, Ireland and the United States meant he witnessed a number of important historical moments first-hand, including the 1916 Republican Uprising and subsequent Irish Troubles in which Phelan and his brother Willie participated as members of the Irish Citizen Army. But much of the potential strength of his autobiographical work is lost, partly because of his perplexing refusal to give more than the barest smattering of dates, and partly because of the paranoid and self-contradictory tone he adopts throughout. Phelan, on the one hand, identifies with tramps and argues from a deterministic, almost genetic standpoint about the nature of the "tramp type" being inherent, while on the other frequently asserts that he is not a typical tramp, and is significantly more intelligent, more "cultured" (a word Phelan frequently uses) than vagrants in general. Consider the passage below from th opening of *The Name's Phelan:*

> I am a tramp.
>
> That is almost all my story. Now I shall write a long and, I hope, an interesting book about all the things I have done. But in the end I shall only have amplified the statement in that short line. It is strange that few of my friends, and none of my enemies, ever discovered the truth
>
> There is some excuse for the misunderstanding. One does not, as a rule, look for a tramp in the offices of New York or Dublin, in the West End of London, or down the newspaper-streets of the capitals! Besides, I have never looked like a tramp except on the few occasions when I was not one.[2]

Taken out of context this can appear comic or tongue-in-cheek, but pronouncements of a similar nature occur so unrelentingly often in *The Name's Phelan* that the overall impression is one of grandiose self-congratulation. Phelan relates events in the form of anecdotes that always end with him being pleasantly surprised at how his intellect or natural skills have saved the day yet again— life of course contains such moments and there is no reason why they should not be included in an autobiography, but after the first fifty pages or so of *The Name's Phelan* the impression is of having read nothing but one such anecdote after another. It's true that there is a tradition of the "tall story" in Irish writing, and Phelan's work does display resonances with it, but he

returns to this style of narrative so obsessively, and with so little humour or self-parody to counterbalance it, that *The Name's Phelan* swiftly becomes a wearying read.

Other aspects of the autobiography fail because of their unintentional distastefulness. Phelan is outspokenly homophobic, although, as indefensible as this aspect of his writing is, it would be unfair to view it in isolation. Rather, his perspective is representative of a number of 1930s writers: Orwell's scorn for "Nancy poets"[3] in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) is one such example, and even W. H. Auden expressed contempt for the kinds of homosexuality he considered himself aloof from. In Phelan's autobiographical treatment of his own emerging sexuality, though, somewhat more disturbing elements are to be found. Some passages do effectively convey the suffering and repression of an Irish Catholic background, recalling the oft-quoted passage from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:* "He wanted to sin with another of his kind, to force another being to sin with him and to exult with her in sin."[4] Consider below, where Phelan graphically illustrates the painful dichotomy he felt between the urge to fulfil his desires and the deeply ingrained terror this brought:

> In my walking at that time I always had a story about myself, and was always just going to meet a lovely girl. Then in some magical way I would be ordinary, and not gelded at all, and I would hold this girl and love her and then go my way.
>
> A dirty, mean little mind, I feel it must have been, because even my imagination-stories were always conditioned by the ever-present fear, of God and my father and of bearded men in forests and strange black things that sprang at you.[5]

However, these ambiguities and agonies frequently articulated in rather too much detail to make for comfortable reading—some sections of second chapter in particular, such as the ones that dwell on infant nakedness, give one cause to wonder how the book was possibly considered suitable for a 1993 reprint. But *The Name's Phelan* was reprinted that year, in Britain by Blackstaff and in the United States by Dufour Editions, and it is now by far the easiest to find of all Phelan's works. It is not clear why a book with so many flaws was chosen over the likes of *Green Volcano, Ten-a-Penny People* or *...And Blackthorns,* for these three novels stand out as Phelan's finest, and if reprinted they would not only redress the false impression that he concentrated exclusively on autobiography about tramping and prison, but would

also make clear a quality of writing that is so lacking in certain of his non-fiction works.

A dedicated scholarly book on Phelan, along the lines of John Fordham's *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working-Class,* is needed to bring together all of Phelan's disparate works and evaluate them in their proper context. This thesis cannot be that book: firstly because ten of Phelan's works were published after the period under study here, secondly because my focus on fiction excludes more than half of his oeuvre, and thirdly because Phelan's fiction, enjoyable and important as it undoubtedly is, is not always especially subversive. His two novels of his native Ireland, *Green Volcano* and *...And Blackthorns,* are masterpieces of plotting and characterisation but do not prioritise the reinventions of politics, class and gender that this thesis concentrates on. Both contain relevant material that will be discussed later, and their collective scope takes in a hefty portion of Ireland's modern history: *Volcano* runs from 1916 to 1922 and *Blackthorns* resumes in a 1940s Ireland still under the domineering control of the landowners and the post-rebellion government. But more important to Phelan in these two novels than engaging with current ideology and history debate is the simple achievement of telling a good story. Phelan once described himself, perhaps with a certain false modesty, as "a tramp who writes middling-readable stories,"[6] and it's certainly true that the two Ireland books are models of extremely readable writing: tightly paced, intricately plotted, full of intrigue and convincing character development, and displaying a perfect balance between humour, action and romance. David Smith, one of the few writers to give even a small amount of critical attention to Phelan's fiction (he dedicates just over a page of his 1978 book *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth Century British Novel* to *Ten-a-Penny People)* includes a damning-with-faint-praise assessment that does not do adequate justice to the novel it refers to, but is most appropriate to the twin novels of Ireland. For Smith, *Ten-a-Penny* is "written with a crude vitality reminiscent of some of the 'tough' American proletarian novels," and "it tears along at a breakneck pace" such that "so absorbing are its intricate romances and its involved cases of mystery and murder that one tends not to treat the political influences too seriously."[7]

Undoubtedly the breakneck pace and involved cases of mystery are the most compelling parts of *Green Volcano,* a sprawling spy-epic in which Glaswegian I.R.A. member Ben Robinson travels to wartorn Ireland in 1922 on a personal mission of revenge against the traitor who sent his loyalist gun-running father to jail in 1916.

The characters are drawn with such skill and sharpness that they are quite unforgettable, especially hero Ben, I.R.A. cell leader Bartholomew "Batty" Regan, farmer-turned-resistance fighter Jack Keelahan, pernickety quartermaster with heart of gold Tim Rooney, cockney Black-and-Tan who later joins the good fight Martin James, dastardly traitor Liam O'Donohoe, and child-member of the rebel band Seumas (an affectionate portrait of Phelan's own son, who was also so named). The scenes of battle, ambush and siege are blisteringly vivid, as they are in the book's companion-piece and semi-sequel *...And Blackthorns;* the development of Ben's romantic interests from the pontificating and aloof schoolmistress Molly Coolin to the earthy and vivacious peasant girl Bridget O'Leary is handled with admirably unmawkish sensitivity; and the mystery plot works entirely convincingly—for several chapters we do believe, as Phelan leads us to, that Regan and not O'Donohoe is the imperial spy, and the final unmasking of the latter truly does come as a surprise. *Green Volcano* is a kind of Irish *A Farewell to Arms,* a text with which it shares a number of similarities, and like *...And Blackthorns* it has a decidedly cinematic feel. Hemingway and Phelan both worked in film, and the influence of Hollywood on the former's writing was one of the reasons his books were made into such successful movies. Although Phelan's Ireland novels were never dramatised, it's apparent that in them he adopts a similar approach. Indeed, Hemingway is an appropriate writer to compare with Phelan as they both wrote about wars they fought in (though Phelan's experiences were somewhat more extensive than Hemingway's), and the writings of both were influenced by the epic scope and tough-guy masculinities of their contemporary war-films.

Green Volcano, encompassing as it does the Republican Uprising, the Civil War, the Troubles and the subsequent rise to power of the Government of Ireland, can be described as an historical novel in Georg Lukács's terms. As the framework laid down in *The Historical Novel* dictates, the lives and activities of Phelan's characters take precedence—Ben's quest for justice being the foremost motivator of the plot—while the larger, real struggles it describes form a backdrop and motivate the fictional events without intruding on them. In this sense the novel is important just as the works by Scott, Flaubert and others listed in Lukács's study are important. But Phelan's work runs the risk of being classified as a "popular novel" rather than one which makes serious points about the world in which it is set. This problem is more pronounced in *...And Blackthorns* and *Moon in the River,* both of which are set in

imaginary communities cut off from the world at large. ...*And Blackthorns* does make some reference to greater events—the landowners' takeover of Ireland in 1922, and the Second World War which is taking place during the novel—but the battles of its Irish peasants against their masters are entirely localised to their fictional environs and are individual, not influenced by larger political events. *Moon in the River* is best described as fantasy or a novel of the supernatural, set in a remote English village haunted by the spectre of what may be witchcraft, pagan gods or some other dark force. For all Phelan's assertion that "An interesting novel need not be a tangle of lies,"[8] the impression one gains from his own novels is that constructing a powerful fiction was more the author's aim than loading his work with relevance to the real world. And there is no reason at all why he should not have written in such a way, especially since his writing was, for the most part, at its best when he adopted this approach.

2) *Ten a Penny People* and the influence of the 1930s "panoramic" Left-Wing novel

One book by Phelan is an exception. This novel is *Ten-a-Penny People,* and while it is a highly individual work, even unique, it draws upon a number of books to arrive at its singular vision. The previous century's "Condition of England" novels are one important source: Ken Worpole rightly draws links between Phelan's work and *Hard Times*[9] (the second chapter, for example, was quite plainly influenced by the scenes of the M'Choakumchild School) and the plot also treads similar terrain to *Mary Barton: Ten-a-Penny* shares with Gaskell's 1848 epic a setting in the Manchester factories, a fire at the workplace, the murder by a mill-hand of a high-ranking figure in industrial society, and a climax following the trial of an innocent man for that crime. As we will see later, these resemblances are not coincidental—part of Phelan's subversive project in *Ten-a-Penny People* depends on our being reminded of these earlier works.

Another novel that *Ten-a-Penny People* closely resembles is *May Day* by John Sommerfield, a Communist writer who fought alongside John Cornford in Spain and was friendly with Randall Swingler, Edgell Rickword, Douglas Garman and Tom Harisson.[10] *May Day* was published just two years before *Ten-a-Penny* in 1936, but it is not quite accurate to describe Sommerfield's work as a source for Phelan that stands alone in its own right: as Andy Croft and Keith Williams both note, it is one of

a number of books of its kind published in the thirties (though Croft adds, rightly, that *May Day* is one of the best).[11] The style of these works, which was experimented with by a number of Left-Wing writers, is variously described as "panoptic," "panoramic" or "collective," and draws upon the techniques of film in a similar way to that described by Storm Jameson in her essay 'Reports'. For *May Day* in particular can be seen to operate like a documentary film in terms almost identical to Jameson's, with the writer "keep[ing] himself out of the picture while working ceaselessly to present the *fact* from a striking...angle."[12] As a *Daily Worker* reviewer observed in 1936, this is often achieved through the use of filmic techniques such as group and individual "shots."[13] Furthermore, Stuart Laing observes that one of the achievements of the panoramic novel was to "overcome what Storm Jameson termed: 'the frightful difficulty of expressing, in such a way that they are at once seen to be intimately connected, the relations between things (men, acts) widely separated in space or in the social complex.'"[14]

The presentation of collective, interconnected life in the modern urban environment was a preoccupation of much contemporary art and literature, and can be detected in diverse sources, from the opening chapters of Henry Green's novel *Living* to the woodcuts of Frans Masereel in his *The City* sequence. Raymond Williams in his essay 'The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism' examines the development of early twentieth-century literary and artistic conceptions of the "modern" city, showing how these were influenced by nineteenth-century depictions of urban space in the writings of George Gissing, James Thomson, Dickens and others. Williams observes that with the modernist age came a reimagining of these early interpretations:

> For a number of social and historical reasons the metropolis of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century moved into a quite new cultural dimension. It was now much more than the very large city, or even the capital city of an important nation. It was the place where new social and economic and cultural relations, beyond both city and nation in their older senses, were beginning to be formed: a distinct historical phase which was in fact extended, in the second half of the twentieth century, at least potentially, to the whole world.[15]

One of the main sources for this mode of writing is Walther Ruttmann's film *Berlin: Symphony of a City,* which Worpole describes as "the most seminal" of "those

documentary films whose aim was the capture the multi-faceted reality of city life."[16] Keith Williams, discussing *May Day,* expands on this:

> Sommerfield owed much to the fascination of the dynamics of film held for modernists like Dos Passos, Joyce, Jules Romains and Woolf, as well as actual film-makers like Vertov and Ruttmann. *May Day* was a radical cinematic adaptation of the formal templates of novels like *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway*—both fictionalised cross-sections one June day—which revealed the collectivity of mundane social and economic relations.[17]

This collectivity and the highly-condensed time span are the two elements of *May Day* that leave the most lasting impression. Set in what Sommerfield describes in a prefatory note as springtime "a few years hence," or "an *average* year between 1930-40,"[18] *May Day's* events cover fewer than three days: it begins on the morning of April the Twenty-Ninth and ends in the early afternoon of May the First. (There are no chapters as such: the novel is divided into three parts detailing each day of its span, divided into large sub-sections titled 'Morning', 'Evening', 'The Hours Before Dawn' and suchlike.) But the sheer volume of activity, character development, personal interaction and ongoing subplots that Sommerfield squeezes into this confined space is staggering. This is achieved by the cross-sectional collectivity Williams refers to: *May Day* does not have a single hero or a small group of principal characters, but rather encompasses a gigantic cast and gives coverage to all. The focus of the novel constantly jumps from large-scale "bird's eye" views of London's crowds, flocking the streets or filling the workplaces, and then "cuts" (again, in filmic style) to new set-pieces featuring individual members of the huge ensemble. *May Day's* characters are drawn from every social stratum, and include working-class brothers John and James Seton, John's wife Martine, industrialist Sir Edwin Langfier, factory-hand Ivy Cutford, Langfier's wealthy son Peter, socialite Pamela Allin whom he is courting, prostitute and kept woman Jenny Hardy, "Bright Young Things" Clara Foskett and her brother Tony, and a colossal array of other parts both named and unnamed. (Indeed, juggling so many characters seems to have been an overwhelming task for Sommerfield and his editors, as the finished copy of *May Day* gives the wrong surname to both Ivy and Pamela on two occasions.) Andy Croft gives a typical example of how the novel's narrative runs:

> Martine Seton, a young mother worried that her husband might join the coming demonstration and risk his new-found job, sees a chalk slogan calling people to it; the same chalked slogan is seen by the Earl of Dunbourne, merchant banker and director of the factory where John Seton now works; he too is worried, in his way, about the demonstration, as he is chauffeur-driven past the Park Lane office of the firm; just leaving at that moment is Sir Edwin Langfier, the old-fashioned former owner of the factory, who walks out across the park, depressed because he is being squeezed out by the proto-fascist Sir William Gilroy; who happens to be looking out of his window across the park, discussing how best to break the demonstration; below the taxis rush past, one carrying a loud-speaker, broadcasting the call for the May Day demonstration.[19]

An important source for this type of narrative is the 'Wandering Rocks' segment of *Ulysses* (1922), which depicts the major characters' meetings and interactions on a single night all as one continuous flow of events. Croft observes that, as in the sequence from Joyce, some of *May Day's* characters know each other and the crossing of their paths serves to illustrate the complex interconnectedness of life in the city and give the novel it characteristic sense of collectivity. In other cases characters and events are tied together in a more subtle and inventive way, such as the instance where two events are linked by a segment narrated from the point of view of a dog. (The brief spell in the spotlight Sommerfield gives to Mick the mongrel does not seem so strange when one considers that the year before *May Day's* publication, W. H. Auden in *The Dog Beneath the Skin* had made a dog-skin talk.) There is a scene a little later on where a working-class woman's thoughts of the artificial leather sofa she would like to buy segue into a capitalist MP's thoughts of an artificial leather company that he co-owns, suggesting not just the huge financial divide between the classes but also that human subjects are united in having the same aspirations and drives, and their perceptions differ in only in degree and not in kind. And there is the wonderfully intricate sequence running from page 164 to 169, which begins with striker the George Sims at work, shifts to his blind father sitting at home, then to a scruffy child outside his window, then to some other squabbling urchins, and finally to some men near them who are leading a horse down the street. Five different sequences, featuring different characters all connected either by family or their proximity to each other within the city, contained in as many pages.

Croft lists Walter Allen, Anthony Bertram, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Dot Allan and Graham Greene as the foremost writers of 1930s panoramic city-life novels,[20] and Keith Williams regards Ashley Smith's *A City Stirs* (1939) to be the greatest book of

that kind.[21] *Ten-a-Penny People* can be grouped with these texts as part of this small but significant collection of thirties novels, and while it is not known how many of the others Phelan was familiar with, it's clear that he did read *May Day* and was greatly influenced by it in his own panoptic epic of 1938. *Ten-a-Penny* does not share the compact three-day timescale of Sommerfield's work, as the main bulk of its action spans a number of months with uneventful interim periods skipped over in the fashion of a conventional novel, and there is a gap of six years between chapters Two and Three. Nevertheless, there are important structural similarities: like *May Day, Ten-a-Penny People* is divided into three large parts, and its narrative approach—leaping from character to character in an enormous cast, some of them personally connected, some not, in an attempt to show the vast and complicated range of social interactions in a modern metropolitan city—is identical to Sommerfield's own. Phelan emphasises the links between his Manchester-based principal cast just as Sommerfield does for his Londoners, and the end result is an involved series of relations: Joe parts from his girlfriend Kitty who later marries Tom, who is brother to Dick, who served time in jail with the father of Maeve and Joan, the latter of whom is dating Ted's friend Sid but leaves him for Dick, who meets her while keeping a promise to his prison friend that he will check that his children are well, which leads Joan's sister Maeve to meet and begin a love affair with Ted, who is also a friend of Tom's family and has recently met Joe, who consequently through Ted re-enters the life of Kitty.

As with *May Day,* interconnectedness within the city is shown in more subtle ways too. Chapter Nine, the last of Part One, consists of a series of conversation-snippets each no more than five or six lines long. In these characters recap on past events and discuss those to come, imminent subplots such as the strike are prefigured, and the intricate relations between individuals all across the social spectrum are laid bare. Chapter Twenty-Seven begin with a similar sequence that cleverly links a number of characters through the motif of dining: working-class parents struggling to feed themselves and their children after being fired and blacklisted for demonstrating against pay reductions at their workplace, a thinly-veiled stand-in for Belfast shipbuilders Swann Hunter which Phelan renames Gannet and Swon, are juxtaposed with the firm's owners sitting down in their club to discuss the aftermath of the strike while drinking and eating well. (Sir Arthur Gannet's surname is, of course, appropriate for this scene.) There are also stream-of-consciousness and dialogue-only passages in *Ten-a-Penny* that borrow heavily from similar moments in Sommerfield's

work, and some similar characters too. The presence of a pair of brothers among the main protagonists is a trait common to both novels (John and James Seton are altered somewhat to become Phelan's Tom and Dick Rogan, and Tom's wife Kitty is a rather more feisty and likeable version of Martine), as is the presence of a prosperous capitalist magnate who comes to question the ethics of his position (*Ten-a-Penny People's* Gannet is essentially identical to Sommerfield's Langfier), and as is the conflation of big business with fascism that runs as a strong undercurrent through the two novels. *Ten-a-Penny* and *May Day* both depict strikes necessitated by large conglomerate business ruthlessly taking over smaller firms to establish trade monopolies, at the cost of hundreds of jobs. As David Smith observes, this is "capitalism…moving into its final phase;" capitalism that "assumes more openly the characteristics of fascism."[22]

Ten-a-Penny People's Left-Wing heroes make this explicit in their announcements that fascism is "the same as big business"[23] and that the rich entrepreneur Sir Reginald Fletton is as "guilty as Franco."[24] Further notes of anti-fascism are inserted when the character Maeve Ross is unfairly dismissed from her job by a pro-Hitler manager just because she is a socialist, and when Tom, a principled Communist organiser, is wrongfully arrested and tried for Fletton's murder: as Kitty to grimly declares, "Fascism knows the Tom Rogans are its death—and fascism from here to Kobe wants Tom killed."[25] Tom's fellow organiser Ted Langley remarks solemnly to Maeve, "You'll soon see that fascism is—a bluff. One that *has* to be called, but a bluff,"[26] making explicit Phelan's own political stance and anticipating the worldwide conflict that was to break out the year after *Ten-a-Penny People* was published. Indeed, these elements are more effective here than in the later *...And Blackthorns,* which also voices anti-fascist politics but does so in a manner that makes them sound thoroughly tacked-on at the last minute. In that novel the final chapters reveal Phelan's corrupt Irish landowners, whose struggle with the heroic peasants has so far been entirely contained within a remote stretch of countryside, to be in league with the Nazis and helping them launch an invasion of England by submarine. This is not to say there were not such people or such plots in the Second World War, because there were, but this dimension of *Blackthorns* feels like nothing more than a hackneyed device by which Phelan make his novel topical and ensures its sentiments strike the right anti-Nazi note for its 1945 publication date. In *Ten-a-Penny People* there is more of an impression that Phelan is sincere in speaking out

against extreme Right-Wing ideologies and arguing how imperative it is that the fascists be defeated.

However, although this line of thought is on face value a common feature to Sommerfield and Phelan's books, it also provides an angle of entry with which to discuss a key difference between *Ten-a-Penny People* and *May Day*. This lies is in the political alignment of those novels' writers. John Sommerfield was an ardent Communist, and the resistance to Nazism his book advocates is part of the author's engagement with Popular Front thought. *May Day* depicts the social classes uniting for the common good, under clearly-defined leadership from the Left in accordance with the Comintern line, and the novel culminates in a bloody but triumphant demonstration that strikes a blow against both the capitalist masters and the fascists with whom they are associated. Stuart Laing recognises Sommerfield's conformity to Leninist thought when he writes:

> In *May Day* John Sommerfield uses "mass" then to suggest how collective consciousness and political strength should grow directly out of the living and working conditions of urban industrial society; it is, of course, not a matter of purely spontaneous growth, but one aided and directed by the Communist Party—a party whose strength is presented as being its close relation to the working-class experience.[27]

Phelan's resistance to fascism, by contrast, is of a more personal and emotive nature. He and George Garrett were close friends and shared similar political standpoints: both were keen socialists, both were influenced by the Industrial Workers of the World during their time in America, but both rejected Communism and were wary of rigid or extremist Left-Wing movements. Nothing in *Ten-a-Penny People* comes about as a result of authorial commitment to the prescribed ideas of organised Leftism, whereas Sommerfield's allegiance to strict Communist ideals is evident from much of *May Day* including the passage quoted above. The dictates of socialist realism as defined in the last chapter are very much adhered to, and the novel resonates well with Zhdanov's idea of a literature "imbued with enthusiasm and heroism."[28] Croft observes that the imaginary statistics Sommerfield gives in his novel overstate the number of members of the Communist Party in 1936. There were, as he claimed, 7000 members in London and 8000 in the Young Communist league The actual figures were just over 7000 members nationally and only 2000 in the

Y.C.L.[29] The implication is that figures will have so increased by the near-future setting of *May Day,* and such optimism is a founding principle of Zhdanov's literary demands. Nor would it have seemed a naïve, false optimism at the time of *May Day's* publication: immediately prior to the Second World War the Communist Party was enjoying a period of widespread growth and popularity, as the results of the 1939 general election attest. Thus the May Day demonstration at the end of Sommerfield's novel, which, as stated earlier, does have the desired effect of uniting the nation under Communism and making the bosses aware that change is due, can be seen to emerge from this brief flourishing of hope for the future. Immediately after the protest, a character reflects in a forward-looking way on how much the Party can achieve, if "we are strong enough to canalize into the correct channels the whole of the strong current of militancy roused amongst the workers."[30]

To interpret *Ten-a-Penny People* as endorsing identical politics to Sommerfield's in *May Day* is to miss the point of Phelan's novel, however much it may superficially resemble the earlier work. My aim in the following section is propose a reading closer to what seems to have been Phelan's original intent; but the starting point in this should be that *Ten-a-Penny* can appear to operate in exactly the same way as Sommerfield's book. Much of Phelan's novel strongly suggests conformity to the terms of socialist realism: most of its heroes are Communists, the importance of educating others in the Party's ideals is emphasised, workers and bosses emerge from the story's events with new and more Left-Wing perspectives, and the ending, though it does not depict a full revolution *per se,* is optimistic and forward-looking about the chances for one. ("See you in the big days,"[31] one character says to another as they part in the final chapter, and the final paragraph is a fragment of an original song by Phelan which contains the line: "We look to the day when oppression must go.")[32] Certainly these elements of Phelan's novel would seem to have made the greatest impact on David Smith, for, in the account criticised in the previous section, he describes *Ten-a-Penny People* as "clotted with class-hatred and Communist slogans,"[33] and goes on:

> Set mainly in Manchester in the firm of Gannet and Swon, it tears along at a breakneck pace, featuring numerous Communists, fascist bosses, a traitorous trade-unionist, three romances, violent clashes between police and strikers, an attempted suicide, nine deaths, and finally as a climax the trial for murder of an innocent man, Tom Rogan, the Communist hero of the book...But Tom's

> brother Dick, who closely resembles him, falsely claims at the last minute that he is the guilty one, and, rather than serve a life-sentence he is facing for robbery-and-assault, is happy to go to the gallows in Tom's place. The Communist-leader is freed to carry on the good work, there is an upsurge of bright hopes, and the book ends with a series of staccato conversions registering the moral.[34]

Two of Smith's conclusions here are understandable but ill-founded: the accusation of sloganising and class-based antagonism, and the interpretation of the novel's "conversions" as a means of emphasising some sort of oratorical Communist message. To address the first, I noted earlier that Phelan was not a Party member and viewed Communism with caution, so *Ten-a-Penny's* treatment of Left-Wing politics must be understood in that context. Without doubt the slogans Smith refers to are there, most of them voiced by Tom Rogan, his wife Kitty or their comrade Ted Langley, who uses his job as a lorry-driver to preach Communism nationwide. (A man who refuses to join to Party is "just fifteen stone of meat...as far as the boss-class are concerned,"[35] Ted warns a non-union member in Chapter Fourteen.) But all these elements are contrasted with, or more accurately consumed by, a twin current that voices grave doubts about the effectiveness of Communism and its prospect for making any significant change to the world.

The scenes at the start of *Ten-a-Penny's* third section, concerning a strike and mass violence at Gannett and Swon, were touched upon briefly in the first chapter of this thesis. I would now like to return to them in more detail, giving particular consideration to the way in which Phelan depicts the breakdown of the workers' protest and its descent into carnage and disaster. The strike's failure is set in motion some time before it actually begins—indeed, Phelan shows how its organisation is fraught with difficulties from the earliest planning stages. Some of the troubles are engineered by the managers of the firm: their agent Swanlynn uses his cover as a union official to circulate misleading information about strike-notices and discourages men from taking direct action, and the principal Communist leaders including Tom are fired after their workmate Kellaway, who takes backhanders for naming names to his superiors, informs on their activities. But tellingly, the strikers' problems stem not merely from their exploitative bosses, as one would expect from a heavy-handed Communist novel. An equal if not greater threat to solidarity comes from tensions within.

Pay cuts at Gannet and Swon are announced in Chapter Eleven to the consternation of the workers, and Chapter Thirteen narrates their first gathering to discuss industrial action against these measures. Though referred to as a "union meeting" the assembly seems to consist of men from all across the workplace whether union members or not; everyone attends, from ardent Communists to politically-uninvolved workingmen who are angry about losing their wages. A dialogue-only chapter, the account consists of long speeches from Tom, his fellow Communist Bill Brown, Swanlynn and the other unionists, interspersed with contributions from the crowd in parentheses. The cries of approval (mostly "Hear-hears") are contrasted by and often occur simultaneously with derogatory scoffing about the organisers' Left-Wing politics ("Wah—bolshie stuff") especially when one of them tries to relate the problems at Gannet and Swon to capitalist exploitation on a larger scale. Brown's argument that the matter is more than a pay cut of a few shillings for the workforce, and that "G and S aim to smash our unity and grab something over 100,000 pounds,"[36] for example, is met with a volley of approving shouts and disparaging remarks all at once. The impression conveyed is of divisiveness among the protestors, to say nothing of a fair-sized body of outspoken hostility towards the Left. There is no standing together under the unifying cause of Communism here—it's apparent that many of the protestors make no connection between the Party and fight for their pay, and indeed view Communists and socialists as a dangerous obstacle in the way of their rights. There is no change in this even after the strike is over: when Tom is falsely accused of Fletton's murder many workingmen from Gannet and Swon stand up to give phoney evidence against him at the trial, on the grounds that he is a dangerous troublemaker they are better off without.

By the time the strike takes place, Tom and the other Communist leaders have already been fired from Gannet and Swon, and without their leadership the protest quickly crumbles into the carnage discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. Of course, one can read this all as Leninist didacticism: here are the terrible consequences that ensue when protestors do not unite and organise, and are stripped of proper Communist guidance and control. It's true that this approach can teach just as effective a lesson as showing the rewards when all goes well; but the fact that Phelan chooses to depict the protest's degeneration instead of its triumph, and calls upon his own personal experience of similar debacles in Ireland, is most revealing. The tone of regret that pervades the strike scene is so overwhelming that one never

really feels the protest might have been successful had circumstances been different. Some time before the violent climax the strikers lose all will to go on: they move "slowly and listlessly, as if any aim or purpose had been long forgotten."[37] They are later likened to "a flock of pigeons" and "a wolfpack,"[38] the animal imagery suggesting the dehumanising effect of sustained hostile resistance. And as the sequence closes, with protestors and blacklegs clubbed as one by police and lying together in an insensible groaning mass, the view unequivocally conveyed is that violence does not achieve political goals, and acts only as a leveller. This is a long way from the glorious uprising that ends Sommerfield's *May Day,* where the Leninist idea that organised violence has political effect is vehemently endorsed. The pro-Communist slogans David Smith observes in *Ten-a-Penny People* are voiced by Phelan's characters, but that novel's descriptions of the strike's terrible aftermath convey more the tone of omniscient authorial voice. The sentiments they articulate are not Tom Rogan's or Ted Langley's, but Phelan's.

Likewise the "conversions" of *Ten-a-Penny People* Smith refers to read like the devices of archetypal socialist fiction, but on closer examination subvert the ideologies of that literary mode. An example of this apparent conformity to socialist realism is the subplot of Sir Arthur Gannet, with its portrayal of a rich industrialist eventually convinced, through the solidarity and moral strength of his workers, that he has chosen the wrong path in capitalism. His final scene, where he confronts the supreme business-empire plutocrat Wilfred Walters, forms part of Smith's "series of staccato conversions" that closes the novel:

> "Listen, Walters. I've been in this business long enough. When business and murder and savagery come to the same thing, I'm—"
>
> "Gannet! I say!"
>
> "You think I'm a fat old fool. Business is finished, I tell you. No—you know as well as I do. All over the world—I—I," he choked. "No," he said after a pause, "when business comes to mean murder, I'm out."
>
> "I warn you, Gannet."
>
> "Go to hell."
>
> "We'll break you Gannet, if you—"
>
> "Go to hell."[39]

An even more formulaic case is the story of Joe Harrish, one of Tom Rogan's co-workers at Gannet and Swon. When he first appears in the novel Harrish is a detestable figure, belligerent, obnoxious, mean-spirited and a domestic bully. He is also rabidly anti-Leftist, sneering at Tom, Bill Brown and the other workplace Communists, and boasting to his wife Janet about the insulting ripostes he snapped out at them during the day. But the Harrish home is not a happy one, and in true socialist realism style, economic hardship is shown to be the cause of its disharmony. Janet wants to buy her teenage daughter Minnie a new dress for her confirmation, but her husband, who has recently been unemployed for fourteen months, insists on putting aside five shillings every week and will not allow the purchase. The Harrishes scrimp and save to maintain a meagre existence where the evening meal is mashed potatoes and a tiny piece of fish. Janet frets that their son Timmy will become ill from underfeeding, and also worries about the impression Minnie gives the local young men by being seen in clothes several sizes too small for her. She and her husband argue, Janet voicing sentiments that are probably close to what the reader is thinking: "...we go on and on like this—while you're *in* work. Then I tell you, Joe Harrish, it's better to be dead than dying."[40] Mr. Harrish, having apparently run out of clever retorts, ends the discussion by striking her full in the face before continuing his paltry dinner.

Figures like Harrish are a commonplace of Left-Wing writing: politically ignorant working-class characters who cannot see that their economic suffering is brought about by the resistance to socialism that they themselves help to perpetuate. In the scene detailed above Harrish tells his wife he cannot face another fourteen months without financial security, and cries in "desperation" that "Wages is wages, and you can't change 'em."[41] He then goes on to dismiss his Communist workmates, who are fighting for improvement in wages and employment conditions, as "bleedin' windbags."[42]

But a series of upheavals in Harrish's life conspire to change his views. Janet is driven by the argument over the confirmation dress to try and gas herself, and though the suicide attempt fails the resultant leak kills the Harrishes' youngest son Willie. Harrish himself is affected by the pay cut at Gannet and Swon, arrested for taking part in the demonstration against it, and emerges from prison a changed man. Bitter experience has taught him that capitalist exploitation is the cause of all his woe, and that the Communists are correct to oppose such forces. In stories like his the reader is

always some way ahead of the character in realising this truth (or at least realising that the author wants us to perceive this as a truth), and indeed both Kitty and Ted connect Janet's fate to capitalism long before Harrish does. But it is necessary for the didactic purpose of this kind of writing that the character arrives at such a revelation himself and so brings closure to the tale of his personal development, and Harrish does just this in a stirring speech to his fellow strikers when he rejoins them after serving his time. A running joke in his early appearances is that a man so loathsome should have the catchphrase "Fair's fair," and that is called upon here:

> "Well, mates," shouted Harrish again. "There's some on us here's been fools—meself the biggest o' the lot. I've clemmed meself an' me kids, gone against me own in the workshop, made meself a cur for Gannet and Swon. Because I believed that fair's fair...now I'm to be robbed, an' knocked senseless if I say owt, an' jailed if I do owt. All right, be god. I'm only goin' to say one thing, mates. That ain't fair.
>
> [...]
>
> "Them scabs," shouted Harrish, "is rawbers. The pleece that's behind them is rawbers. The boss that's employing them is a rawber. Here's my say—down with the lot of them."[43]

There are several other characters too, including Maeve and Ted's friend Sid, who are initially wary of Communism but learn, through the teaching of others or their own personal epiphanies, that joining the Left is the only way to better the lot of the workers and overcome fascism. Their stories make a neat contrast to the case of Kellaway, the informer, who after exposing his Communist workmates to the directors is himself fired, on the grounds that his double-dealing has become common knowledge and his usefulness is therefore at an end. This leads Kellaway to take twisted revenge (he is the actual murderer of Fletton) and then kill himself to evade justice. The message seems clear enough: those who join the Party are secure in their solidarity with their fellow workers, but those who do not and try to side with the bosses instead will share Kellaway's fate.

As all with all else in *Ten-a-Penny People,* though, the textbook examples of socialist writing are contrasted with other subplots that stand markedly at odds with Left-Wing literary conventions. One of these has to do with Joe Jarrow (another alias for George Garrett, though the character himself is more a fusion of Garrett and Phelan) and Josephine Kirkland, secretary and union member at Gannet and Swon. Jarrow, a tramp who believes his lifestyle isolates him from the worlds of work and

politics, initially refuses the join the Party despite pressure from Ted, Tom and Kitty. After meeting Josephine, though, and eventually beginning a relationship with her, Jarrow learns the value of worker solidarity and participates in the strike, supports the Communists during Tom's trial and starts calling Josephine "comrade." His is a standard conversion-plot, but this time with a reciprocal dimension. When Josephine is introduced she is presented as a coldly intellectual young woman so absorbed in the theoretical dimension of Communism that she has lost sight of individual human lives. She and Joe first meet immediately after Janet Harrish has been sentenced to death for the gassing of her son (the verdict is later commuted to life imprisonment in a curious echo of Phelan's own experience), and their initial conversation suggests nothing of the romance they later discover:

> "Can't anything be done?" asked Joe. "This can't be let go without some attempt to save her."
>
> "A leaflet would probably be best," mused Josephine Kirkland. "A pamphlet perhaps. Of course I can get an article in one or two papers. There's *bound* to be some coalescence-reaction."
>
> Jarrow stopped short. "What are you talking about?" he demanded bluntly. "I'm trying to think about how to save the woman's life."
>
> "And I'm trying to think how to let the working people know what's being done to them," retorted Josephine Kirkland.
>
> "In other words," burst out Joe, "you want to *use* this for propaganda. Is that it?"
>
> "I want to let the people know about these things," she said quietly, "so that there may be an end of these things."
>
> "You mean?" Joe was plainly hostile.
>
> "I mean that this *is* capitalism," said Josephine. "What they do to the woman is an incident. What the workers do *about* it is history."
>
> "Then you're the coldest-blooded bitch that ever traded on misery," said Jarrow angrily. "Go to hell you and your party."[44]

As both semi-autobiographical character and literary rendering of a man Phelan liked and respected, we can normally assume the views Jarrow expresses to be closely akin to the author's own. And just as Jarrow learns solidarity and commitment from the Communist characters, Josephine learns from him that human lives rather than empty political cogitation must be the priority of anyone who claims to battle for a greater good. By the end of the strike Josephine is no longer theorising about the workers' struggle and planning leaflet campaigns, but is fighting police and blacklegs on the street side-by-side with Jarrow. Her maturation as a character serves as a critique of

the organised, polemical type of Communism and an advocacy of the more humanitarian approach, directly addressing the needs of the suffering and the exploited, in a manner that the two non-Communists on whom Jarrow is based believed in.

There is much, then, in *Ten-a-Penny People* that suggests conventional socialist realism, and also much that subverts the ideas of that literary ideology. The next section will go on to explore Phelan's possible motives for this, but it should be sufficient from what has gone before to conclude that David Smith's observation, that *Ten-a-Penny* is straightforward, unproblematic, "crude" Left-Wing polemic, does not do anything like full justice to the complexity of Phelan's novel. The "Communist slogans" he detects sit jarringly alongside other parts that critique and undermine the dictates of Soviet thought and socialist realism writing, making deeply ambiguous the novel's seemingly Communist-prescriptive tone.

3) Brechtian dramatic techniques in Ten-a-Penny People

A more complex engagement with literary subversions of socialist realism is to be found in the figure of Dick Rogan. Unlike his brother Tom, Dick is another character who refuses to join the Party, preferring instead to live as a robber, even though this has latterly landed him a five-year stretch of hard labour. Once he is released from prison (around Chapter Three of *Ten-a-Penny People)* he moves in with Tom and Kitty, who immediately set about encouraging him to become a Communist. This is no easy task, as Tom remarks:

> "He calls himself classless. Understands *everything,* but won't join, won't do spade-work. Sometimes I hate the bloody fool—wasting his life and his genius in the quarries of what-do-you-call-it, when he could be doing something real!"[45]

Chapters Four and Seven feature long conversations that recall the laboured and unconvincing twenty-sixth chapter of Jack Hilton's *Champion,* in which Tom explains to Dick the importance of socialist politics and expounds on how much help Dick could give if he joined. Such scenes, in Hilton's novel at least, are part of the didactic enterprise of socialist realism: the character given the lesson is convinced and resolves to devote himself to Communism, and the reader is expected to absorb the

same message and follow the character's example. But Dick Rogan, unlike Jimmy Watkins in *Champion,* remains utterly unmoved by the earnest teachings of his politically dedicated counterpart. He makes no change at all in his political orientation, and his final sacrifice—going to the gallows in his brother's stead—is personal and singular, reflecting no commitment to any greater political cause. Indeed, it is not even a purely altruistic act: Dick is already facing life imprisonment for killing a policeman who caught him looting during the strike, and has more than once announced that he would prefer execution to returning to jail. (Kitty, in the final chapter, acknowledges quite openly that Dick chose his fate to suit his own ends just as much as his brother's or anyone else's.) But most crucially of all, Dick is not a victim-character like Mrs. Harrish, designed to illustrate the cruelty of oppressive authority, or a didactic example such as Kellaway whose purpose is to show the ill fortune that befalls those who reject Communism. Phelan quite manifestly does not consider any of Dick's actions to be regrettable or misguided. Rather, the one character who steadfastly refuses to have anything to do with Communism throughout this ostensibly pro-Communist novel receives more sympathy and respect from the author than any other.

Dick Rogan is an extraordinary figure and his uniqueness must be understood in order to grasp just how much Phelan achieves through him. However, it is difficult to do justice to Dick by mere description. Ken Worpole in *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading, Popular Writing* (1983) mistakenly identifies him as a Communist and so draws the wrong conclusion about Phelan's intents, but he does make the useful observation that Dick (and his wife Joan, who effectively becomes a female version of him after they meet) "can only ever speak in truncated phrases like modern Gradgrinds."[46] Certainly there is a feel of Dickens's famous grotesque about Dick's delivery, but this is Gradgrind *in extremis.* Below is Dick explaining to Kitty why he considers himself classless, and justifying his activities as a thief:

> "Proletariat exploited. I, no. Bourgeoisie exploits. I, no. Means of production—nil. Robber—parasite on rulers. Work, no. Dislike. Exploit workers, no. Dislike. Take wealth. Classless."[47]

And all of Dick's speech is like this. Consequently he is sometimes quite incomprehensible—he has a tendency to substantiate his arguments with personal theories of science and philosophy, which involve "energy channels," "energy

streams,"[48] "brain angles," "mind lines"[49] and other fantastical terms. (Phelan has an occasional habit of inserting baffling pseudoscience into his works, and it's possible that in these passages he was tentatively voicing his own peculiar ideas.) But many scenes with Dick are above all else hilariously funny, and intentionally so, providing *Ten-a-Penny* with the most outrageously comic moments of any book studied in this thesis. One of these is Dick's wedding proposal to Joan, the shortest section in one of the dialogue-montage chapters—it is simply:

> "Marry, Joan?"
> "Yes, Dick."[50]

Then there is his introductory speech to Tom and Kitty, the first words Dick speaks in the book, on arriving at his brother's house and meeting Kitty for the first time:

> "Kitty. Lovely. Grand body. Tom, lucky. Fine pair. You a red, too?" Kitty did not answer at once, taken back a little by his outspoken manner and shorthand speech. [51]

And later, when Dick introduces his new wife Joan to the Rogans:

> "Well, all I can say is I'd like to hear him trying to persuade a girl to—gosh!" Kitty laughed helplessly. "If she's *really* like him, Tom, they'll be about as in love as the people in *Back to Methuselah*—last act!"
>
> "Dunno. Remember Dick's—" her husband was beginning, when a knock came at the door.
>
> Kitty opened it, and returned, followed by Dick Rogan and Joan. The tall, wide-shouldered girl looked round, turning her serious brown eyes from one to the other.
>
> "Tom. Kitty. Glad," she said, and sat down.
>
> Kitty exploded into half-choked laughter, nearly strangled herself in an effort to regain seriousness, and dashed from the room.[52]

That these sequences are extremely amusing is not to be questioned, especially as they demonstrate so well Phelan's skill with comic timing and his understanding that the reaction of the other characters is just as important as Dick or Joan's words in producing the right humorous effect. But the absurdity and irreverence of this humour hinges on the fact that neither Dick nor Joan can be described as realistic or believable—it is impossible to imagine somebody in the real world speaking and acting like Dick. As such, he and Joan are bizarrely out of place in a novel that seems

otherwise intent on showing contemporary social and economic relations as they actually are. Such events as the strike and Mrs. Harrish's attempted suicide are powerfully written to give the impression that they could happen—and the purpose of scenes like these in traditional socialist writing is to remind the reader that identical incidents *are* happening—but they stand alongside the depiction of a man we cannot believe in at all. Indeed, Dick's very presence weakens the veracity and plausibility of those scenes for just that reason. He and Joan call attention to the fact that *Ten-a-Penny People* is a novel by being so at odds with the devices of realist narrative that Phelan also employs. Dick undermines the illusion of reality through his own unbelievability—it is as if Phelan sets up a realist tone only in order to tear it down.

This technique, revealing the artifice of one's own written work, should bring the name Brecht to mind. And *Ten-a-Penny People* leaves us in no doubt that Phelan read and was influenced by Eugen Bertolt Brecht, who found success as a playwright early in life and was well established by the time Phelan published his novel in 1938. It's true that some of Brecht's masterpieces such as *Mother Courage and her Children* (1939) *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1940) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944) had yet to be written, but Phelan would still have been able to read such seminal works as *Baal* (1923), *The Threepenny Opera* (1828) *The Mother* and *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (both 1932) along with, most significantly, 1926's *A Man's a Man.* This was arguably the first text to feature explicitly the Brechtian concepts of Epic Theatre and *Verfremdungseffekt* (usually translated as "alienation effect," and shortened to "A-effect" or "*V-effekt*")[53] which clearly influenced Phelan in the production on *Ten-a-Penny People.* For though Brecht was primarily a playwright, his ideas can be adapted for use in the novel, and *Ten-a-Penny* demonstrates how successful this approach can be.

Brecht was a dedicated Communist and in some ways his aims in writing conformed to the post-1934 dictates of Soviet literature, particularly his views on tendentiousness: he believed that "For art to be 'unpolitical' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group."[54] His dramatic devices have real political objectives, reflected in Brecht's frequent declarations that his goal was to apply to literature Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach. (The oft-quoted rephrasing of assertions made in the Communist Manifesto, that "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.")[55] However, the victories of fascism and the early dictatorial leanings of the Soviet Union fostered in Brecht a

deep pessimism that made him unable to accept the heroism, optimism and triumphal closure of socialist realism.[56] This rejection of Communism's prescribed writing form and Brecht's subsequent turning to the twentieth century modernist experimentation that Zhdanov forbade set him against advocates of the Soviet mode such as Lukács, and simultaneously made him a devout ally of Walter Benjamin.[57] Contributing to the working-class's struggle against capitalist exploitation remained Brecht's objective in all his writing, but he sought to achieve this through means entirely different to those laid down at the 1934 Soviet Literary Congress.

Chris Baldick describes Brechtian Epic Theatre as a theory of performance that "involved rejecting the Aristotelian models of dramatic unity in favour of a detached narrative (hence "epic") presentation in a succession of loosely related episodes interspersed with songs and commentary by a chorus or narrator."[58] The *verfremdungseffekt,* a "major principle" of this theory, is defined thus:

> It is a dramatic effect aimed at encouraging an attitude of critical detachment in the audience, rather than a passive submission to realistic illusion; and achieved by a variety of means, from allowing the audience to smoke and drink to interrupting the play's action with songs, sudden scene changes, and switches of role. Actors are also encouraged to distance themselves from the characters rather than identify with them: ironic commentary by a narrator adds to this "estrangement."[59]

Epic Theatre as a technique was not so much invented by Brecht as drawn together from a number of different sources. The idea of *entfremdung* (also meaning "alienation"), which has an important place in Hegel, was a primary influence,[60] as was the thinking of Meyerhold and Piscator.[61] Peter Brooker observes that as much as Brecht railed against socialist realism he was informed by members of the Soviet avant-garde too, especially Sergei Tretyakov who also uses the word *verfremdung,*[62] and John Willett asserts that the Russian formalist device of *ostranenie* ("making strange"), a term coined by Viktor Shklovsky, was Brecht's main source.[63] But the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* differs from its various predecessors in that it is, as Brooker remarks, a radicalised version of *ostranenie.*[64] The formalists used alienation and estrangement only as an aesthetic device to facilitate a broader and more involved consideration of their subject, whereas Brecht's aim was to stimulate in his audience a more inquiring attitude that would lead them to question the social conditions of the world in which they lived.[65] By calling attention to the various manmade forces that

contributed to setting up the artifice of a stage play, Brecht intended for his viewers to arrive at a dual recognition that the ideological forces governing society were also arbitrary, manufactured and alterable. Thus the *Verfremdungseffekt* exists to impress upon the public how contradictory, absurd or outmoded are aspects of their lives that they take for granted and never question. Brecht himself saw his Epic Theatre as a way of prompting the people's resistance to capitalism and fascism rather than a solution in itself, remarking of his technique that "the puzzles of the world are not solved but shown."[66] Epic Theatre was Brecht's own way of addressing the socialist literary agenda of teaching others that the working-class's exploitation and hardship throughout history can be changed, and is not an inevitable hard fact that must be accepted. It is effectively the same intent that lies behind Lukács's attack on literary naturalism, and though he and Brecht differed widely in their techniques and could never find common ground, their essential political objectives were of a piece.

The panoramic 1930s city-life novel lent itself well to the agendas of socialist realism, as is apparent from a book like Sommerfield's *May Day,* but the literary form also contains much potential for Brechtian dramatics. Montage was important to Brecht, and *Ten-a-Penny's* array of different narrative approaches—stream-of-consciousness, conversation sequences and dialogue-only scenes alongside conventional storytelling—combined with its presentation of life all across Manchester on the individual and mass spheres and throughout all social classes, makes the whole book a kind of montage in itself. Furthermore, the way in which the tale is told is quite Brechtian: Brooker writes that in Epic Theatre:

> ...narrative proceeded, not in a continuous linear direction, but in a montage of 'curves and jumps'—dialectically, in other words. Episodes were joined in such a way that 'the knots are easily noticed." Each scene was to stand "for itself..."[67]

We have seen how showing the interconnections between an enormous cast is central to books like *Ten-a-Penny People,* and how Phelan's novel links scenes so that "the knots are easily noticed" both explicitly and through implicit connecting themes. There are also a number of sequences that stand entirely on their own, and Chapter Twenty-Nine, which simply describes an unnamed tramp reading a newspaper, has nothing directly to do with anything that happens in the novel. That Phelan fuses conventions of socialist realism with the modernist Brechtian techniques that stood in

opposition to those conventions is an important part of *Ten-a-Penny People's* uniqueness.

For although the Brechtian influences in *Ten-a-Penny* have never been discussed in the detail they deserve, they are nonetheless conspicuously there. Firstly songs, referred to by Baldick and others as a key *Verfremdungseffekt,* form an important part of Phelan's narrative, but as they are incorporated into the action and explained by it, it may not be quite accurate to claim they serve the Brechtian purpose. *Ten-a-Penny People's* use of song can often carry a feel of the *Verfremdungseffekt,* interrupting the flow of the story or turning the reader's thoughts from it entirely. This is seen in the first half of Chapter Three, which consists mostly of extended direct speech by Tom, at work in the smithy, addressing his young mate Jim Hartley. Their conversation about unionism and Leftist literature is interspersed with instructions from Tom to Jim regarding the job they are doing, and also a number of verses from protest songs which Tom sings and Phelan writes out in full. The end result is a quite disorientating read, most unlike conventional realist narrative. Similarly, the sequence in Chapter Eighteen, with Ted Langley and Joe Jarrow singing as they drive through the deserted countryside late at night, has an unconventional lonely beauty that makes it the novel's finest moment and does nothing to move the plot along; indeed, as with the musical set-pieces in some stage shows, the plot effectively stops to allow the song to take place. But as *Ten-a-Penny's* songs are not the type of staged musical numbers seen in such plays as *The Threepenny Opera,* they ultimately represent more of an engagement with conventions of realist narrative than a Brechtian departure from realism.

However, other areas of *Ten-a-Penny People* suggest much more strongly devices of Epic Theatre. The "ironic commentary by a narrator" referred to by Baldick appears at the start of Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen in the form of sub-headings, which are respectively "May be skipped. Dry prosaic stuff, all about an ordinary union meeting"[68] and "Also dry and prosaic. About another meeting. Cannot be skipped but is fortunately very short."[69] (Ken Worpole in *Dockers and Detectives* also notes Brecht's influence in these brief interventions.)[70] "Can be skipped" and "thankfully very short" are amusing lines when one normally assumes a writer's aim is for his book to be read and enjoyed in its entirety, but the sub-headings also serve the Brechtian purpose of drawing attention to the literary work's artifice as manufactured product. Not only does this direct narrator's address remind us that the

world we are immersed in is the fictive creation of one man, it also exposes the structures and frameworks within which conventional socialist novels are arbitrarily expected to operate. In writing like this, Phelan suggests, there are always union-meeting scenes, and they can indeed be skipped since the only reason they are there is that they are thought obligatory for the literary form.

Then there are a handful of moments hugely significant to the Brechtian overtones of *Ten-a-Penny People,* but which have not yet been considered in their full light by the few who have written about the novel. This is perhaps understandable, as these instances appear on first glance to be no more than absurdly incongruous ill-advised attempts at humour—David Smith may well have them in mind when he comments on the "sheer bad writing"[71] of *Ten-a-Penny* and the books like it. One is a remark from Joe Jarrow in Chapter Eighteen: "What in the name of the insoluble capitalistic contradictions are you talking about?"[72] Another comes from Tom Rogan, replying to Kitty's question about Dick: "Is that a pose—his way of talking?"

> Tom pondered a minute. "No, Kit," he said. "As far as I can see, Dick regards our way of talking as circumlocutionary. *He* pares a thought to the bone, and presents the essentials. Jut as we laugh at the meaningless formalities of convention-talk, he laughs at ours. Dick advances an idea and gets on to the next, thinking instead of talking, that's all."[73]

It would not be sufficient in itself to argue that an uneducated tramp like Joe and an Irish working-class labourer like Tom cannot be expected to talk like this; firstly, because there is no reason why they should not, and secondly, because their manner of speech represents a tradition of "fine speaking" detectable in a range of Irish writing, including the "newspaper" sequence from *Ulysses,* the tramp characters of Samuel Beckett and the works of Flann O'Brien. But the reason why these remarks from Joe and Tom in *Ten-a-Penny People* appear jarring is that they are quite unlike anything else those characters say in the novel. But as clumsy and laboured as such passages seem, they nonetheless fulfil the demands of one of Brecht's most important *Verfremdungseffekts:* commentary on the action of a play or novel by the characters within it.

Socialist writing is about insoluble capitalistic contradictions: its aim is to show that the contradictions of capitalism are indeed insoluble, and that socialism must therefore replace it. But, crucially, for socialist writing to work, characters must

reveal these contradictions implicitly, either through their deeds or the fate assigned them by the plot. They are not meant to comment openly, in so many words, about this insolubility, and in giving Joe a line that does so, Phelan calls attention to the formal conventions and structures of socialist writing in the same Brechtian way that the glosses to his union meeting scenes do. Similarly, Tom's remark on Dick' mode of speech reminds us of the artifice of Phelan's novel in that it is much more like an authorial comment than a reflection on a character by a character. The uncharacteristically eloquent language deliberately sets up this disjunction. No-one in *Ten-a-Penny People's* cast can ever make sense of Dick, and it is revealing that the only time a character is challenged to arrive at some understanding of him, all we hear are the words Jim Phelan might have spoken to an interviewer who asked him why he wrote Dick's speech in such a way. The passage reminds us of the contrast between *Ten-a-Penny's* realist tone and the unbelievability of Dick as a real person, subverting the illusion of reality and calling attention to the text's status as a fictive work.

The most striking of these *Verfremdungseffekts* comes in Chapter Fifteen, immediately after Minnie Harrish learns about her mother's reprieve. It is lengthy, but deserves to be quoted in full:

> "There's good news, Minnie," she [Kitty] said. "Your mother is—isn't going to be killed."
>
> Minnie's composure deserted her immediately. "Oh, ma. Oh, ma, ma," she sobbed, throwing herself into Kitty's arms. "Poor ma. The works, the works."
>
> Kitty comforted the weeping child, and raised her head to find Dick Rogan and his wife exchanging glances of inquiry while they looked at Minnie.
>
> "Thank Christ you people are human," Kitty blurted out. "I thought neither of you had any feelings."
>
> Jim Hartley had been suspiciously near to crying, but had maintained his erect pose and silence. At Kitty's words, however, he relaxed, with a glance towards Dick, and said, "Poor Minnie."
>
> "Interested," explained Dick. "Marvellous reflex-conditioning. Child knows factory really responsible. Works, poverty, tragedy. Marvellous reflexing. Agree?" he inquired, turning to Joan.
>
> "Agree," confirmed Joan. "Wages, want, woe—associated. Expressed as 'Poor ma. The works.' Very striking."
>
> "Oh, go to hell, you cold-blooded pair of swine," shouted Kitty, as she dashed from the room. "Come on, Minnie." Dick and Joan looked at each other in mystification.[74]

None of Phelan's characters are ever able to share the perspective of Dick and Joan, and can react to them only with anger, puzzlement or amusement. Nor can a reader ever empathise with them—as comic as the scene above is, in its surreal and slightly dark way, we cannot help sharing Kitty's outrage at the coldness of Dick and Joan's reaction, and this distances us emotionally from the couple. If this exchange is interpreted as conventional realist narrative it fails disastrously, for the strange pair are never less like real people than they are here, but is also the most accomplished moment of Epic Theatre in the whole novel. Dick and Joan are commenting not on the lives of the characters around them, but on the structure of the book itself. Socialist realism draws links between economic exploitation and human suffering in just the way the characters describe. ("Works, poverty, tragedy...Wages, want, woe––associated.") Dramatic moments such as Minnie's passionate outburst are, again, intended to make readers aware of these links in a subtle way, teaching them by implicit example rather than explicit description. But then, amid this most traditional dramatic scene in *Ten-a-Penny People* comes the magnificent clashing of Phelan's *Verfremdungseffekt,* where Dick and Joan openly call attention to everything that the scene, from a socialist perspective, is trying to achieve. Joan's "Expressed as 'Poor ma. The works.' Very striking" might suggest the comment of a reviewer, complimenting Phelan on how well he has used the drama of the scene to highlight the forces of exploitation. It is an extraordinary piece of comedy, but also an utterly uncompromising subversion, via Brecht, of socialist realist literature in its conventional mode.

The inability of the other characters to make sense of Dick and Joan—and their inability to understand the reactions of those around them—comes of the fact that the couple alone occupy this Brechtian position in which they are able to perceive the inner workings of Phelan's narrative. (Their status is also the reason why readers cannot emphasise with them: as Baldick observes, Brecht did not intend for his characters to be identified with emotionally, as this compromised the distancing and estrangement that was central to his political project.)[75] When characters attempt to rationalise Dick and Joan they can only do so in terms of their own, more limited understanding, confined within the boundaries of Phelan's fictional world. We can see this in Chapter Eleven, when Tom tries to tactfully explain to Joan why Kitty finds her unusual:

> "Well, you see," said Tom, all his customary frankness missing, "Kitty's never met—er—she's never spoken to anyone *quite* like you before. You see," he hurried on, as Joan gazed at him inquiringly, "We're in the Communist Party, and we just knock around with ordinary workers—except Dick, and—er," he halted.[76]

Tom, like all the rest of the cast except for Dick and Joan, is unaware that he is a character in a novel and so can only see the couple's words as confusingly odd, not being aware they are commenting on greater outside forces that govern their world. But that Dick and Joan are aware of these forces is beyond doubt: aside from their comment on Minnie's exclamation, they also work out immediately that Kellaway is Fletton's murderer and arrive at the only way to save Tom when no-one else can conceive of it, exactly as if they have an overview on the plot that nobody else shares. A favourite image of Brecht's to describe the *Verfremdungseffekt* was of travelling along the course of a river while simultaneously passing above it,[77] and this is the perfect description of the position Dick and Joan occupy in *Ten-a-Penny People:* they are characters in the book and are swept along by its events, but also possess the ability to look down on the story in its totality and comment on it in a detached, objective way.

Ten-a-Penny People, then, is a novel in which allusions to Gaskell and Dickens sit alongside the twentieth-century experiments with narrative pioneered by the likes of John Sommerfield, and conventions of socialist realism somehow occupy the same space as Brechtian modernism. The new jostles with the old; contradictory political standpoints are thrown together. It is not surprising that David Smith considered all this to be symptomatic of confused thinking on the part of the author,[78] but he and the few others reviewers of the novel have all mistakenly assumed that Phelan was writing to one specific political agenda, and so conclude that its ambiguities and disharmonies are the product of his failure to realize that agenda in its entirety. A man of Phelan's temperament and uncertainties, though, could never commit himself to any single set of ideologies— Phelan was, as Worpole writes, "an anarchist by temperament and self-description,"[79] and his attachments to any political cause were inevitably casual. *Ten-a-Penny People* reflects this. The goal of Phelan's novel is best understood as representing the working-class, not as Communists, socialists, workers, tramps or any other categorised group, but as a vast, heterogeneous

component of society with wildly diverse views and innumerable different perspectives.

In the emerging form of the panoramic novel Phelan found one way to present his new, challenging literary portrayal of the working-class; in Brecht he found another. Walter Benjamin wrote that his close friend Brecht considered all previous attempts at political theatre that subverted bourgeois conventions and attempted to give the proletariat a voice to have failed, because "The functional relationship between stage and public, text and performance, producer and artist, remained almost unchanged." He goes on to observe that "Epic Theatre takes as its staring point the attempt to introduce fundamental change into these relationships,"[80] and this is close to what Phelan sets out to achieve with the new working-class voices of *Ten-a-Penny People.* It should be remembered that although twentieth-century panoramic novels like *May Day* often concentrated on the working-class, Phelan was one of the only writers to produce such a book who was himself working-class. The fact that *Ten-a-Penny People* goes so much further than its contemporaries in providing a unique and collective view of the working people of Britain is tied to the urgency with which its author felt such a view should appear; an urgency for the working-class to find a new way to speak for themselves that would be unlike the ways in which they had been previously spoken for.

Ten-a-Penny People deserves to be better known, not just as one of the best in the small pantheon of panoramic 1930s city-life novels, but also as a text that challenges our conception about all the writing produced by the working-class in that decade. Its numerous engagements with literary modernisms are astonishingly complex and successful, especially since they come at a time when modernist writing was popularly held to be the exclusive territory of the bourgeois literati. It is also Phelan's greatest work, standing just above the equally masterful but less historically significant *Green Volcano,* and its quality as an individual novel is reason enough why a full re-evaluation of its author's achievement is long overdue.

Chapter Five

Anti-Conradian narrative and Bakhtinian polyphony in the works of George Garrett and James Hanley

1) Garrett, Hanley and Conrad

This chapter will explore ways in which James Hanley and George Garrett employ devices akin to Bakhtinian polyphony in order to undermine the monologic narrative voice of certain earlier writers, in particular Joseph Conrad, whose totalising perspective they felt regulates all other voices in the novel to a single authoritative view and so serves to misrepresent or stereotype the working-class. Finally, I hope to show how Hanley, in his 1935 novel *Stoker Bush,* applies similar techniques to the kind of socialist realist standpoint that posits conventional working-class values as laudable and worthwhile, presenting an alternate perspective that is much darker and more ominous, but shows the individual conflicts, dilemmas and sufferings of the working-class in a new and more convincing way.

Work on the complex literary interactions between Conrad and the working-class writers investigated in this thesis is already commenced, and has made much progress. The chapters 'A View from the Fo'c'sle' in Edward Stokes's *The Novels of James Hanley* (pp. 86-138) and 'Hanley and Conrad' in John Fordham's *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working-Class* (pp. 46-75) cover fully and comprehensively the most important aspects of Conrad's influence on Hanley, and are essential reading if one is to understand this involved relationship. The present section will briefly summarise their conclusions, before going on to explore a new angle of inquiry opened by Stokes's and Fordham's discoveries. What follows must therefore be read as a continuation of the studies already undertaken on Conrad and 1930s working-class writers, and not the beginnings of those studies.

Fordham writes that "Hanley on many occasions expressed an exasperation with the sea novels of Joseph Conrad,"[1] and Stokes makes the similar point that "There can be no doubt that Hanley, from the beginning, has been very conscious of Conrad; there can be no doubt either that his attitude to Conrad has been generally critical."[2] This critical attitude is indeed what emerges most strongly in Hanley's, and Garrett's,

responses to the earlier sea-writer, although it should be observed that in other areas both display views that resonate closely with Conrad's own. In Hanley this is detectable in the portrayals of man's struggle against the ocean as an implacable, unstoppable and remorseless force of nature,[3] found in such stories *Captain Bottell* (1933), 'Narrative' (1931) and *Stoker Bush* (1935), and also in the recurring presence of old-sailor characters who, like figures in Conrad's novels such as Marlow and Conrad himself, announce a preference for the lost days of sail and are regretful that the age of the steamship is now upon them.[4] Likewise Michael Murphy establishes a link between the importance of lived experience in Garrett's conception of working-class heroism and the attitudes expressed by Conrad in his World War One story *The Shadow Line* (1917).[5] There are also passages from the writing of both Hanley and Garrett that suggest the direct literary influence of their predecessor. Stokes remarks of *The German Prisoner:* "That Hanley already knew his Conrad thoroughly is, I think, clear from the closing sentence:"

> For a moment only they were visible, then slowly they disappeared beneath the sea of mud which oozed over them like the restless tide of an everlasting night.[6]

And Adrian Wright, touching briefly on Garrett, Hanley and Phelan in his biography of John Lehmann *A Pagan Adventure,* makes the following observations of Garrett's short story 'Fishmeal':"

> We are inside one of the stoke-holds that Garrett knew so well, where Costain lies ill...Unable to tolerate his surroundings, he casts himself into sea, "so vast, so fascinating, and so inviting," desperate for "a decent cooler." When his body is dragged back on deck, "it hung awry with arms outstretched like a bloodstained Christ." Garrett, like Hanley, could conjure up a Conradian intensity, and mange the shift into symbolism with aplomb.[7]

However, despite the ways in which Conrad influenced Garrett and Hanley there was one aspect of his writing with which they could never find accord, and this can broadly be expressed as Conrad's treatment of class relations at sea. The principal criticism of both writers is that in Conrad's sea-stories the working-class sailors in the stokehold or forecastle are either ignored entirely or, in one case seized upon by both Hanley and Garrett, subject to a most unflattering portrayal. Donkin, the lazy, argumentative and thieving seaman of Conrad's *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* was

held up in Garrett's essay on that novella (published in *The Adelphi,* June 1936) and two essays by Hanley ('Minority Report', published in *Fortnightly Review,* 1943, and 'A Writer's Day' from *Don Quixote Drowned,* 1953) as evidence of Conrad's blinkered and dismissive view of the seagoing working-class.

Garrett and Hanley's conclusions on this subject betray, it must be said, an inadequate grasp of Conrad that does not consider the full depth and diversity of his writing. The first point that has to be critiqued in their argument is the assumption that Conrad presents Donkin as representative of the entire working-class. This is made most explicit of all in a passage from 'A Writer's Day', where Hanley whimsically imagines that Conrad stumbled below decks on just one of his voyages and came face-to-face with the working-class, whom he imagined as a colony of ants and christened one Donkin. ("He was fascinated yet repelled. Did such things exist for'ard of the bridge? He must have a look some time. Also he must get back on the bridge, have a chat with Marlow about it.") The implication is clear: Hanley felt that Conrad considered all working-class sailors a lower form of life, and Donkin no different from them.

But this is to miss entirely Conrad's point in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* which is that Donkin is a quite atypical working-class seaman. He is unlike the other sailors he serves with, all of whom are dedicated to their toil and exhibit none of his laziness and insolence. Indeed, the *Narcissus's* crewmen actively dislike Donkin for these traits, and are unconcerned and even glad when misfortune and violence befall him. It is because Donkin is so dissimilar to the novella's other working-class characters that he is able to carry out his final despicable act—stealing from the dying John Wait after leading him to believe he was his friend—without any of his colleagues even suspecting a fellow sailor could stoop so low. Garrett and Hanley overlook all this when they argue that Conrad intended for this one working-class character to represent the class as a whole.

The two writers were also antagonised by Conrad's presentation, through Donkin, of the undesirable "sea-lawyer" type: he who "earns his living by discoursing with filthy eloquence upon the right of labour to live;" who "knows all about his rights, but knows nothing of courage, of endurance, of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company."[8] It is understandable that Garrett and Hanley would find much to object to in passages like these, as both knew from firsthand experience the terrible demands of shipboard work and both, especially

Garrett, had spoken out about the urgency with which conditions needed to be improved. It's also true, as Fordham observes, that Conrad was troubled by the emergence of working-class sailors who were able to assert their rights and question the treatment they received, but Garrett and Hanley are wrong to assume that Conrad conflates Donkin's "sea-lawyer" tendencies with his idleness and dishonesty in order to portray the two as necessarily inseparable. From this misinterpretation of Donkin as representative "type" rather than individual, singular figure emerges the false impression that Conrad equates working-class protest with shirking and shiftlessness, and so is insensitive to the suffering of the common sailor. This, Conrad is not: *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* itself contain lengthy accounts of exhausting labour, starvation and disease on board ship that above all else engender deep sympathy for his working-class characters.

A further criticism that Hanley made of Conrad was that characters like Donkin illustrated the earlier writer's inability to see that stokers and ordinary seamen were just as indispensable a part of any ship's crew as its higher ranks. For Hanley, all that was commendable about life at sea in Conrad's view was expressed exclusively through the middle class, the officer class. This preoccupation is engaged with in 'Minority Report':

> For Captain Conrad the bridge was respectable height. To have got a little closer to the Donkin heart, even to the machinery of the Donkin mind, would have involved a stoop, and a pretty low one at that, to have tried to understand him would have involved a risky leap to deck level...It was not for "the grumbler," the scuppery little man to inform his creator that in keeping himself within the safe boundaries, he was hutting out valuable areas of information."[9]

And in 'A Writer's Day':

> A binnacle warmth with Marlow was much preferable. And, perhaps wisely, he withdrew and left Donkin for'ard, still crawling, still spitting venom through his rotten teeth. Somewhere life was noble, full of big moments, high hours, men strong and courageous in the face of typhoons, cyclones, hurricanes, head winds, stern seas. Life had a better profile than that, surely?
>
> The final decision must be Marlow in the chart-room, and the dodger well up. Up it went.[10]

Behind these attacks on Conrad lies a reinforcement of the class-difference Hanley and Garrett considered essential to their distancing of their works from that of the

earlier author: the belief that as they had led the lives of seamen they were better-suited to write about that life than a bourgeois observer could ever hope to be. This sentiment is expressed in Hanley's remark at the start of his short story 'Jacob' (first published 1937): "Jacob was not only an unusual sailor, but he was also a very unusual Pole, for one rarely associates Poles with the sea. Conrad was not a sailor, but a writer who happened to go to sea."[11] However, as Edward Stokes observes about extracts such as the two above, "These comments are less valuable as an estimate of Conrad's interests, preoccupations and attitudes than as clues to Hanley's own."[12] Fordham's observation, that Conrad did not so much describe or represent his ocean-going experiences as display "a predilection to use the sea to express certain preconceived notions of a natural hierarchy in human society,"[13] is fair, but to argue that as a result of this, captains and officers are portrayed without exception as stalwart, noble and courageous in the works of Conrad is to display an insufficient understanding of those works. Hanley's perspective does not take into account Captain MacWhirr in *Typhoon,* whose unflinching determination and perseverance can be interpreted as symptoms of a destructive madness, and the eponymous character of *Lord Jim,* who finds himself unable to act heroically when it is required of him and so exemplifies the fallibility, rather than the strength, of the officer class.

The more explicitly anti-Conradian works of Hanley and Garrett can, therefore, be critiqued as their rejection of Conrad's ethos is often based on an incomplete assessment of that writer's oeuvre. Hanley's novel *Boy* and Garrett's 'The Jonah' and 'Fishmeal', which attempt to undermine Conrad's presentation of ships' companies steadfastly united in their cause, suffer in this way, and as do Hanley's 'Fog', 'Seven Men' and *Captain Bottell* which portray inept, drunken or depraved captains as a contrast to Hanley's interpretation of equivalent figures in Conrad. But that is not to say such works are without value, and of particular significance here is one of the rarest of their kind, Garrett's long-forgotten and posthumously-published piece 'The Maurie'.

In its complete form, which did not appear until its inclusion in the 1999 Trent Editions *Collected George Garrett,* 'The Maurie' is a peculiar piece of work. It begins with some passages that would presumably have one day become part of Garrett's autobiography *Ten Years on the Parish,* if its writer had ever completed that book; for Garrett served on the *Mauritania* ("Maurie") in the spring of 1918, and the opening pages relate those experiences in a factual, documentary manner, describing

such mundane matters as sleeping arrangements and the food. It's possible, therefore, that the two sections that follow are also true stories, though they read more like fiction, and there is a decided and abrupt shift in tone when the autobiographical introduction ends. For at this point 'The Maurie' lurches disjointedly to a narrative episode dealing with complex moral issues, then ends with a comical anecdote that detracts somewhat from the important questions raised earlier. It is interesting to note that the 1982 Garrett anthology *Out of Liverpool* features a version of 'The Maurie' titled 'Forecastle Justice', which consists of only the second and most relevant of the story's three components. The exact origin of 'Forecastle Justice' is not clear, but Garrett may have made the alterations himself in an attempt to pare the story down to a more coherent form. It is known that *Out of Liverpool's* editor Jerry Dawson, a close friend who admired Garrett greatly, inherited many of his personal effects after his death, including the original manuscripts of 'Fishmeal' and 'The Pianist'. This being the case, it seems likely that Dawson received the manuscript of "Forecastle Justice" at the same time and published it alongside the other unseen material he had acquired.

Elements of 'Forecastle Justice' deliberately recall the writing of Conrad. The story narrates a crisis on the lower decks precipitated by a stokehold worker who, like Donkin, has been stealing from his shipmates, and, as in Conradian narrative, teamwork and co-operation are decided on as the means of overcoming the problem. However, after establishing these parallels with Conrad, Garrett moves his story into strikingly different terrain. A group effort runs the thief to ground, leading to a bunkroom confrontation with the guilty man which rapidly descends into violence. Although the seamen announce that this is punishment, not revenge, and attempt to impose reasonable boundaries upon the proceedings ("Line up, lads. Belts off. Not with the buckle. Leave his face alone. Leather him back and legs,"),[14] their brand of justice is nonetheless portrayed as a merciless beating administered by men bent on vengeance:

> The thief was completely hemmed in. Yanked over, his singlet and pants were ripped off. Naked, trembling, his fists flailed defensively. A shove sent him spinning. Belts whizzed in the air to exultant oaths, cracking across his back and legs. Screaming, he sagged to the floor. Quickly he was stood up and prodded back into circulation. He flung his arms around a neck and clung tight. "For Jesus' sake," he wailed.[15]

From this emerges the dilemma of whether the punishment given is commensurate with the offence, and this is a troubling question for the reader and the other characters. A discussion between the sailors shortly after they have meted out retribution runs thus:

> Mac rapped his fingers on his breast. "It's in here. It's done now. We're a right collection, aren't we? A right collection." He lay down, gazing at the latticed bed-bottom above.
>
> The man opposite had an excuse. "He brought it on himself, Mac. It's murder when men can't trust each other."
>
> "I know," sighed Mac. "But we were like bleedin' savages. You wouldn't do that to a dog." He turned away on his side.
>
> A gloomy silence of shame pervaded the 'cracks.' Men crawled quietly into their bunks. Aside from the implacable razor-wielder who snapped out "Teach him a lesson," there were undertones of doubt.
>
> Ginger in a top bunk jerked up hysterically. "Alright," he burst out, "the clouting was overdone. I admit that. But what else could we do. Answer me? What else could we do? Weren't we all on edge?" There was no answer, nor was there much sleep. It was a relief to troop down once more to the sweat, clangour and cursings of the stokehold.[16]

At this point 'Forecastle Justice' ends, with Ginger's question unanswered and an uneasy, anticlimactic feel prevailing. This is all some distance removed from the comradely bond between seagoing men typically described in Conrad's novels. But although Garrett's disturbing violence and onboard dissent make a striking contrast to the earlier author's works, most important to 'The Maurie's' Conradian subversions is the presence, or rather the absence, of the narrator in the account described above. It is impossible to locate Garrett himself within this narrative. The author makes no attempt to either justify or condemn the violence any more than he does the thief's actions, and his own opinion on how far such a beating is an appropriate punishment is obscured by an assortment of different views from his characters. Each is steadfastly believed in by that fictional person and each has valid arguments behind it: Mac's self-disgust; Ginger's distressed assertion that their acts were necessary; the razor-wielder's conviction that such methods are the only way to deal with thieves.

Garrett and Hanley both believed that the works of Conrad were characterised by a dominant narrative voice under which all others are regulated, and that when Conrad speaks of Donkin's "filthy eloquence" or his "talents for shirking work, for cheating,

for cadging,"[17] or equally when he speaks of "courage, of endurance, of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company,"[18] we are expected to take it as truth because total authority and final judgements rest with the narrative voice. This, again is to overlook many important dimensions of Conrad's work: his use of irony, his deployment of multiple contradictory voices in *Nostromo,* and the question of how far Conrad's narrators such as Marlow can be regarded as expressing opinions identical to the author's own. But the fact that Garrett and Hanley could not accept the type of singular interpretation they saw in Conrad is why they produced works like 'The Maurie' which reject a dominant authorial voice. Which of Garrett's sailors the reader agrees with, and what conclusions that reader draws regarding the violent solution presented, are not matters Garrett attempts to exercise any direct control over. The troubling, unresolved dilemmas are held as the story's moment of closure, and the lesson learned depends on the reader's own interpretation.

2) The subversive potential of Bakhtinian polyphony

The failings of a dominant textual voice such as Conrad's, especially when dealing with class difference, were recognised by Hanley and Garrett and discussed in their critical writings. Garrett argued that "The true artist is supposed to portray life whole," and that "Seeing is determined by an awareness of intense experience, but does not always exclude personal prejudices…[which]…must not pass as whole truth,"[19] while Hanley engaged with these ideas when, discussing his plans for the unforgettable matriarch of The Furys Chronicle, Fanny Fury, he significantly remarked "I want to show her under every light."[20] Fordham takes this idea as his starting point when he argues that Hanley's project in the Chronicle was to provide "a working-class response to an early twentieth-century popular bourgeois form: the family saga or chronicle,"[21] of which John Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga is the best-known example. As Fordham observes, the crucial difference between Galsworthy's novel-cycle and Hanley's—aside from the fact they do not focus on the same social class—is that in his pentateuch Hanley rejects the privileged authorial voice in favour of an approach more akin to Garrett's in 'The Maurie' where "it is difficult to detect any omniscient narrator or privileged authorial voice; rather, the family is discovered to be a microcosm in which is contained a whole range of positions which reflect the

wider social or macrocosmic level of discourse."[22] This is an understandable approach given that the greatest flaw in the Forsyte Saga's dominant narrative voice is its inability to speak for the working-class, as John Lucas has observed of *Swan Song* (1928), the chapter of the sequence in which the General Strike takes place. Lucas writes that Galsworthy's politician Michael holds "The point of view we are meant to take as authoritative in the novel,"[23] and at the moment the Strike collapses, that character spies "a group of men who had obviously been strikers...leaning over the parapet. He tried to read their faces. Glad, sorry, ashamed, resentful, relieved? For the life of him he could not tell."[24] On this passage Lucas remarks:

> Never were the failings of literary realism more glaringly exposed. Michael's authority is not to be questioned: he speaks for England. The fact he cannot "read" the strikers' faces is not to be taken as implying any inadequacy in his authority. His inability to know what the strikers think is deflected into a trivialising joke: "we're a puzzle to foreigners." But in Michael's eyes the strikers are every bit as foreign. They might as well not be English. In fact, they aren't English, because being English means opposing the Strike, and its defeat, like the armistice, announces one more triumph over foreign foes.[25]

Fordham argues that the position counter to this, adopted by Hanley in The Furys Chronicle, owes much to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "polyphony" as described in the essay 'Dostoyevsky's Polyphonic Novel and its Treatment in Critical Literature', from *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1984). Fordham writes that for Bakhtin, the principal difference between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as writers is that Tolstoy's works are "monologic;" that is to say, "characterised by a novel in which all the discursive material is relegated or relativized to a dominant textual voice"[26] as with much of the writing of Conrad or Galsworthy. In Dostoyevsky's works, by contrast:

> For the purposes of critical thought, Dostoevsky's work has been broken down into a series of disparate, contradictory philosophical stances, each defended by one or another character. Among these figure, but in far from first place, the philosophical views of the author himself. For some scholars Dostoevsky's voice merges with the voices of one or another of his characters; for others, it is a peculiar synthesis of all these ideological voices; for yet others, Dostoevsky's voice is simply drowned out by all those other voices. Characters are polemicized with, learned from; attempts are made to develop their views into finished systems. The character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalising artistic vision.[27]

The result of this is:

> *...a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*...What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world* combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.[28]

The Furys Chronicle itself will not be discussed here, for the same reason Hanley's explicitly anti-Conradian writing was only touched upon: because Fordham and Stokes have already provided comprehensive studies on it in their respective books about Hanley. However, Bakhtin's theory of polyphony as applied to the Chronicle by Fordham is of equal, if not greater, relevance when discussing another of Hanley's works, one which so far has received too little critical attention: 1935's *Stoker Bush.*

There are reasons why *Stoker Bush* is not among Hanley's better-known works. One is that is has never been reprinted, except in a United States-only edition by Macmillan one year after its publication. The book is also quite difficult to read, partly through its over-use of working-class slang and phonetic pronunciations in both character speech and the narrative voice ("Harry" is usually written as "'Arry," the two children Norah and Gerald are referred to as "the chucks," "he" becomes "this one," and so it wearyingly continues) and also because throughout Hanley tries, with little success, to imitate the prose style of Henry Green's *Living* by omitting many pronouns and definite articles. (Hanley's short story of 1931, 'The Last Voyage' suffers for the same reason.) Green was supportive of Hanley in the early years of his writing, and Hanley, as with many working-class writers of the time, found *Living* to be a greatly influential text,[29] but *Stoker Bush* illustrates that in 1935 Hanley was not yet mature enough as a writer to emulate the experimental style of his mentor. As Edwin Muir brusquely but fairly announced in a review of the novel, "for no obvious reason he [Hanley] leaves out the definite article...sometimes the definite article is turned off, sometimes turned on, and the effect is as disconcerting as if one were reading the book by a bad electric light."[30] One of many examples of this is below:

> So Rooney knew job was easy, as Anne had told her dad about whole state of affairs, and this had pushed aside awkwardness of explanations. Added to that he had seen right through Harry,

> whisky being for him clear mirror reflecting old man. All old Harry wanted was to be able to sit in boozer in front of filled glass. Beer could wash out world of loneliness for him, world of Telus Street, where in own house he was but lodger, dependent on daughter.[31]

Yet when all this is said, *Stoker Bush* remains a neglected work of great significance. It contains one of Hanley's most powerfully Conradian moments in the shipwreck chapter that closes the book, with its depiction of a galling battle against the merciless deep. The shift into its new narrative key, much more action-driven than the rest of the novel, is admittedly clumsy as Hanley's earlier works tend to be—on first impressions it reads as if the author suddenly loses interest in telling his love-triangle story so switches to a thrilling yarn of disaster at sea to finish the book—but the account is nonetheless masterfully paced in the style of similar triumphs from Conrad, recalling in particular *Typhoon.* (The chapter also has a certain symbolic weight behind it, about which more later.) But Hanley's aim in the novel as a whole is more akin to Garrett's approach in 'The Maurie': he uses a series of diverse, character-based viewpoints to undermine a single totalising perspective. This is not to say that Hanley leaves us to draw our own conclusions as Garrett does—rather, *Stoker Bush* leads us to a number of powerful and unavoidable conclusions. But this is accomplished not by a governing narrative presence, but through the characters being allowed to develop in their entirety, such that both their admirable and darker qualities are presented with equal impact. What emerges from this is close to Bakhtin's descriptions of polyphonic narrative: "Characters are polemicized with, learned from; attempts are made to develop their views into finished systems," resulting in "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world [that] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event."

This time, though, it is not the dismissive summation of the working-class detectable in Conrad or Galsworthy that is subverted, not the perspective of one who stands separate from that part of society. Rather, it is the intrinsic ideologies and values of the working-class itself that Hanley critiques, which, in the hands of a number of writers of the time such as Jack Hilton, was interpreted as just as much a set of intractable principles as Conrad's views on class hierarchies at sea or Galsworthy's ideas of "Englishness" ever were.

Stoker Bush's story, though it contains a variety of subplots and comic digressions, is simple enough at the core. Chris Bush, a hardworking but unexciting

seaman from a working-class neighbourhood in a large seaport town (presumably Liverpool) is married to Anne, a girl three years his junior. Now in her early twenties, Anne has become fearful that life holds nothing better in store for her and this has led her into an extramarital affair with a bosun's mate, Michael Davit Rooney. Her infidelity becomes widely known in her close-knit community, and Chris is encouraged by practically everyone around him to administer a brutal beating to his wife, this being universally considered the best way to teach her obedience. But the violence only strengthens Anne's resolve to leave Chris, and when he sets off on his next voyage to New York she and Rooney swiftly commence plans to elope. Chris's father hears of this and wires his son in New York; Chris jumps ship and immediately sets off back to England, stowing away on a homebound liner, which hits an iceberg and sinks. Chris must fight for his life in the freezing Atlantic for hours, while also endeavouring to save another survivor, a drunken university lecturer, whom he has in tow. Finally they are both rescued, but too late for Chris to win back Anne, who has already dumped their two children on her father and left town with Rooney.

Anne is the most important character in *Stoker Bush,* and much of the novel's radical and subversive effect is achieved through her. A first reading of Hanley's book, however, suggests there is little good to say of the character. Aside from being unfaithful to her husband, she is vain, shallow and superficial. She uses her looks to influence others, exercising control over Chris through sex. Anne also appears quite unconcerned about the upbringing of her two children Norah and Gerald, hitting them for minor offences and leaving them to play in the gutter at all hours to the disgust of the neighbours. It's amusing to consider what would happen if Anne ever met Elsie Watkins, the heroine from Jack Hilton's novel *Champion,* and to imagine what the two young women would make of each other. For although they are roughly the same age and from almost identical backgrounds, Elsie, the model for all Hilton's pretty, honest, loyal and wifely working-class girls, would inevitably hold her hands up in horror at the way Anne leads her life. Anne, equally inevitably, would scoff at Elsie for marrying as a teenager and resigning herself to a life spent with the same man, accepting an end of thrills and excitement before she is even twenty. Hilton apparently saw nothing depressing about the fate he assigned to Elsie: disappearing into the background of her new husband's life, providing him with children and comfort, and spending her days "washing up like a woman." But it is the thought that

this very life is all that remains for Anne that has terrified her so, and driven her into the arms of Rooney.

Here lies the essential difference between *Stoker Bush and* the two novels of Jack Hilton. *Champion* and *Laugh at Polonius* are written strictly in accordance with a set of views the author believes in firmly, involving the importance of hard work, supporting one's family at all times, finding love and standing by one's loved one. This has resonances with the Trotskyite conception of "workerism," and Hilton's belief in such principles is clear enough from the fact that his characters arrive at worldly success (in *Champion)* or the revelation that their lives have been worthwhile (in *Polonius)* through adhering to these values. However, the standpoint is hammered home yet further by the proliferation of direct announcements from the narrator on the absolute worth of the ideologies these novels endorse. Such lines as "he did all the things that a man should do in the home"[32] and "It [working] was earning money, it was doing something, it was manly"[33] serve to enforce the specific perspective the author expects us to share, which in Hilton is always laden with social and gender preconceptions, but for which valid alternatives are not posited. The narrative voice of *Laugh at Polonius* and *Champion* is deeply monologic. The two novels do not present numerous different perspectives and leave the reader to reconcile them as Garrett's 'The Maurie' does—rather, Hilton's fiction expresses a specific set of working-class values and announces, without entertaining the possibility of argument, that they are the only ones to conform to.

It hardly needs saying that these values were widely accepted at the time Hilton and Hanley were writing, and they dominated the lives of working-class people. Of all the relevant sociological studies dealing with the social class and period focused on in this thesis, Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) is the best-known. It would be unfair to say that this work gives a sentimentalised view of the 1930s working-class, but Hoggart does emphasise some of the cheerier aspects the lives he investigates—the intimacy and friendliness of tightly-bound communities, the mutual support that grows among people who struggle financially, the holidays and recreational activities. However, what emerges most strongly from Hoggart's book and others like it, perhaps unintentionally, is rather the overwhelmingly unquestionable laws of acceptable behaviour and proper conduct that governed working-class neighbourhoods—all of them unwritten rules, and mostly based on

arbitrary or unsubstantiated ideas—and the harsh or even outright cruel treatment that befell those who contravened them.

The terms and conditions of laudable behaviour in working-class communities, applied particularly strongly to women, revolved around a cultish preoccupation with "respectability." What exactly this constituted is difficult to say, but Hoggart is in agreement with other social historians including Chris Chinn, Lee Rainwater and Elizabeth Roberts, who all identify a "schism" among the working-class that divides individuals and families into one of two categories, according to their perceived "respectability." Roberts, in *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940,* gives a useful definition of how this term might be understood in context:

> The origins of the all-powerful universal norm of respectability are much debated but little agreed upon. It would seem to have several roots: from the Bible, and especially the Ten Commandments, came the rejection of stealing, swearing and adultery; from the Pauline tradition came the suppression of sexuality; the by now well-established industrial discipline contributed the virtues of punctuality, obedience and rigid self-discipline; from the Methodist tradition came the maxim that "Cleanliness is next to godliness."[34]

The idea that status was achieved by being honest and hardworking, while rejecting immorality and slovenliness, is enough to show that Hilton's Elsie is "respectable" and Hanley's Anne is not. Hoggart makes the accurate observation that a working-class wife and mother who embodied the perceived qualities of respectability would be considered laudable and worthy, and neighbours would be likely to compare her favourably with other, less desirable residents of the same street. (In describing "the great number of differences, the subtle shades, the class distinctions, within the working-classes themselves," one revealing contrast Hoggart draws is "the wife here is a good manager and very houseproud, whereas the one opposite is a slattern.")[35] Indeed, Chinn remarks in his study *They Worked all Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939,* that the great importance of the working-class matriarch had much to do with the role she played in managing the home, maintaining cleanliness, and preserving respectability.[36] This seems to be the role *Champion's* Elsie has dedicated her life to fulfilling, while in *Stoker Bush* disparaging remarks are made constantly from Chris, Chris's parents, Anne's father and the minor characters about the untidiness of the house on Telus Street Anne shares with Chris, and how the

young woman makes no effort to keep it clean. ("My 'eart fair bled seein' the state of that 'ouse, which was a disgrace to a woman of her age, and also not fair to Chris, who turns up his money regular.")[37] But unhappy as Anne is, and as unsuited to domesticity she seems, her community recognises her life as the only one available to her. Hoggart writes that for working-class couples, marrying young and immediately taking on family duties was all that was considered "normal and 'right' in the 1930s.[38]

That it was possible for women to fall into bad habits and find themselves on the other side of the schism was recognised by the working-class of the thirties. Angela Rodaway's mother used this division as a threat, stating that her daughter would have to become a "factory girl" if she did not win her scholarship, and Rodaway recalls feeling a genuine fear of girls who worked in the mills, with their raucous behaviour, gaudy dressing and supposed loose morals.[39] (As workplaces were, necessarily, dominated by males, the day-to-day contact female workers made with them was considered a spur to their increasing licentiousness.) Anne already is a factory girl, or at least she was—before marrying Chris she worked at a rubber refinery—and this is apparently one of the foremost reasons why Chris's parents, especially his devoutly Christian, retired-sailor father, have always looked down on her and consider her and her family to be beneath their son. It's worth noting that most "respectable" working-class men of the thirties did not believe it appropriate for their wives to go to work at all—Mr. Craigan's remark in Henry Green's *Living,* "None of the women-folk go to work from the house I inhabit,"[40] is highly representative of its time. (Elsie in *Champion,* of course, leaves her job at the cotton mill as soon as she and Jimmy are married.) Here the codes of "respectability" can be seen to support, or perhaps legitimate, the gendered preconception of the man's proper role as breadwinner and the woman's as domestic. Hanley's presentation of Anne shows how women are not necessarily happy when they conform to these ideas, however proper such conformity is thought to be.

Indeed, the arbitrariness of the reasons why a woman might be thought to lack respectability were often connected to a complex series of ideas rather than solid evidence, and this is where these working-class social norms and mores start to become sinister. For example, Chinn can offer no concrete reason why "It was not seen fit for a young, single woman to drink alone, or with others of her kind, in a public or beer house. If she did she was regarded as 'an old tail' or prostitute."[41] That this was the case in the thirties and later, though, is impossible to dispute, and as was

the equally tenuous association that might lead a woman who did not keep her house clean to also be associated with prostitution or "loose living."[42] But although such judgements on the moral character of woman were often based on highly vague connections, reactions from neighbours and workmates to perceived lapses in respectability could nonetheless be severe. The report from one of Roberts' working-class interviewees in *A Woman's Place,* which describes how a pregnant bride was publicly stoned on her wedding-day, is an extreme case and dates to about a decade before the period of this study.[43] However, Hoggart, Chinn and Roberts are in agreement that working-class neighbourhoods exhibited considerable scorn for women who were felt to have contravened acceptable codes of conduct relating to cleanliness, public behaviour or sex. *In They Worked all Their Lives,* Chinn writes:

> As a Birmingham woman commented of the 1920s and 1930s, a wife who was not clean would be hounded, especially if there was a row between two women. When this occurred, the distaste of the community in general would be publicly aired by the protagonist who was the cleaner.[44]

As Roberts rightly puts it, "Working-class views were not, of course, identical; the class was not a monolithic mass."[45] Yet these tacitly acknowledged codes of conduct were very real, and held considerable sway on working-class communities and individual lives. Hanley and Hilton both grew up in the world of these conventions and knew them well. The difference between the two writers, expressed by the works they produced, is that Hilton accepted his social class's communal values and saw much good in adhering to them, while Hanley recognised the failings of such ideologies and their potential for abuse, and used *Stoker Bush* to bring all this to light.

Edward Stokes remarks how "faithfully and convincingly drawn"[46] are *Stoker Bush's* characters, praising the "complete objectivity"[47] of their presentation and the skill with which they are "brought fully and convincingly to life."[48] The anonymous inside-dustcover blurb of the 1935 edition makes a similar point, stating that Hanley "creates his characters in so masterly a fashion that whether you love or hate them you are always engrossed in them: they are so truly human." This is indeed the secret of *Stoker Bush's* success, and while neither source uses the word polyphony, it is the fact that explicit narrative guidance is kept to the barest minimum that allows the characters to develop into believable and complete forms. Our personal feelings on

these characters, "whether we love or hate them," therefore becomes a matter of personal perspective.

Here Hanley reveals that the perspective he is writing for is not that of his own social class, as his attack on the working-class cult of respectability is not intended for those who are immersed in its value systems. Rather, it is aimed at readers who stand apart from it, in particular the middle-class. This is closely tied to the author's own feelings of class ambivalence, for of the four writers focused on in this thesis Hanley expressed the greatest desire to abandon the life of day-to-day work for the financial security and cultured status more commonly associated with the bourgeoisie, and used his writing to forge middle-class connections that could lead him to that end. *Stoker Bush's* urban seaport setting and authentic reproduction of working-class language and mannerisms meet the 1930s bourgeois interest in accurate, gritty presentations of proletarian experience, and likewise the conclusions Hanley's novel leads us to depend on our being sufficiently detached from working-class life to see its paradoxes and contradictions. Haney was so detached by 1935, which is why he and not Jack Hilton produced *Stoker Bush.* Many working-class people of the thirties would not have arrived at the same conclusions on the novel as the contemporary bourgeoisie, or a present-day readership would.

This is seen most prominently in the episode of the beating administered by Chris to Anne. While domestic violence is inexcusable no matter what era it occurs in, it would be anachronistic to assess *Stoker Bush's* treatment of this theme from today's perspective. In the 1930s such acts were more widely endorsed by society, particularly in working-class communities where wife-beating was considered a necessary part of preserving respectability. Hanley saw this, and depicted it. Thus Chris's churchgoing father, much as he comforts Anne after the incident, instructs his son in an earlier scene to "'It as 'ard as you can"[49] before placidly returning to the wooden boat he is carving. Similarly Anne's father Harry tells Chris that Anne "wants a bloody good thrashing every night for a week,"[50] but goes to see Mr. Bush once the deed is done and complains about his son's actions. (Harry, speaking "in tones of an injured father," declares to him: "let me tell you, as man to man, Mr. Bush...as man to man, I think 'e went too far. 'E nearly killed her. If I 'adn't been 'andy 'e would 'ave done.")[51]

The effect of this to a modern reader, or to Hanley's contemporaries who stood outside the conventions of working-class society, is one of deep disgust at a

community that endorses and encourages violence against women while pretending to care for and support the victims it creates. But Harry, Mr. Bush and others like them are not mere products of Hanley's imagination: there were such people, and there were such attitudes as theirs. *Stoker Bush* is emphatically not intended for readers who share such views. The emotional guidance Hanley infuses into the scene portrays the violence as quite horrific, and the man who commits it appears monstrous. For, despite a number of assertions from other characters that Chris is "soft-hearted"[52] and "wouldn't harm a fly,"[53] the thought that crosses his mind while watching her breasts just before commencing the beating ("He'd like to cut them things clean off her. Ruin her for good,")[54] suggests a capacity for cold-blooded sadism rather than uncharacteristic anger at Anne's unfaithfulness. And the beating itself, viewed from Harry's perspective and depicted without any sparing of detail, is more disturbing still:

> He looked closer. "Ugh!" he said, pressing his nose to the window. He had her across the sofa, had her clothes off; already he could see the blood running from 'er back, and weals on her backside. Not a sound from her, nor Chris. It was like sudden power had come on his son-in-law, that swam to hand and arm. It was like a powerful piston, rising, falling. There was no end to it. It was everlasting as if this *must* go on, and on, until all the energy left that arm. He was controlled by that power.[55]

The image of Chris's arm as a "powerful piston," which occurs repeatedly throughout the beating-scene, dehumanises the man and suggests a machine has taken his place. This idea is borne out by the description of Chris as a "crazy automaton:"[56] cold, unfeeling, relentless and terrible. But these reactions come of a reading of *Stoker Bush* that is not conditioned by the conventions of 1930s working-class society. Readers who belonged to that existence would not have drawn the conclusions Hanley intends.

This engagement with a middle-class, rather than working-class readership may also have influenced Hanley's choice of subject matter. Edward Stokes observes that *Stoker Bush* follows an essentially bourgeois tradition, and considers this a weakness:

> The book has a very simple and banal plot—the eternal triangle of wife, husband and other man— which acquires a certain novelty from its setting in a seaport slum instead of in upper-class drawing rooms."[57]

However, this view can be critiqued, as the interpersonal relationships Hanley portrays depart significantly from the "simple and banal." Just as Chris's complexities as a character (particularly his appetite for violence) make him more than the one-dimensional wronged husband of formulaic love-triangle tales, Anne is drawn in too well-rounded a way for the role of heartless, scheming adulteress. Hanley makes no attempt to excuse her faults ,but he also portrays her deep unhappiness in her marriage with Chris in an honest, entirely sincere way. Consider the passage below:

> Anne thought of Norah and Gerald now. They were indeed problems. Why she had them she didn't know. Fool she was. If she could plant them on his people she would go back to the old factory where she worked, refining rubber. At least was freedom there, and the other girls to talk to. She was not an old woman yet, but a young woman full of life. Memories of good times at this factory strengthened her desire.[58]

The influence of *Living* is particularly evident here, as Anne's loneliness closely resembles that of Henry Green's heroine Lily Gates, who also craves a more exciting life than that of a mere housekeeper and wants to start work at a factory. Anne's relationship with Rooney, furthermore, is convincingly shown to be more than simple infatuation or lust, and the reader genuinely feels it could grow into the love Anne so badly needs in her life. It is not mere physical attraction—Hanley deliberately takes the unconventional path of giving the romantic rival in his love-triangle "an appearance forbidding and even a little repulsive"[59]—and nor does it have to do with wealth, for though Rooney, unlike Chris, is in the officer-class, he is only a bosun's mate and would not be greatly better-paid paid than Anne's husband. Anne herself reflects on this:

> It wasn't only because Rooney was bosun's mate and wore a gold anchor on his sleeve. It wasn't only that he had a good constant job. No! He was a man, different to Chris in all things, and he was the one destined for her. She was certain of this.[60]

And not only is Anne's love for Rooney genuine, so is her regret and sorrow at the heartbreak she must subject Chris to. There is no reason to suppose that the

sentiments expressed in her letter of confession, which she writes but he never reads, are anything but sincere:

> "I couldn't bear to see your face when I said 'I don't love you any more.' I haven't got an open, honest heart like you have, more's the pity. If I had I wouldn't have married you seven years ago, and had two kids, for then I would have known myself better. But you see, Chris, being only seventeen I was just a kid. I didn't know what I was doing. Mind you, I've been happy too. But all the same this wasn't real, being only pretence, for when I met Rooney years ago, I knew then I'd made a mistake. So you see, dear Chris, I can't go on. I still love you, but not in the way you think."[61]

The working-class communities of Hilton's *Champion* and *Laugh at Polonius,* then, no longer seem quite so cheerful and wholesome after studying *Stoker Bush*, and the conformity to and acceptance of working-class conventions that Hilton's two novels posit as the route to happiness become considerably harder to accept. The impression given by Hanley's novel is that happiness can be achieved only by escape from the suffocating, claustrophobic working-class neighbourhood in which it is set, with its unending poverty, its petty animosities, its contradictions and its callous, unforgiving, unwritten laws. Hanley deliberately seizes on recognised working-class stereotypes of the unrespectable—untidy houses, factory girls, disreputable streets—in order to show them for the harmful prejudices they are. The horrors Anne endures in *Stoker Bush* illustrate graphically how the cult of the "respectable" serves to force individuals into condemning categories, ignoring their human frailties and individuality, in order to legitimate violence, ostracism and abuse. Her experience presents a sound argument for wanting to leave such a life, and though we might question the way she goes about gaining this freedom, we surely cannot fault her for craving escape. This interpretation is reinforced by the novel's surprise ending. The final chapter, with its dramatic account of Chris saving himself and the academic from a watery grave, is regarded by both Stokes and Fordham as the novel's best. Its Conradian lyricism and profusion of important imagery and ideas particularly impressed Fordham, who writes:

> ...the two men—sophisticated member of the elite and ordinary seaman—are thrown together in a battle with ice and sea. In the extreme conditions, the lecturer is reduced to raving powerlessness, totally dependent on Chris's sanity, strength and superior maritime knowledge. At a crucial

> moment, the dead weight of his companion gets heavier and heavier and "[t]he lecturer from America who said society was coming to an end was slowly pulling Chris into the water." Chris's perseverance eventually saves them both and the sailor finally emerges triumphant, not only in the physical sense but as a latent life-force shouldering the cumbrous and impeditive burden of a declining civilisation.[62]

This is of course an entirely valid interpretation, but Fordham views the ending and the observations it makes on society as entirely separate from the drama that runs throughout the rest of the book. (Stokes is in agreement with him on this point, referring to the iceberg chapter as "the most memorable" but "actually irrelevant.")[63] However, I tend to think that this conclusion works best as a metaphor, symbolising the futility of Chris's love for Anne.

Throughout *Stoker Bush* there are a number of scenes featuring the couple in which Hanley, quite boldly given the book's 1935 publication date, writes from Anne's point of view while a sexual act is taking place. However, the effect of this is quite different from the use of the same perspective in *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* a text Hanley, like many working-class writers of the thirties, was influenced by. Rather than describing, as Lawrence does, the woman's struggle to achieve a fulfilling orgasm with some men and the joy that climaxing simultaneously with a partner brings, Hanley describes how Anne, no longer in love with her husband, use sex only as a way to placate him, assuage his suspicions of her, and ultimately control him. It is a far more realistic imagining of sexual relations than Lawrence's phallocentric fantasy of satisfied females, belonging more to a misogynistic literary tradition which seems to emerge around the eighteenth century—a famous example early is Alexander Pope's second Moral Essay, 'Epistle II. To a Lady: on the Characters of Women', which contains the line: "She, while her lover pants upon her breast / Can mark the figures on an Indian chest"[64]—and which informs similar attitudes emerging in the twentieth. (The "Tiresias" segment in 'The Fire Sermon', third chapter of *The Waste Land,* contains another modern manifestation of this.) For Anne, sex with Chris is nothing more than a part of their ongoing power struggle, and at one instance when Chris climaxes she merely notes absently that "the whole frame of this man shook as if he had a fit of ague."[65] (The fact that Anne's only sex scene with Rooney, in which she might be expected to take genuine pleasure, is quickly skipped over in perfunctory and cliché-ridden language suggests that Hanley was anxious not to

repeat the debacle of *Boy,* whose prosecution and banning occurred in the same year *Stoker Bush* was published.)

But observable in Anne and Chris's intimate moments is an abundance of imagery involving ice, water and ocean, which emerge while we are sharing Anne's perspective. In one such instance there are four examples in a single paragraph: Chris's touch is to Anne a "flame licking against a wall of ice" or a "trickle of water on a great rock;" she seems to "sink lower and lower" and remains unaffected by his "fierce tide of passion."[66] In other moments Anne reflects on how Chris would "reach a certain depth in her, and then cease,"[67] while her thoughts fly to "The middle of the Atlantic"[68] where Rooney is. All this is apparently to prepare the reader for the symbolic dénouement that is to come. The closing chapter's shift from the main body of the narrative is clumsy to be sure, but all the same the final scene resonates with ideas of battling against cold, unconquerable, ruthless inevitability. Chris valiantly fights against the forces of nature, and though he survives the encounter he cannot hope to defeat his foe, just as he cannot stand in the way of Anne's desire to be free of him. The juxtapositioning of two scenes in the final few paragraphs of *Stoker Bush* seem to make this symbolism explicit:

> Gasping "Christ! Hurry! HURRY." Spitting water from his mouth. His eyes bulging from his head.
>
> "Can you hang onto him for half a second? Look out. Here's a rope."
>
> This whistled through the air. Oh! Ah! ... He caught the rope. The boat drew nearer now. "Steady! Steady now. Now."
>
> They pulled the lecturer into the boat. He flopped to the bottom like a great fish. Then they pulled Chris in after him. Saved. Saved.
>
> The same day Anne, leaving the chucks with 'Arry, went with Rooney, they catching the eight-twenty p.m. for Cardiff.[69]

It is a form of bleak, pessimistic naturalism; a powerful subversion of such optimistic working-class novels as *Champion* and the happy endings and just desserts of socialist realism narratives generally. But it is there for a purpose: to emphasise how insufficient Hanley finds such conclusions, which only serve to reinforce the working-class values he attacks in *Stoker Bush.* Hanley strikes a final blow against the world where one is expected to marry young and settle unquestioningly into a way of life

that endorses violence and ignores despair, by showing the failure of such a relationship to be not unfortunate, not the fault of one or another partner, but as intractable and inevitable as the forces of nature.

The most lasting impression Hanley's novel leaves is that nobody is deserving of poetic justice because nobody is truly good or bad; and that the happiness good people are supposed to be rewarded with is actually almost impossible to find. The only character who achieves happiness is Anne, and this much is clear enough in a tale where nothing else appears so. During a minor conversation between Rooney and a shipmate shortly before Rooney arrives home, the following exchange takes place (the shipmate is the first to speak, and they are discussing Rooney's affair with Anne):

> "What about 'er?"
> "Well, what about her?"
> "Is it exactly decent?"
> "Is anything decent?"
> "Well, I don't know."[70]

"Is anything decent?" This throwaway line is in fact central to the vision of *Stoker Bush*. In a world where conventional values—decency, respectability, and other such hollow words—are indeed shown to be arbitrary, hypocritical and meaningless, the pursuit of simple happiness appears to be all that matters. That such happiness is achieved by an individual's escaping the social and gender roles her working-class community expects her to fulfil, and in her seizing the freedom to indulge her individual subjectivity, her own desires, and her own sexual choice, is what makes *Stoker Bush* a truly radical text.

Chapter Six

Working-class writers of the thirties: some connections to modern art

1) Contemporary art styles in context

Jack Hilton's *Champion* (1938) contains a scene in which the hero Jimmy Watkins and his boxing manager Mick visit the art department of an expensive store, looking to spend Jimmy's latest winnings on gifts for his wife and mother.

> Mick saw the Venus de Milo, both eyeless and armless, and asked the salesman if it was broken; the salesman only frowned at his ignorance.
>
> Passing through, they came to the pictures. One was of a woman. She looked at them with a sickly smile, her hands seemed to be troubling her, and the whole picture was tainted with a bile orange-green mustiness. A young couple, obviously newlyweds, seemed to be engrossed in it. This puzzled Mick and Jimmy.
>
> "What can anyone see in a mouldy bitch like that?" Asked Mick in a whisper.
>
> "Blowed if I know," Jimmy answered.[1]

The picture is of the *Mona Lisa,* as Hilton reveals shortly afterwards. The scene concludes with Jimmy choosing a print of Arnold Böcklin's *Battle of the Centaurs,* and, after a salesman has had to explain to him and Mick what centaurs are, Jimmy makes his purchase:

> "How much?" he asked.
>
> "Three guineas. It is a perfect copy of Böcklin's masterpiece, sir."
>
> "But I don't want a copy, I want the real picture," said Jimmy.
>
> "My dear sir! You could not get the original for any amount of money."
>
> Jimmy handed over the money, feeling a little uneasy that it was only a copy.[2]

The sequence appears on first impressions to exploit the by then outdated stereotype of working-class people as unable to understand art and culture. However, what Hilton presents in this ostensibly throwaway comic scene is in fact one of the most subtly ironic challenges to such stereotypes to be found in any book discussed in this thesis. Hilton, himself working-class, reveals through this scene his own artistic

knowledge just as he generates humour from the artistic ineptitude of his working-class characters—indeed, the sequence would not be funny if the narrative voice failed convincingly to establish its own grounding in aesthetic study. For although Böcklin is considered trite by some, Hilton's high regard for his work is apparent in the long description of *Battle of the Centaurs,* articulated from Jimmy's perspective as he contemplates his purchase, which lovingly considers the picture with the depth and sensitivity that only a true appreciator of that artist could achieve. Hilton dwells on the warring beasts' "chests, hairy and deep-lunged," admires how their "brown skin covered magnificent biceps and shoulders," and praises the depiction of their death-struggle in all its "savage onslaught" before a backdrop in which "red, burning thunderbolts hung temporarily in the air like exiles doomed for hell."[3] The author does not feel the need to name the painting itself; for him its intrinsic merit as a work of art is more important that how it should be contextualised and categorised within the trappings of artistic theory. This is in witty contrast to the middle-class newlyweds, who announce a love for art simply because it is deemed proper for bourgeois people to do so rather than because they have any understanding of art itself:

> "We must have it, darling; everyone who is arty has that one."
>
> "Yes," he replied. "Mona Lisa is Leonardo's best. I wish I could remember what Pater says about it, he describes its merits perfectly, dear."[4]

The newlyweds' deliberately dated mode of speech parodies ideas of middle-class mannerisms just as Mick and Jimmy's comic blunderings lampoon popular notions of the working-class: it is to be understood that neither of the social strata represented here speak or act as they would in the real world. Hilton's seeming conformity to stereotypes of class actually serves to undermine those stereotypes, highlighting his own extensive awareness of art through the use of comedy. And the working-class authors discussed in this study do indeed possess such an awareness, particularly of modern art and expressionism, one which exerts an important influence over the writing three of them produced. For while Jim Phelan does not use expressionistic imagery prominently in his works, perhaps because such techniques were stylistically at odds with the type of popular narrative he preferred, Hanley, Hilton and Garrett all

made use of what were then contemporary experimental art forms to enhance and add impact to their short stories and novels.

The particular nature of the modern art form seized upon by working-class writers of the thirties might be appropriately described as surrealism, though it also owes a considerable amount to a mode of expressionism that had evolved from the movement's beginnings in mid-nineteenth century Germany and gone on to acquire a distinctive identity of its own in early-twentieth century Britain and America. It was defined by the expressionistic technique of presenting, as Chris Baldick writes, "a world violently distorted under the pressure of intense personal moods, ideas and emotions," such that "image and language thus express feeling and imagination rather than represent external reality."[5] Rejecting futurism's celebration of science and technology as constantly developing and improving for the greater good of man, this expressionist school was preoccupied instead with "the eruption of irrational and chaotic forces from beneath the surface of a mechanized modern world."[6] John Fordham, expanding on the earlier studies of Ken Worpole *in Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading, Popular Writing* (1983), observes in his *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working-Class* (2002) that this mode of interpretation and presentation was ideal for writers such as Hanley who were familiar with "the extremes of social experience"[7] and who had known first-hand the contemporary machine-age. (Hanley and Garrett had both worked in the stokeholds of ships since their teens, while Hilton began work in a textile mill, as part of the "half-time" schooling system, at the age of twelve.)

It is astonishing that more has not been written about this engagement with experimental art by working-class authors of the thirties, and that, as Fordham observes, it is so often overlooked by commentators more eager to "deploy the readily-available Marxist formulas: assessing a work according to its evident commitment or on the basis of the conventional socialist realist criteria."[8] The stereotypes of proletarian artistic ignorance exposed by Hilton would seem still to carry some weight, for even without a comprehensive knowledge of working-class writing from this time it is easy enough to see how prevalent modernist art was in popular culture and media readily available to working-class people.

It was, for example, emerging in Industrial Workers of the World magazines and pamphlets as early as the first decade of the twentieth century, and Garrett, who visited the United States in 1912 and later joined the Wobblies, would have been

exposed to these. Alongside more traditional, linear cartoons spoofing "high art" forms or involving slapstick images of bungling overweight bosses, sit illustrations that exploit new modes of surreal metamorphosis and provide grotesque distortions of man's interaction with machine. Thus, the November 5th 1910 issue of *Solidarity* features a cartoon of several of the I.W.W.'s enemies (officers of the Civic Federation and their rival union, the American Federation of Labour Workers) metamorphosing into organ pipes,[9] and the June 30th 1917 edition of the same paper contains an illustration of hundreds of workers all raising their right hands, which combine into one gigantic fist above their heads.[10] Even the I.W.W.'s popular comic character Mr. Block, created by Ernest Riebe around 1912 and immortalised by Joe Hill in his famous song of 1913,[11] displays these influences: Block, sometimes an A.F. of L. member, sometimes a non-union workman (who continually stumbles into misfortune because of these political orientations) was portrayed as a human with a piece of wood for a head, who interacted with ordinary people in the recognisable world. But one of the most effective I.W.W. cartoons, to be found in the August 1924 issue of *The Industrial Worker,* depicts the sinister image of a gigantic, wheeled, cast-iron cart branded "modern machinery," fronted by two prongs metamorphosing into a pair of human hands with the palms forward, shoving people into their thousands over the edge of a cliff and into a pit signposted "unemployment dump," while the dark chimneys of an industrial dystopia fume in the background.[12]

Such art was also flourishing in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the most direct link between it and the writers focused on in this study must be that *Left Review,* the journal in which Hanley, Garrett, Hilton and Phelan all published for the first time some of their writings, regularly featured expressionistic images by modern artists. The greatest of these was James Boswell, who was personally known to Hanley and provided covers for some of his books,[13] and Boswell's contemporaries including James Fitton, Michael Boland and James Holland were also frequent contributors to the *Review.* Thus in the October 1935 edition a memorable depiction by Fitton of a dove of peace metamorphosing into a bomber (see fig. 1 at the end of the chapter) appears alongside 'The Redcap' by Garrett; the May 1936 issue features reproductions of paintings by Frans Masereel and a chapter from Hanley's *The Secret Journey,* and in May 1935 *Left Review* published a photomontage by an artist using the name "Luke" together with Garrett's short story 'The Overcoat' and a segment from Hanley's novel *Hollow Sea.* This evidence is probably sufficient in itself to

illustrate how farcical is the notion that working-class writers of the 1930s had no access to developing forms of modern art.

As the decade progressed and it became clear that war with the Axis Powers was inevitable, this mode of expressionism began to be used in images of anti-Nazi propaganda such as the cartoon by Fitton described above. Futurism's forward-looking veneration of technological progress had already been taken up by fascism, particularly Mussolini's Italian regime, as an apt means of expressing that movement's strength and magnitude: as Baldick notes, the futurist predilection for "the dynamism and speed of the twentieth century machine age," particularly "Marinetti's aggressive cult of machinery and warfare," was deemed fit to become "a part of official fascist culture in Italy."[14] This resulted in a proliferation of pro-fascist futurist paintings such as *Portrait of the Duce* (1933) by the "aeropainter" Gerardo Dottori,[15] which lends majesty to Mussolini's head through the use of sharp angles and straight lines which project from the edges of his visage to suggest rays of light or the gleam on crystal or precious metal, and also subtly reshape the subject of the painting to suggest a chiselled bust or revered idol. This, and the association Dottori draws between Mussolini and the miniscule aeroplanes and bombs in the background, bestow upon the dictator a godlike air. Similar techniques are to be found in Alfredo Ambrossi's *Portrait of Mussolini,* 1930, and Alessandro Bruschetti's triptych *Fascist Synthesis,* 1935.

Perhaps as a natural response to the fascist appropriation of futurist art, much anti-fascist propaganda made use of the expressionist mode that represented the mechanised age as a dangerous, threatening force imposing corruptions and distortions upon life's routine. The best works of this nature include Josep Renau's anti-Franco posters of the Spanish Civil War,[16] Paul Nash's photographic reflections on the dangers of aerial warfare (one of which, *Dive Bomber,* fig. 2, features a plummeting German bomb mutating into a swordfishlike metal monster with eyes, teeth and tail, its side hatch opening to revel a human skull inside),[17] and images by the prolific John Heartfield, which were circulated in the magazines *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung (A.I.Z.), Volks Illustrierte* and elsewhere. Heartfield's work uses motifs of metamorphosis, distortion and disturbing mechanisations of the organic in an unambiguous, even unsophisticated way: his *German Acorns* (1933; fig. 3) portrays Hitler watering a tree whose fruits are giant bombs wearing Nazi helmets, and *The Peaceable Fish of Prey* (1937; fig. 4) transforms Herman Göering's head into

that of a huge-toothed marine predator and surrounds him with far tinier fish representing the small nations that stood in the Third Reich's path.[18]

Examples such as these presumably influenced Herta Wescher when she wrote of Heartfield that "not infrequently the symbolic content of his posters is all too rhetorical and bathetic,"[19] but it is crucial to observe that the bluntness of Heartfield's anti-war propaganda has much to do with the fact that he was aiming, self-consciously, at the masses rather than the gallery crowd or the drawing-room. Heartfield belonged to the Artists' International Association (A.I.A.), the founders of which included Boswell and Fitton and whose membership encompassed most of the modern artists of the thirties. With the aim of mobilising "the international unity of artists against Imperialist War on the Soviet Union, fascism and colonial oppression,"[20] the A.I.A. took as its priority the circulation of "art for the people" and concentrated on producing works that could be easily reproduced in pamphlets and magazines and so distributed to the greatest number. An exemplary follower of this movement's cause, Heartfield combined his talents for photomontage and humour to impress upon all social strata the urgency with which the threat of Nazism must be addressed. He is foremost among the artists who successfully introduced to huge amounts of working-class people the effectiveness of modern art as a means of articulating political commitment.

Hanley, Garrett and Hilton, all of whom openly opposed fascism and allied themselves, to varying extents, with the ideological Left, would have been aware of these and other manifestations of experimental or avant-garde art and would have seen the value of incorporating such aesthetic motifs into their own written works. Artistic developments were continually happening around these authors, and their writing can be said to have emerged from this period of change. The next section of this chapter cannot claim to document all the instances where such influences are apparent—another thesis would be required to do full justice to this, and besides, both Ken Worpole and John Fordham have already produced extensive studies on the importance of expressionism to the authors currently under study. What follows, then, should be considered as a brief summation of the different types of modern artistic motifs used by Hanley, Hilton and Garrett, and the purposes to which these motifs were put, and also as a way of introducing the theme of the remaining three chapters of this thesis, which will investigate the alternative ideas and agendas

engaged with by writers who rejected much of the stylistic and political alignment of conventional working-class literature.

2) Politicised distortion and the human body

One of the most memorable uses of expressionist imagery in the writing studied by this thesis comes in the penultimate chapter of Hanley's *Captain Bottell* (1933), when the eponymous character, by this stage in the novel quite mad and under guard in his cabin, breaks free from captivity as the ship begins to sink, and flees into the doomed vessel's stokehold. From here we enter Bottell's deranged perspective and Hanley presents us with a bewildering phantasmagoria of horrific otherworldly visions. Edward Stokes is right to observe that the sequence "suffers from Hanley's tendency to go on too long,"[21] but even so, the disturbing images it conveys are perfect examples of the hallucinatory melding and metamorphosis of organic and manmade forms so popular in contemporary experimental art, and which were drawn on by working-class writers of that time. Bottell "sees" the below-decks machinery metamorphose into "Hundreds of tiny figures...made of steel,"[22] and a gigantic woman whose flowing hair attempts to strangle him. Living tissue becomes inert matter and vice versa: one passage describes a bald head made of steel, while another states: "The pumps were made of flesh; they were a mass of flesh."[23] The metal rivets are nibbled at by rats, one of which is flung away by the captain only for its head to explode in a burst of sparks. Even human bodies appear to have detachable parts like automata: Bottell pulls an arm from an hallucinatory figure, and later a steel hand yanks Bottell's foot off. Hanley's use of nightmarish illusions owes absolutely nothing to any realist or naturalist mode commonly associated with 1930s working-class writing, and provides one of the very best examples with which to illustrate the true depth of artistic engagement carried out by such authors during that period.

However, as powerful and effective as this segment of Hanley's novel is, its use of such imagery is atypical among the writing considered by this study in that it presents a modernist twisting of reality only in the personal, private sphere. Bottell's delusions are a symptom of his madness, a madness that has much to do with his desire for the ship's sole passenger, Mrs. Willoughby, and his intense sexual jealousy over the relationship he convinces himself she is having with an eloquent and manful stoker named Mulcare. (This, of course, parodies the later segments of Joseph Conrad's

1913 sea-novel *Chance,* and Fordham's chapter 'Hanley and Conrad' in *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working-Class* fully explores the relationship between the two books.)[24] Consequently the surreal visions that haunt Bottell are related more to his individual lusts (motifs of female hair, lips, mouths, breasts and penetration recur obsessively throughout the chapter); they are not linked to any collective or large-scale experience. By contrast the writing of Hilton and Garrett, along with other works by Hanley, tend to privilege a deployment of surrealist transformations that serve to emphasise and draw attention to the suffering of the working-class as a whole.

To some extent this device calls upon a pre-existing tradition in literature identified by Fordham, in which intensive manual labour was shown to assert an atavistic, dehumanising effect upon workers, reducing them to something less than complete civilised men. Fordham writes that this idea finds its clearest expression in Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1922), which was, coincidentally, the play in which George Garrett made his theatrical debut.[25] In this work the American stoker Big Yank, explaining his love for his job, makes a speech that Fordham describes as "expressive of a certain pre-First World War optimism, recalling the futurist conceptions of the machine-age as forward-looking and heroic."[26] ("I'm steel—steel––steel! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it!")[27] Fordham goes on:

> Yank's perception of a new unity of human being and machine is soon overturned, however, by an authorial conviction that the machine's transformative power is self-defeating. It will ultimately propel humanity retrogressively to some atavistic state: a bizarre reversal of the evolutionary process in which human being will become ape.[28]

This idea is not completely absent from the works of the four authors who are the subject of this thesis, as characters occur in their writing who have been rendered brutish and animal-like by years of toil in the workplace. Joe Jarrow's father in Phelan's *Ten-a-Penny People* (1938) is perhaps the best example: Phelan describes his "great bare arms" and "vast gorilla chest," reflects on "What he had been before a lifetime of labour warped him,"[29] and makes it clear that his son, who considers him a "work-beast," does not want to follow him into the same job because he fears becoming a subhuman creature like him. ("I don't reckon teh take the same raw deal *you* took…I'm a man, and I reckon teh stay a man.")[30] Similar motifs of

animalisation and degradation occasionally resurface in works by Phelan's fellow authors, though never so vividly as in the case of Mr. Jarrow. Arthur Fearon's father in *Boy,* and Horrigan and Scully in 'Feud', both by Hanley, are also grizzled elderly seamen, Muldoon in Garrett's 'The Jonah' is a younger version of such figures, and the idea of a workplace turning its labourers into animals is made use of by Hilton in his essay 'A Plasterer's Life', where he describes how boys in the mills, to keep up with the hectic pace, became "human whippets."[31] But ultimately, such animalistic imagery was by and large rejected by Hanley, Hilton and Garrett, perhaps because it leads to an overly pessimistic presentation of the working-class in which their strength and cultural depth cannot be celebrated, or perhaps, as Fordham notes of Hanley, "the idea of the 'Hairy Ape' has rather too many negative connotations, not the least of which is the familiar imperialist representation of colonized racial groups, including the Irish, as 'ape-like.'"[32] So these writers chose a subtler, more aesthetically-aware means of depicting the working-class man's dehumanisation through his interactions with the modern mechanised age, imagining this not as simple brutalisation and atavism. Instead they choose to express his suffering through the use of surrealist and expressionistic imagery.

In Hilton this most frequently occurs in the descriptions of cotton-mills and the work they demand, subjects the author knew well. Hence this from *Laugh at Polonius* (1942):

> Following him, Leslie entered one of the door mouths of the mill-monster's body. The body's entrails had hot air and dust and the smell of cotton seeds inside them. "Yon fellow" got into the hoist, and out at the middle room; so did Leslie. The mill-engine started...The machines worked their way into the brains of their minders. The women thus had become deformed robots, forfeiting speech for strange noises that matched the hum and the rattle of machinery. The women whooped like demented beings, whooped for the boy doffers to change full bobbins for empty bobbins, whooped and yelled for everything. They were living corpses driven on by a steam monster that had steel-hooked their hearts, and had made their human hearts throb in unison. So in the factory there were streets of machines minded by hordes of robotized, life-sapped humans.[33]

The expressionist impact of this scene is underscored, intentionally, by its inclusion in an otherwise strongly socialist-realist novel. None of Hilton's characteristic optimism about the diverse joys of working-class life is evident here; rather, what emerges overwhelmingly is the sheer horror of the "steam monster," the "living corpses" who

can only speak in klaxon-like whoops, and the "deformed robots." (Hilton is of course aware of the derivation of this last word.) Most frightening of all is the human mutation Hilton artfully portrays, the idea that the workplace is insidiously taking over the living body: from engine vibrations infiltrating brain patterns to the central machine attaching hooks into workers' hearts and so synchronising their beating with its pulsations. Importantly, there are resonances between these distressing images and actual health-risks that were part of the mill-life Hilton knew. The possibility that a factory could "work its way" into its labourers was real enough in the form of dust-inhalation, hinted at in the second sentence of the passage above, and Storm Jameson remarks in her essay 'Documents' that repetitive, monotonous work did indeed impose permanently its patterns on the behaviour of machinists as Hilton notes. Jameson likens "the girls from one of these rationalised factories" to Charlie Chaplin in the opening scene of *Modern Times:* they "cannot keep their hands still; they walk around the club room nipping off the heads of flowers, turning on the heating; they jerk and twitch and scream."[34] Hilton is aware of all this when he describes the variety of often horrific ways in which factory-hands lose their individual identities and even their humanity, becoming instead the insentient cogs or components of one huge mechanical entity.

In 'A Plasterer's Life' Hilton despairs that the working-class were forced to labour under such conditions, and explains that this was what motivated him to leave the mills and turn to plastering, his chosen career.[35] It is necessary to grasp how strong were Hilton's feelings about the dehumanising effect of factory toil if we are to understand his preoccupation, expounded on throughout much of *Laugh at Polonius,* with love, sex and the natural world as a means of resisting this mechanised life-in-death. It's true that Hilton is better at describing the affliction than the cure—his sermons on how factory girls using "ribbons and dress and grace"[36] are "the balm against automatism, against efficiency, against modern business,"[37] are laboured and stray too often into wish-fulfilment. But this must all be recognised as part of his ongoing engagement with literary and aesthetic modernism, and these debates are continued in his presentation of modern dance, influenced principally by D. H. Lawrence, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Hanley was also interested in illustrating the suffering of working-class people through depicting a transformation of the human form into the lifeless matter of the workplace. As Fordham notes, a scene in *Boy* (1931) works to this effect when the

principal character, Arthur Fearon, stows away in the coal-bunker of a docked ship after fleeing his home and the menial job for which he is too frail. Sealed in pitch-blackness upon a great mountain of coal, Fearon collapses in anguish as "[t]he darkness itself seemed to lift him up, to bear him unto itself until he became a part of it."[38] Fordham observes:

> The modernistic aesthetic relies upon the primacy of the sensual or felt experience but it also proposes an alternative interpretation: the "boy" has become one, not only with the darkness, but with the very stuff which was "the food of the ship," just as Hanley's other characters of his "men in darkness" period have become consumed "used up," by the demands of the industrial machine.[39]

The idea that workers could be stripped of their humanity preoccupied Hanley, and this is evidenced by recurring themes in the covers and illustrations of his books. *The German Prisoner's* frontispiece, for example, is an engraving by William Roberts, depicting the three main characters in a state of transition between organic and robotic, puppet-like forms. (Fig. 5.) Roberts, a follower of Wyndham Lewis whose work was influenced by vorticism and futurism, was well-equipped to provide so apt an illustration for *The German Prisoner* but his artistic style does not carry quite the appropriate resonances for Hanley's vision of worker suffering in the automated age. A far better choice was his favourite illustrator Alan Odle, whom the author described as "the only man who really understands my work."[40] Odle provided the frontispiece to Hanley's privately-printed *The Last Voyage* in 1931 (fig. 6) as well as the cover of the first edition of *Men in Darkness* (fig. 7) that same year, producing images for both which depict, as Fordham writes,

> ...the human figure, in starkly contrasting tones of black and white, undergoing some inner transmutation, where the recognisable organic forms of limb and muscle are being replaced by metallic or grainy wooden forms. In such a conceptualisation, workers at sea are subject to the same unceasing will that drives Ahab, rendering them quasi-robotic, assuming the very nature of the machine that drives them.[41]

Odle's cover to *Men in Darkness* conveys this impression particularly well. It depicts a pair of legs in heavy workman's boots and dungarees below a trunk and upper arms whose curves and muscles are fragments of metal chassis and bodywork, amid which wheels and spotlights can be seen. The figure's faceless head is the square cab of

some industrial vehicle, while the robotic arms end in humanlike gloved hands, one of which clutches a shovel. It is an image singularly appropriate for a working-class writer of Hanley's expressionistic tendencies, recalling John Heartfield's *Under the Sign of Rationalisation* (1927; fig. 8) which also presents a human form made grotesque and ominous by its transformation into machine components.

But probably the most accomplished of all these modernist engagements is the scene in George Garrett's short story 'Firstborn' (1934), mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, where sewer-cleaner Harry Marsden must unblock a pipe in which a dead baby is jammed. Earlier I discussed the potential for an optimistic reading of 'Firstborn', but whatever truths there may be in such an interpretation cannot change the fact that this scene in and of itself represents Garrett's writing at its very darkest. The descriptions of the baby's "rat-eaten cheek," its "throat-tape [that] frayed in Harry's fingers,"[42] its arm that Harry inadvertently wrenches off while trying to dislodge it, and the torrent of sewer water from the unblocked pipe that deluges Harry, extinguishing his candle and plunging him into darkness, are almost too horrendous to read. But as disturbing as the sequence is, it is also a masterful presentation the human body's corruption under the twin forces of mechanisation and capitalism.

Unlike similar scenes in the works of Hanley and Hilton already discussed, 'Firstborn' does not depict its working-class protagonist physically transformed by these forces: rather, Harry retains his human status and it is the world around him that distorts into a monstrous intermediary stage between the manmade and the organic. For, as explained in Chapter Two, this sequence forms a conscious parallel with the earlier safe delivery of Harry's infant daughter (the "firstborn" of the title), and Garrett ensures that Harry's ghastly duty in the sewer is laden with imagery that suggests, and provides a grotesque parody of, childbirth. The pipe represents the channels of a mother's body, with the dead baby occupying it in a foetal position ("the head pressing hard on the doubled-up knees")[43] to reinforce this idea, while the foul water of the drain takes the place of amniotic fluid. Harry, assuming the role of midwife in this twisted debasement of biological processes, must "deliver" the child by reaching into the opening, "wedging his hands behind the buttocks," and "drag[ging] forcibly."[44] While he is about this Garrett inserts the line "He could feel the thing moving,"[45] which brings a terrible double-meaning: is Harry managing to shift the baby along the pipe, or has his perception of reality been so shattered by this

experience that he is beginning to imagine some semblance of life in the decomposing corpse?

With the body's eventual extraction from the pipe, and the following barrage of filthy overspill (a suggestion of afterbirth?) the appalling episode is complete. This, the narrative grimly declares, is the true face of human love and reproduction in the modern era: a child born already dead and decaying into a world irredeemably corrupted and deformed. As observed in Chapter Two, it is economic necessity that forces Harry to participate in the ordeal—he cannot afford to lose his job by refusing the task, or to sacrifice a day's wages if he reports the death and attends an inquest—just as we gather that poverty is the reason the baby was abandoned in the first place. These privations wrought by capitalist society and its simultaneous mechanisation of the human sphere have resulted in the dreadful world Garrett describes, where the purity of lived experience is lost and the sewers undergo a surreal transformation into the arena of birth. It is terrifying writing, but it is also George Garrett at his finest, and his achievement is all the more remarkable given that this exceptional scene appears in his first published story. This is the example that should be used above all others to illustrate how extensively working-class writers of the thirties engaged with devices of modern art and expressionism. It is greater even than the hallucinatory images of *Captain Bottell's* penultimate chapter, for though the horrific distortions of reality presented in Hanley's novel are equally as impressive as those in Garrett's story, Garrett connects the techniques of modernist art with the uniquely working-class motifs of capitalist exploitation and its enforced deadening of the human spirit.

3) Modern art and ideological subversion

Hanley, Hilton and Garrett's use of avant-garde aesthetic devices does not merely reflect an interest in adding impact and emphasis to their written works: it must also be understood as part of an ongoing enterprise to distance themselves from the constraints and demands of socialist realism. Literature, art and music were all grouped together in post-revolutionary Russia as modes of expression that needed to be brought under control if they were to best serve the interests of the state, and under Stalin the Soviet attitude to art closely resembled the attitude to literature. Frank Whitford writes that "in the Soviet Union, instantly legible and uplifting scenes would replace abstract arrangements of colours and forms 'devoid of meaning,'"[46] and the

result of this was that effectively all varieties of modern art were outlawed, including Constructivism, expressionism, Dadaism and photomontage. (Or at least experimental photomontage—as Brandon Taylor remarks, "soberly instructional montages" became an important part of pro-Communist propaganda.)[47] The preferred art of the Soviet Union focused on non-abstract, linear presentations of powerful male and female workers striving for the development of the nation, and the most famous work of this kind is probably Vera Mukhina's gigantic sculpture *Industrial Worker and Collective Farm Girl.* The installation, which adorned the Soviet pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition of Art and Technology, features far-greater-than lifesize figures standing proudly side by side, he raising a hammer to the heavens, she a sickle. A. A. Zhdanov was an outspoken enemy of artistic modernisms, condemning them in public speeches just as he did their literary equivalents. According to Zhdanov, "names like futurism, cubism and modernism" have already reached their "most insane point;"[48] "cubism and futurism have as their aim nothing more or less than the decay of painting;"[49] while only classical, pre-modern forms have any artistic merit. Zhdanov quotes A. N. Serov to illustrate this point: "but for the genuinely and timelessly beautiful in their art there would be admiration neither for Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, nor for Raphael, Titian and Poussin, nor for Palestrina, Handel and Gluck…"[50]

It is possible to see in the Soviet attitude to modern art the swift decline of that political ideology into dictatorship, and the same conclusion could be drawn from studying the Zhdanovite approach to literature. Many have commented on how closely Stalin's Russia came to resemble Hitler's Germany or Mussolini's Italy, even though Soviet and fascist ideals were ostensibly opposed—Malcolm Muggeridge's *The Thirties* (1940) is one of the best known works to discuss their similarity—and the area of artistic censorship yields a revealing example. Nazism encouraged art that emphasised the family unit or the classically heroic qualities of athletes and warriors, while, like Soviet ideology, rejecting modernisms or any art thought to be pessimistic, "decadent" or contrary to the spirit of the nation's expansion and development. In 1937 Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels commissioned an exhibition titled *Entarete Kunst* ("Degenerate Art") which displayed the work of artists who resisted fascist ideals with the declared intention of vilifying and ridiculing them.[51] The catalogue for this display featured on its cover Otto Freundlich's 1912 carving *The New Man,* deemed "degenerate" for its abstract and bleak presentation of the modern age

(Freundlich died in a concentration camp in 1943 for producing art works of this nature),[52] with the word *Kunst* ("Art") from the exhibition's title scrawled across it in inverted commas. A favourite tactic of Zhdanov's in his speeches on writing is to place in inverted commas the phrase "literary work" when he wishes to make it clear he does not consider the subject of his discussion a literary work at all, but rather degenerate modernist nonsense or mere "epigonism" (one of Zhdanov's most-used words, meaning "inferior imitation"). Oskar Schlemmer might equally have been describing Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia when he wrote: "It is hard to say yes to a state that denies the artist the freedom of art, and to witness how the arrogant prescription of the direction that art should take increases with the power of the state."[53]

Garrett, Hilton and Hanley saw this, and their use of artistic as well as literary modernisms was central to their project of resisting State oppression, overcoming conventional expectations and encouraging freedom of aesthetic expression. Of the writing produced by these three, it is perhaps Hilton's that is lent the most impact by the incorporation of such devices, simply because his fiction otherwise conforms so closely to traditional socialist realism. In making motifs of avant-garde art a central component of his creative enterprise, Hilton shows how a rigid and dictatorial literary form can be adapted in new and challenging ways and also tacitly subverts a political ideology that threatens to intrude on human liberties. This chapter's findings are in support of Andy Croft's conclusion to his essay 'Jack Hilton, The Proletarian Novelist':

> The writings of this self-styled "proletarian" remind us just how complex, diverse, and full of conflict that [working-class] experience has always been, the wrong-headedness of restrictive and excluding definitions of that experience, the need to understand its changing character. Jack Hilton was attempting nothing less than a wider redefinition of working-class experience, a reappraisal of working-class politics, a widening of understanding and a deepening of commitment.[54]

It is his reappraisals of his own social class and his resistance to categorisation and political polemic, often achieved through the use of modernist techniques, that truly define Hilton as a subversive writer, whose works challenged the standards and beliefs of his time. As observed previously, this quality of his writing is extended through his preoccupation with Lawrentian modern dance, and his interest in this

subject, along with that of Hanley and Phelan, will be fully explored in the next chapter.

Fig 1: James Fitton in *Left Review*, October 1935

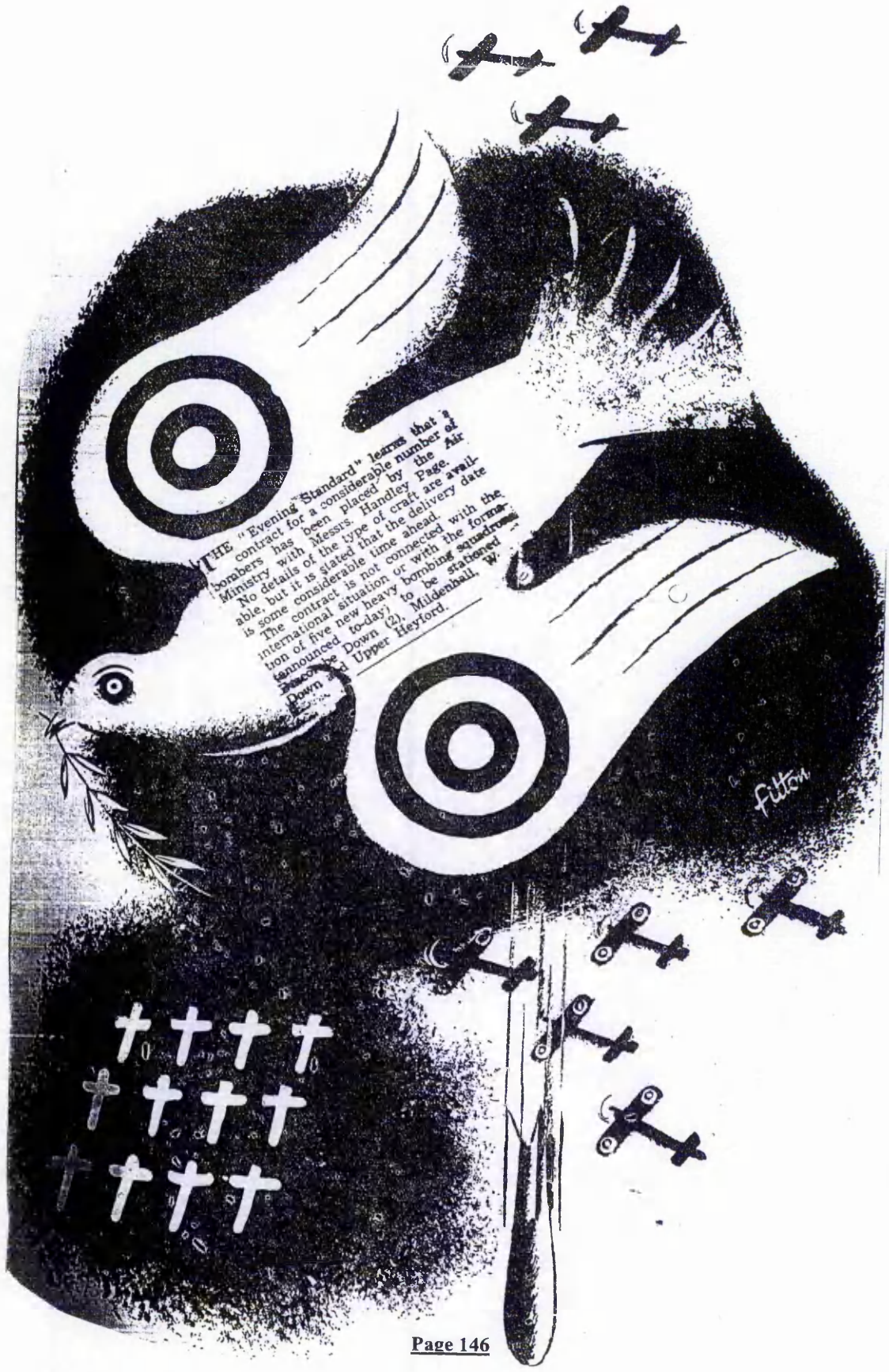


Fig 2: Paul Nash, *Dive Bomber,* c. 1940.

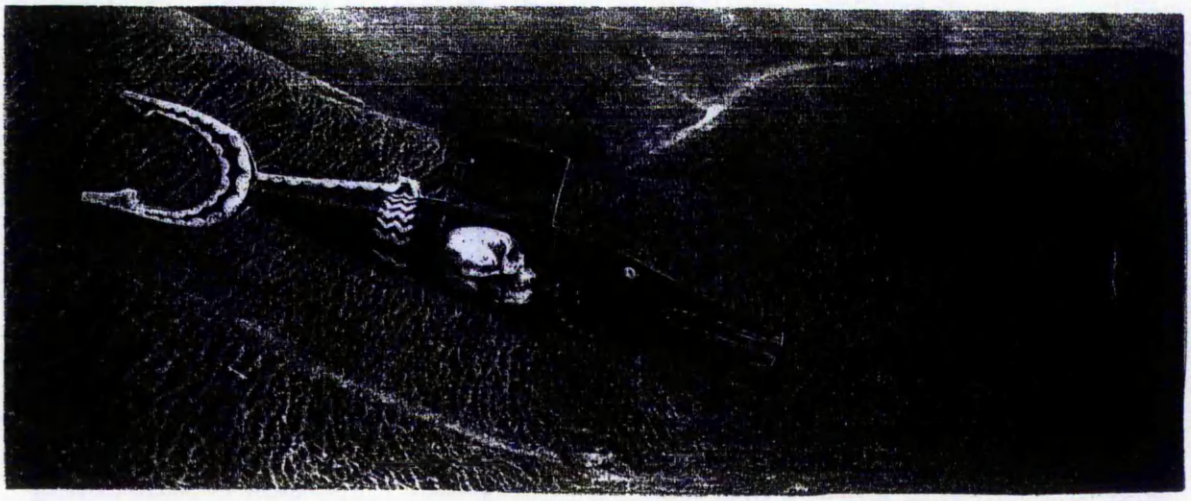


Fig 4: John Heartfield, *The Peaceable Fish of Prey,* 1937

Fig 3: John Heartfield, *German Acorns,* 1933

Fig. 5: William Roberts's frontispiece to *The German Prisoner,* 1930

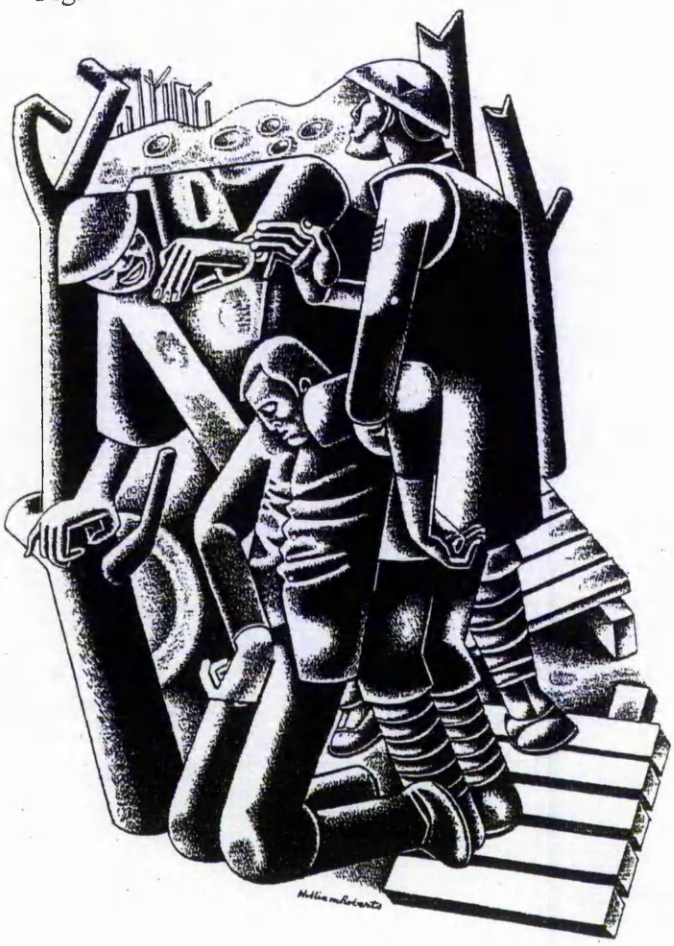
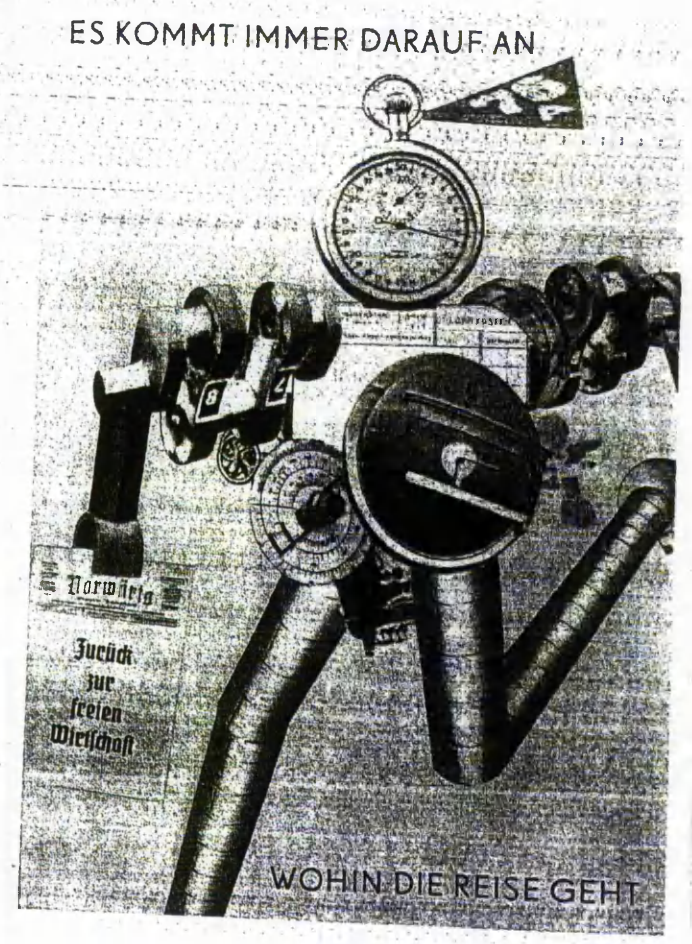


Fig 6: Alan Odle's frontispiece to *The Last Voyage,* 1931

Fig 7: Alan Odle's cover to *Men in Darkness,* 1931

Fig 8: John Heartfield, *Under the Sign of Rationalization,* 1927



Chapter Seven

The influence of D. H. Lawrence: modern dance and working-class writing

1) The ideological and literary context of early-twentieth century dance

The next two chapters take as their theme modern dance and its effect on the writers discussed. Here the influence of D. H. Lawrence becomes crucial, as he was hugely popular among 1930s working-class authors and his works convey a deep interest in emerging forms of modern dance. Lawrence can therefore be considered one of the most important sources for writers such as James Hanley and Jack Hilton, who discovered this new discipline through him and so became able to engage with it. This chapter will examine some of the more general correspondences with Lawrentian modern dance in the novels of Hilton and Jim Phelan, and the chapter that follows will analyse in more depth James Hanley's *Resurrexit Dominus* (1934), whose treatment of these ideas is more complex and suggests the strong influence of one of Lawrence's particular modern dance inspirations. For if we accept, as we surely must, that D. H. Lawrence was influential to working-class writers of the thirties, then it is reasonable to expect that his ideas regarding dance and the erotic should also have made an impact upon these writers. As there do not yet appear to be any studies that explore those connections, it is in keeping with the aims of this thesis that I should set out to do just this.

In her 1997 study *Movement and Modernism: Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Williams and Early Twentieth Century Dance* Terri A Mester states that dance was a vital part of the interplay between different creative disciplines that characterised literature of the modernist period. Just as new anthropology influenced T. S. Eliot, cinematic montage James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner, and cubist and Dadaist art Wallace Stevens and Williams Carlos Williams, contemporary dance helped shape the creative development of the four modernists of Mester's study, one of whom is D. H. Lawrence. Mester argues that dance, like other artistic and intellectual forms, "met the new century with some profound innovations. Ballet was revolutionised and a totally new genre—the modern dance—was invented."[1]

New ballet and modern dance met most spectacularly in 1913, when *Le Sacre de Printemps,* Nijinsky's ballet to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring,* opened in Paris. "Who is not aware" of the event, Mester asks, which caused "one of the greatest furores in French theatrical history?"[2] *Le Sacre's* debut was in many ways the beginning of modernist music and dance, or at least the moment when these creative disciplines first assumed the worldwide stage, but the tradition that informed them began as early as the 1890s. Loïe Fuller, a dancer associated with the *Art-Nouveau* movement who debuted in 1892,[3] was greatly admired by W. B. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence and Stephane Mallarmé, and her innovative dancing techniques left a notable impact on the writing they produced. (See, for example, Yeats's poem 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' with its reference to "Loïe Fuller's Chinese dancers,"[4] and D. H. Lawrence's character Poppy Traherne in *The Lost Girl,* who is based on Fuller.)[5] Mester writes:

> In addition to converging interests and aspirations, modernists also regarded some of the dance's formal properties as desirable models for a new poetry. They saw, for instance, in the dancer's endless struggle to achieve perfection of line, an analogue for their own emphasis on the hard, dry presentation of the poetic image. The French symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé, was the first to isolate some of these correspondences in a few influential essays written on dance at the end of the nineteenth century, which were later paraphrased and expanded by his disciple Paul Valéry. Basically, Mallarmé noticed that the dancer epitomised the modern characteristics of "impersonality" in art and that her movements constituted an unwritten language in some ways superior to the written word. And because her female beauty was objectified into dazzling, evocative symbols, the dancer became the visual incarnation of Mallarmé's notion of the "ideal."

Mallarmé's conclusion, that "Dance is a visual representation of an absolute beauty that cannot be comprehended rationally;" that it is "the 'mysterious and holy interpretation' of universal life and our innermost being,"[6] became a central tenet in the development of modern dance in the twentieth century. And D. H. Lawrence was deeply involved with this, as even a cursory glance over his works will make clear. All but three of his nine novels feature modern dance, and the scenes in which it appears rank among his most memorable, from Constance Chatterley's nude twirling in the rain-soaked woods after her first sexual encounter with Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* and the portrayal of a vibrant *Schuhplattlertanz* folk dance towards the end of *Women in Love,* to the naked dances that feature in *Mr. Noon* and

the unclothed, pregnant Anna Brangwen's dance in *The Rainbow* that seems to have contributed much to the banning of that novel in 1915.[7]

Many of the key preoccupations of contemporary dance resonated closely with Lawrence's interests and personal views. Dance is tied to the fascination with pre-industrial cultures that led him to visit South America and study the Hopi and Zuni peoples—Mester observes that "one of the crossroads where the new dance and modernism met was in the portrayal of 'primitive' myths, rituals, archetypes." It was also an interest in dance that motivated Lawrence's friendship with a former stage manager affiliated with the famous modern dancer Isadora Duncan, Maurice Magnus, who became the character Mr. May in *The Lost Girl.* The idea, often expressed in Lawrence's writing, that dance has a therapeutic quality and brings the body into healthy communion with inner drives and desires, is detectable in modern dance schools all across contemporary Europe: the theory of eurhythmics, pioneered by Emil-Jacques Dalcroze at his institute near Dresden, and the modern dance movement based at Monte Verita in the tiny Swiss-Italian mountain town of Ascona, are just two of the more famous examples of philosophies that viewed dance as part of an overall "nature-cure." (*Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Women in Love* both contain direct references to Dalcrozian eurhythmics.) And the recurring Lawrentian themes of pseudo-religious reverence for the sun and the natural world, and increased erotic awareness as a means of bringing about the collapse of patriarchal authority and organised religion, are also key tenets of the Asconan vision.[8] Martin Green argues convincingly in his 1986 study *Mountain of Truth: The Counterculture Begins, Ascona 1900-1920,* that that movement had one of the greatest effects on modernist art and writing during the early twentieth century. Lawrence's involvement with it was also a personal one: his wife, Frieda Weekley (née von Richtoven) was one of Ascona's foremost disciples, and had previously been the lover of its founding member, Otto Gross.

Lawrence's fascination was with dance that could become an empowering force, especially for women—like Isadora Duncan, he used dance to express the "primacy of maternity"[9] and saw it as a means to enable the female erotic impulse. Constance Chatterley, Kate Leslie and the Brangwen women Anna, Ursula and Gudrun are all female characters in Lawrence's works who, through dance, arrive at a new, more sexually aware consciousness, who conceive of undermining the dominant patriarchal authority of workplace, church and home, and participate in a general overthrow of

contemporary society to make way for a new world that will rise from the ruins. This type of dance is contrasted in *Women in Love* with an opposing variety detested by Lawrence: that which privileges the cerebral over the bodily and reflects a bourgeois hyper-intellectual cult of the senses. This is represented in the dance-party thrown by Hermione Roddice, a character based on Lady Ottoline Morrell, who, as Richard Aldington notes, was treated by Lawrence as a friend and confidante only to be "mercilessly satirised" in the finished novel.[10] The dancing Hermione demands of her guests is not spontaneous, not connected to internal drives: they perform a costumed enactment of the Biblical story of Naomi, Ruth and Orpah, followed by a Hungarian folk dance in which the character Gerald Crich finds he "could not yet escape from the waltz and the two-step."[11] But Rupert Birkin, one of Lawrence's most recognisable self-portraits, can: Mester notes that his dancing "reveals a chameleon nature, capable (as Gerald is not) of breaking loose from the scheme of values imposed on him by his environment."[12] This establishes the opposition between Birkin and his hostess, and consequently between Lawrence's preferred body-orientated dancing and the alternative mode Hermione represents:

> Birkin, when he could get free from the weight of the people present, whom he disliked, danced rapidly and with a real gaiety. And how Hermione hated him for his irresponsible gaiety...her soul writhed in the black subjugation to him, because of his power to escape, to exist, other than she did.[13]

Although Lawrence was himself working-class, modern dance is often perceived as a bourgeois activity participated in only by privileged aesthetes. It can therefore be a difficult subject to connect to working-class agendas of the 1930s, particularly as there was a strong current of resistance to such philosophies among the contemporary Left. George Orwell provides one of the thirties' most outspoken vocalisations of this in the oft-quoted, infamous passage from *The Road to Wigan Pier,* where he rails against "the horrible—the really disquieting—prevalence of cranks wherever socialists are drawn together," and lists such undesirables as the "fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist."[14] Practitioners of modern dance at the Dalcroze institute, Ascona or elsewhere, who were often nudists or vegetarians and believed in the redeeming potential of inner sexuality and the natural world, are plainly included in Orwell's

condemnations. The passage is one of the most notorious in that author's body of work, revealing his deep-seated prejudices and suggesting a number of puritanical inhibitions too, but it is also sadly representative. Many 1930s British socialists, which would include many working-class writers, were probably in agreement with Orwell that the "cranks" he describes had no place in a serious political movement such as socialism.

Other writers, though, drew productive links between modern dance, socialism and the working-class, even though they were not working-class themselves. Martin Green notes that Rainer Maria Rilke, a fringe member of the Asconan group,[15] describes in his 1922 story *'Der Brief des Jungen Arbeiters'* ("The Young Workman's Letter") a working-class man's discovery that there are godlike creative powers within himself, and that the divine is ever-present in the mortal world and not displaced to some metaphysical realm—all key tenets of modern dance ideology.[16] Similarly, John Cornford's poem 'As our Might Lessens' asserts that "those whose tortured torturing flesh / Stirred at the body under the lash"[17] can escape their oppression through an increased erotic awareness. Janet Montefiore observes of Cornford's lines that "Women, who contain the essence of life and joy...also represent the potential power and freedom of the working class:"[18]

> All strength moves in the dance of a woman's body.
>
> Only the maimed talk of soul's dress.
> Her glory is her nakedness,
> The free surrender fusing love and lust.
> And manhood muscled by this love
> Under the madman's whip can prove
> Stronger than the force by which its life was crushed.[19]

But it is questionable whether Rilke or Cornford, both of whom belonged to upper-middle-class worlds, were sufficiently grounded in working-class experience to assume the role of spokesmen for that social sphere. (Cornford's poem in particular, with its heavy-handed imagery of starving masses and the master's whip, suggests a popular notion of proletarian suffering rather than an attempt to authentically replicate working-class concerns.) Therefore, the fact that D. H. Lawrence did not lose sight of his origins when writing about modern dance is crucial in understanding how

working-class authors of the thirties were able to absorb these ideas through his work, and apply them to their own writing.

A hugely important character in this debate is the coal-miner Walter Morel, father to Paul in *Sons and Lovers.* A dark, ominous figure throughout most of the book, Walter's one redeeming feature is his dancing skill. This is one of many parallels between the character and Lawrence's own father, on whom he is based, for Arthur Lawrence was also a renowned dancer and gave lessons in the community.[20] It is Walter's dancing that first attracts Mrs. Morel, as seen in a passage from early in the novel. Once again, Lawrence's interest in dance as instinctual, erotic activity, as opposed to intellectual pursuit, is apparent:

> ...the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her.

Green writes that Rudolf Laban, another of Ascona's founding members, believed "a good man to be someone who finds natural expression in the powers of the body," while those born prematurely middle-aged and unwilling to embrace nudism and the dance suffered from "dull blood and sick nerves."[21] Walter Morel's talent for dance suggests on the one hand a Nietzschean "bodiliness," indicating Lawrence's ongoing interest in that philosopher, but it is also revealing of some compliance with the mode of thought expressed by Laban. As *Sons and Lovers* progresses, Mrs. Morel becomes scornful of her husband's dancing, thinking it an "idle pastime."[22] Mester remarks that "Through a combination of factors—his own weakness, his wife's 'casting him off', and the physical conditions of the mines, Morel's 'sensuous flame' is extinguished early in the marriage,"[23] but another interpretation is that just as Walter is spiritually oppressed by the nature of his working-class existence, he can also attain physical freedom through dance. In Walter Morel, Lawrence illustrates that dance has a quality of particular significance for the working class, in that it allows escape from the hardship and exploitation attendant on their lives.

2) Modern dance in the writing of Jack Hilton

The philosophy that informs Jack Hilton's books in general and his two published novels in particular often displays striking accord with ideas expressed by D. H. Lawrence in his writing on modern dance. The belief that woman is the source of life and love, that sexual freedom and dance are essential parts of a healthy human life, that organised religion has tried to repress the impulse towards both, and that regular contact with the natural world is vital, all emerge repeatedly. It's clear that Hilton read Lawrence, and there are moments when he seems prepared to echo him almost verbatim. Compare Lawrence in *The Rainbow:* "And woman was immortal, whatever happened, whoever turned towards death. Let the misery come when it could not be resisted,"[24] with the final lines of Hilton's *Laugh at Polonius:* "Yet woman is there. She is the force of life; a beautiful, lovely functionary to compel love. She is ever moving ahead of that ghoulish, pursuing thing, death, trying to recreate before defunctus."[25]

Hilton's credo "yet there is woman" (the phrase that forms the subtitle to *Polonius)* resonates strongly with contemporary ideas of woman as the fount of life and object of man's worship as well as his love, and both of Hilton's novels contain a succession of female protagonists who suggest this conception. The Hilton heroine is usually introduced to us as an adolescent and blossoms into full womanhood through the course of the story; descriptions of her abound with flower-imagery and will carry other associations with the natural world; and she will invariably provide for the hero a source of strength and inspiration. Sheila, Violet and the young Nan Stott in *Polonius* are all examples of this, but the most memorable of all Hilton's heroines must surely be Elsie Watkins in *Champion.*

Although *Champion* as a novel in its entirety is less of an achievement than *Laugh at Polonius,* Elsie's debut that comprises all of Chapter Seven is possibly the finest moment in all Hilton's writing. It is best read as a short story, in which form it was originally published in the May 1937 issue of *Left Review,* and describes a morning when Elsie arrives late at the mill, is refused entry to her workplace and so spends the day wandering the nearby moors. Hilton introduces the girl to us in typical form, emphasising her beauty through the use of nature imagery, likening her to a pansy, a swan, a calf and a "lamb of Eve."[26] One of the weaknesses of Hilton's writing is that there are occasions when he seems to enjoy writing about pretty adolescents rather too much. The disastrous "horseplay" scene in Chapter Four of *Laugh at Polonius* is perhaps the best example, as it is clearly supposed to present good-natured sexual

tomfoolery between teenagers but more closely resembles a gang rape. The consequence of this is that Hilton's novels strike a precarious balance between an affirmation of the erotic life-force overcoming man-made forces that would undermine and corrupt it, and unsophisticated voyeuristic fantasy.

Certainly these problems emerge in parts of Elsie's first appearance: Hilton dwells on the curves of her body, returns obsessively to descriptions of her underwear and uses clumsy, male-centred clichés to describe her "kiss-enticing lips" and "lovely maiden-chaste face."[27] But of much more value in Chapter Seven of *Champion* is the glorious depiction of a young woman breaking free from the world of men, work and family and striking out for the unknown. The imagery is among the best in all Hilton's writing, recalling a number of scenes from D. H. Lawrence and also H. E. Bates, in its rejoicing in the heroine's dance and its suggestion of powerful inner erotic forces:

> The mooring grass was thin and dry, and like a child she swaled it. The wind blew the fire along, and, as her eyes brightened up, following the running flame, her hair blew in the breeze, and the skirt flapped and wriggled like a banner. She ran along the line of fire, plucking dry grass, lighting it, whirling round with it flaming in her upheld hand, and then flip it would go, tossed into the air, to be blown fifty yards, settling down, and causing another fire.
>
> She forgot her troubles, with fire and breeze she danced, ever getting higher and higher; the breeze showed the form of her, the coming woman. Those little apples in her breasts quickened to a livingness, her skirt embraced her slender buttocks, and clasped her knees with tingling fingers. Her cheeks glowed with the red bloom of health.[28]

The principal source for this sequence would appear to be Ursula and Anton atop the downs in *The Rainbow,* for Hilton borrows not just the characters' triumphal running through unspoiled nature but also the direct contrast Lawrence draws between the rural world represented by the moor and the urban world of the town that lies in the valley. It is clear which of the two has Lawrence's favour, from Ursula's reflection: "Up there the stars were big, the earth below was gone into darkness…She was free up among the stars,"[29] and from a later moment, which incorporates images of sun-worship, set at dawn after the lovers have spent the night outdoors:

> It was so unutterably still and perfect with promise, the golden-lighted, distant land, that Ursula's soul rocked and wept. Suddenly he [Anton] glanced at her. The tears were running over her cheeks, her mouth was working strangely.
>
> "What is the matter?" he asked.
>
> After a moment's struggle with her voice.
>
> "It is so beautiful," she said, looking at the glowing, beautiful land. It was so beautiful, so perfect, and so unsullied.
>
> He too realised what England would be in a few hours' time—a blind, sordid, strenuous activity, all for nothing, fuming with dirty smoke and running trains and groping in the bowels of the earth, all for nothing. A ghastliness came over him.[30]

Hilton privileges his rural setting in a similar way in *Champion's* seventh chapter, with such sentences as "She was half-way between the primitive above, and the busy modern civilisation below"[31] and "She could see the dirty town below and the desolate wild spaciousness above."[32] The descriptive passages in the early part of the chapter dwell on the dirty, polluted urban environment Elsie observes as she wanders aimlessly through the streets: the "soot and ugliness" of the mill's walls, the "fluffy whiskers of cotton refuse"[33] that are to be found everywhere, and the foul-smelling river stained red with dye. There are also a number of references to the consumerist nature of Elsie's working-class community and how this leads to inconvenience instead of reducing it: her struggle while dressing to find a pair of unladdered stockings, which takes up several paragraphs and ends with her leaving the house bare-legged, is one example of this. Hilton's open country is free of such nuisances, superior because more "primitive:" the narrative voice praises its wildness, its untamed grasses and heather, its majestic crags and boulders. The "primitive above," equating ideas of heaven or an elevated state of consciousness with pre-industrial settings, recalls Anton and Ursula greeting the dawn "together on a high place, an earthwork of the stone-age men."[34] Elsie, like Lawrence's lovers, also finds happiness beyond compare in such a place, though Hilton's expression of this is less eloquent than the language of *The Rainbow:* "It felt nice, she had never felt so nice before."[35]

Much of Hilton's writing expounds on this opposition between the natural world, which is perceived as an unspoilt, pre-industrial environment, and the modern world of towns and factories. It runs as an undercurrent through his two reportage books about his travels in the countryside, *English Ways* (1940) and *English Ribbon* (1950),

and is engaged with closely in a long segment that takes up most of Champion's fourteenth chapter. Here Hilton describes at length how Jimmy and his family benefit from setting up home on the same stretch of moor that Elsie visits in Chapter Seven:

> Amid the general depression of the town a happy prospect had opened out to them. The thoroughness and contentment of the camp was a countering blast to the fetid demoralising stagnation that, haunted by the spectre of poverty and unemployment, had grimed and drabbed the town's atmosphere. Health, cleanliness and action routed the cobwebs of decay, sloth and dirt. The house where they lived was three miles from the town, up above it, above the sun-hiding smoke that rose from the chimneys of the few mills that were working. Flowers and vegetables grew in the garden, which Jimmy's muscles had turned to creative fruitfulness; down below nothing seemed to grow other than the decaying filth and corruption.[36]

The tradition to which writing of Hilton's kind belongs originates in the mind-nineteenth century with George Meredith and Richard Jefferies, both of whom privileged rural space in their writing and were aware of its importance in the face of expanding industrial development. Edward Thomas, who like his contemporary W. H. Hudson took up these ideas later in the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth, observed in Jefferies's writing early appearances of the belief that the body and senses could be attuned to the natural world, and that communion with it led to a better understanding of the self. Thomas uses a number of passages from Jefferies's autobiography *The Story of my Heart* (1883) to illustrate this:

> "Involuntarily," he says, "I drew a long breath, then I breathed slowly. My thought, or inner consciousness, went up through the illumined sky, and I was lost in a moment of exaltation. This only lasted a very short time, perhaps only part of a second, and while it lasted there was no formulated wish." There came, too, "a deep, strong and sensuous enjoyment, of the beautiful green earth, of the sky and sun," and the thought that "I might be like this; that I might have the inner meaning of the sun, the light, the earth, the trees and grass, translated into some growth of excellence in myself, both of body and of mind; greater perfection of physique, greater perfection of mind and soul; that I might be higher in myself."[37]

W. H. Hudson calls on a similar motif of oneness with nature in *Green Mansions* (1904): "my flesh and the soil are one, and the heat in my blood and in the sunshine are one, and the winds and the tempest and the passions are one." This tradition is continued after the 1930s by such inheritors as H. E. Bates, who admired the works of

Hudson, and Hilton is aware of the established literary ideas that his novels relate to. But *Champion's* conceptualisation of escape from large-scale industrial and capitalist structures achieved through dance and the natural world also recalls Dalcroze, who believed that freedom, health and nature should triumph over the artificiality and consumerism of the contemporary age, and ideas Martin Green identifies as central to the Asconan school.[38] In *Mountain of Truth* Green reveals that the Asconan idea "can be summed up most simply as nature worship, meaning the worship of the nature to be found in human beings as much as the nature in animals, plants, the soil, the sea, the sun,"[39] and to Hilton nature in these twin terms, which again correspond with Jefferies's views, was of incomparable importance. Dust-choked, sunless factories and mills were the cause not just of poor physical health in the working-class, but were also a corrupting force to all that he considered inherent, essential human drives, including reproduction and the erotic urge.

The natural world, on the other hand, provides an arena of untainted, "true" feeling. Part of *Champion's* optimistic and complete narrative closure is the protagonists' relocation to their country house outside the town where they can live and love freely, and Jimmy and Charlie, the two heroes, also set up a socialist school for underprivileged town children amidst the countryside. This recalls Green's observation that some Asconans such as Ida Hoffman criticised ordinary schools, because they "wanted children to be brought up in close sympathy with nature."[40] Here Hilton again recalls ideas long-established in literature, for much socialist utopian writing had imagined that its egalitarian communities would be located in unspoilt rural settings, and there were experimental schools like the one in *Champion* that sought to educate their pupils in the importance of physical health and Left-Wing awareness. (The child-psychology theories of A. S. Neill display some compliance with these ideas, and Edward Thomas's wife Helen taught at one such school, Bedales, in the 1910s.)[41]

Another important aspect of socialist utopianism, connected to its affinity with the natural world, has often been an undercurrent of sexual liberation and free-love ideology. This is touched upon in William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1891) and can be detected as early as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey's late-eighteenth century plan to inaugurate a new society which Coleridge dubbed 'Pantisocracy'. William St. Clair observes that the proto-socialist Pantisocratic ideology involved "the holding of all property in common," with "government equally

in the hands of all members," and the natural world played a central part: colonists "would discuss metaphysics while cutting down trees, criticize poetry while hunting buffalo, and write sonnets while following the plough."[42] Another of the colonists' principal aims was as follows:

> The colonists intended that marriage would be abolished and the children brought up in common. This would not have involved the sharing of wives, but freedom to move from partner to partner according to their changing perception of each other's virtues.[43]

Though Hilton's views on sexual liberation were not quite as radical as this, utopianism's fusion of love for the natural world and freedom from the sexual constraints of Christian morality was of particular interest to him. Through dance he found a means of expressing this in a relevant, contemporary manner. Terri A. Mester observes that in the early twentieth century, dance was "communicating increasingly subversive messages about sexuality to a generation eager to free itself of Victorian stuffiness," and Hilton, who vehemently opposed the stifling dehumanisations of menial factory-work and the sexual repressions of Methodism (the dominant religion of his social class) recognised this. It is significant that he believes the two forces that repress the essential human drives—the capitalist system and the Christian Church—must be resisted not by violent protest or organised political campaigning (about both of which he had become quite cynical by the time he wrote his novels) but rather in dance and an awareness of the erotic impulse.

This debate is explored most explicitly in *Laugh at Polonius,* Hilton's *Bildungsroman* describing the trials of its hero Leslie Stott as he discovers the joys sexual liberation can bring him and which his stern Methodist background and exhausting day-to-day job at the mill would crush. That Hilton equates his realization of this new freedom with dance again suggests his affinity with motifs in D. H. Lawrence, though Hilton departs from the other writer in his use of popular contemporary music, specifically jazz. Lawrence was known to have no great liking for this form, but jazz has important resonances with the kinds of subversion Mester identifies in modern dance, and with the increased sexual awareness Hilton was arguing for. John Lucas remarks in *The Radical Twenties:*

> There is no space here to mention how from the early years of the century modern dance had become self-consciously developed as an expression of erotic energy by Rudolf Laban and his group at Ascona. Nor can I be certain how far knowledge of this had spread to England. But there seems no reason to doubt that it *was* known about and that it prompted a renewal of ancient fears of dance as bacchantic licence. This helped to make some imported dances—first the tango, then the foxtrot—appear as the epitome of dangerous abandon.[44]

Lucas states that one of the only two facts universally agreed on about jazz, along with the notion that it is "city music," is that is that it "has always had connections with sexual license."[45] This, along with its associated dances that "suggested, even mimed, sexual abandonment"[46] is indicative of a mode of expression similar to Lawrentian modern dance in effect if not in implementation. Furthermore Hilton, who believed that the working-classes "need the drums and the cymbals and the sax, and the hot rhythmical music of jazz to make them shift their feet,"[47] chose to feature that particular style of music for its huge popularity among the social group he belonged to, wrote for and sought to represent. He included two jazz-dancing scenes in *Laugh at Polonius,* one in Chapter Four and then later in Chapter Nine.

In the first of these, a teenage Leslie attends his workplace's annual tea-and-dance and enjoys himself, discovering both jazz music and his first girlfriend, Violet. The sequence is very much in keeping with Hilton's usual approach of resisting the idea that working-class experience is endlessly bleak and inescapably hopeless, showing instead that there are episodes of carefree recreation and happiness as well as hardship. Leslie, while listening to the jazz band perform "Lonesome and Sorry," experiences an epiphany that suddenly brings him into a new understanding of the "life-force," to use the term Hilton uses:

> His Sunday school teacher had told him the saxophone was a wicked instrument that whined seductive strains. As he watched and listened, he marvelled. The saxophone was the life-force of dancing. It was like a jolly man singing. It made everyone's feet happy. Happiness could not be evil.[48]

The second jazz sequence comes when Leslie is a little older, now courting a young woman named Sheila who later in the novel will become his wife and then his widow, and takes place in Blackpool where they are holidaying in the "fifty-second week." The lovers spend an evening at the Tower Ballroom and are rendered "delirious,"

"mellow" and "moonstruck"[49] by the music of Jack Hylton. (This is not a cameo role by the author using an unimaginative pseudonym—Jack Hylton was a band leader popular in the thirties and forties, who we can assume was a "hero" of Hilton's just as he is for his character Leslie.) The jazz so affects Leslie and Sheila with its affirmation of life that on returning to their hotel room they finally consummate their relationship:

> And they walked slowly home in the cool of the morning. They had sung enough and danced enough. They were now content to look at one another as they walked, and to be in a dream. They were different from what they had been before. The protective rigidity of morality was not strong enough to overcome the pressure of their instinctive desires. They could not do that which they had intended to do. She could not lie in her bed and be content with listening to him breathing in his. The partition of plywood would have put them as far away from one another as the ocean which gulfed two distant countries. They went quickly upstairs together. She still held hold of him and took him past his bedroom to hers.[50]

In both cases dance is shown to be a means of realizing the inner erotic potential, and simultaneously a strategy for undermining the deeply ingrained repressions of sexuality brought about by Methodist morality. Connected to this are Hilton's reflections on the importance of the erotic impulse even, or especially, in places of working-class menial labour where there would be few opportunities to indulge it. *Polonius* has many passages on this theme, but perhaps the most important is this below:

> Leslie could see so much more in girls than the machines could possess. He had to be interested in something, and they were more fitting things. Flesh, blood and bone were boldly trying to survive, despite the adverse circumstances. There was an heroic beauty about the effort. How therefore could he regard it as sinful? To function, to show off, to prove that they had not been got down by the heat and the speed was nature's answer to the challenges of science. Science was a dead thing, the vagaries of the love-urge came from the living life of human beings not yet killed. It augured the possibility of something more than steel and steam and revolutions. It was the assertiveness of flesh and blood and bone and breath and heart and soul. Methodists were wrong to repress such things. It was the balm against efficiency, against automatism, against modern business. It was the womanly part of woman refusing to be crushed.[51]

Hilton lacks the subtlety of D. H. Lawrence in illustrating the conflict between organised religion and the human erotic impulses: the former spends whole novels

such as *The Rainbow* enacting the process of Christianity's collapse through complex imagery and symbolism, while Hilton writes: "Methodists were wrong to repress such things." But *Polonius* does recall Lawrence's works in its anticipation of the downfall of organised religion and its emphasis on a new order based on heightened awareness of the erotic drives.

However, as much as ideas from Lawrence played a significant part in the vision of Hilton's two novels, the two writers ultimately reached different conclusions in their perception of the religious and social upheaval that a greater erotic awareness would make possible. In Lawrence's works, particularly *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love,* this upheaval takes on apocalyptic proportions: Lawrence wrote in 1916, while working on the latter novel, that "The book frightens me: it is so end-of-the-world. But it is, it must be, the beginning of a new world too."[52] In *The Rainbow* two female characters, both sexually liberated appreciators of erotic dance and both based on Lawrence's Asconan wife Frieda, participate in various symbolic moments that anticipate an end to the established religious structure. One such episode involves Anna Brangwen forcing her husband Will to recognise that the traditional Christianity he enjoys is insufficient because it has systematically excluded a female voice, which makes him furiously burn his carving of Adam and Eve, lament for some time over the happiness he has been denied, but ultimately arrive at a new faith, more akin to that of his wife, where he can appreciate the natural world and feel "glad he was away from his shadowy cathedral."[53] Connected to this is the later scene where Anna's daughter Ursula and her lover Anton Skrebensky visit a church while it is being renovated. The decaying building represents the fall of Christianity, while Ursula and Anton become, to paraphrase the title of another story by Lawrence, "a new Adam and a new Eve." ("Everything seemed wonderful, if dreadful to her, the world tumbling into ruins and she and he clambering unhurt, lawless, over the face of it all.")[54] This idea is continued in the final chapter, first through the scene with Ursula and the horses (H. U. Seeber writes that this episode prefigures the Biblical apocalypse)[55] and then in the novel's triumphal ending that looks ahead to the new age, when "the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption...would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of

heaven."[56] Writing broadly about Lawrence's expressionist influences, Seeber observes:

> Renouncing Christian dogmatism while remaining firmly rooted in the Christian experience, the religious energy in Lawrence and numerous other expressionists led to a cult of "life" and "nature," a *Lebensphilosophie* dedicated to a kind of religion of the flesh wholly opposed to the scientific positivism of contemporary thought. Sexual union in Lawrence's texts assumes, as in the work of his expressionist contemporaries, the aspect of a mystery in which lovers are transformed into ecstatic gods, to suggest a cosmic significance of something essentially ineffable and transformative. [57]

This *Lebensphilosophie* is touched upon in Hilton's novels, but it is never wholeheartedly embraced. Much of this has to do with the fact that Hilton's disapproval is not directed at Christianity as a whole, but rather at Methodism, or specifically the dictates of Methodism that stand in opposition to sexual empowerment. This much is made clear in the novel's fourth chapter, significantly titled 'Contrasts', which draws a distinction between the simple joys of a church service—sunshine through the stained-glass windows, children's voices raised in song—and the preacher's overbearing sermon that gives grim warnings against the evil of adult pleasures. It is during the former segment that Leslie's mother Nan happily reflects on her relationship with her son, thinking to herself "They had been poor, but between them there had been something that money could not buy,"[58] and the fact that Leslie is singing a hymn while Nan makes this contemplation suggests Hilton felt there was still room for Christ's love in a fulfilling life. In a similar way he also rejected ideas of the industrialised world being completely replaced by a new order: in accordance with the Trotskyite "workerist" ideology detectable in his personal philosophy, he believed in the importance and redeeming value of hard work even though he acknowledged it presents obstacles to realising the inner potential. A typically Hilton-like consideration of work from Chapter Three of *Polonius* is "It was earning money, it was doing something, it was manly. You held your end up in the world, you were doing your share, you were helping."[59]

Lawrence was, then, an important source for Hilton whose ideas often corresponded closely with his own, but whose visions of wide-scale social change were incompatible with Hilton's view. James Hanley, however, did pursue these Lawrentian motifs to a further extent than Hilton did, and the debates engaged with in

this chapter can be used to explore the novel by Hanley that displays these influences most prominently. That novel is his rarest, 1934's *Resurrexit Dominus,* and a full consideration of it will follow in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

James Hanley's *Resurrexit Dominus* and Asconan aesthetics

A particularly useful text when discussing the modern dance influences of James Hanley's *Resurrexit Dominus* (1934) is Martin Green's *Mountain of Truth: The Counterculture Begins, Ascona 1900-1920* (1986). Green argues that the Asconan movement, established around 1900 by Otto Gross, Rudolf Laban and Gusto Gräser, was one of the most important and influential to emerge from the general climate of interest in modern dance that pervaded the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. Listing a huge array of prominent figures from contemporary intellectual disciplines who came to Ascona and found its values influential in shaping their respective designs, among them Hermann Hesse, Franz Kafka, Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, Carl Gustav Jung, Ida Hofmann-Odenkoven, Franziska Zu Reventlow, Rainier Maria Rilke and H. G. Wells,[1] Green asserts that modernist art and literature is "importantly indebted to Ascona;"[2] and that "The feminism, pacifism and psychoanalysis we now know all took an imprint from these people. So did Dada, surrealism, modern dance, and much modern fiction."[3] Green acknowledges that that the Asconan idea is also associated "with other places and provenances; Ascona is only one name to give it,"[4] or, as he puts it elsewhere:

> Obviously, Ascona's cause, its idea, was one unusually independent of social contacts and of intellectual concepts. It was not to be pinned down, and hard to specify. It was more a wave than a particle, a rhythm or a ripple in thinking of all kinds. It was spores in the wind, invisible, innumerable, ubiquitous. After 1920 it makes no sense to locate it in one Swiss village, or in three individual lives, or even in the intellectual climate of Europe. It was likely to turn up anywhere in the world, and in the most opposite-seeming forms.[5]

The ideals of Ascona were indeed recognisable in a number of similar philosophies from that time: the Asconans worshipped the sun and the natural world, revered woman as the source of all life and inspiration, and invented new types of erotic, often nude dances that were designed to bring humans into communion with their inner drives and desires. Militarism, repressive patriarchal authority and the dogma of organised Christianity were institutions the Asconans attacked, and whose collapse

they anticipated.[6] In a literary context, we need only think of the Sun-God's appearance in *The Dance of Death* by W. H. Auden; such poems as 'Sunday Morning' by Wallace Stevens, with its images of sun-worship and its privileging of earthly, rather than heavenly pleasures; the elements of W. Somerset Maugham's 'Rain' that champion a pagan life in communion with nature over the corruptions of organised Christianity; and of course many of the motifs from D. H. Lawrence's writing discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, to recognise how pervasive were the ideas Green explores. Lawrence's connection to Ascona is particularly significant given that he married Frieda Weekley (née von Richtoven) one-time lover of Otto Gross and one of the foremost members of the Asconan movement. (Eberhard in Lawrence's novel *Mr Noon* is based on Gross, and Green remarks that the rapturous descriptions of him by a character based on Frieda, Johanna Keighley—a "white Dionysus,"[7] "a wonderful lover—a doctor and a philosopher,"[8] "almost the first psychoanalyst...and far, far more brilliant than Freud"[9]—make the character based on Lawrence depressed when he hears them.)[10]

When examining D. H. Lawrence, then, Green's contention that Ascona was a principal inspiration is logical, and *Resurrexit Dominus,* which draws upon Lawrence's work, displays the same influences. Indeed, with its heroine who is equated with the idea of woman as the source of life and love, its masterful depiction of a nude modern dance that unlocks the subject's inner erotic potential, and its damning critiques of patriarchy and the organised Christian church, we might suppose *Resurrexit Dominus* to be in highly similar territory to such novels by D. H. Lawrence as *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1921).

However, this description does not do adequate justice to Hanley's novel of 1934, which is a difficult work indeed to describe. Edward Stokes, one of the few writers on Hanley who makes any mention of the novel, refers to it as "a sort of Gothic companion-piece to *Boy.*"[11] The comparison is a reasonable one: the novels were conceived at around the same time,[12] both tell the tale of a beautiful innocent violated by the lust and sadism of twisted men, both conclude with the principal character's life being snuffed out, and both were first printed as limited editions for private subscribers only. However, *Boy* was quickly made available to the general public, reprinted three times before being banned in 1934, and now, partly because of the legal controversy it generated, is arguably the best-known of all Hanley's novels. Its "companion piece" has not been so well-remembered. It and the 1937 autobiography

Broken Water are the only two books by Hanley never to have been reprinted, and as *Resurrexit Dominus'* print run was the smallest of any of Hanley's privately-published works (just one hundred and ten copies were made; ninety-nine for sale to subscribers and eleven for display purposes), it can fairly be described as Hanley's rarest work. Stokes tells us that he could locate only two other texts that mentioned the book—*The Letters of T. E. Lawrence,* and Reginald Moore's review of Hanley's *No Directions* in the May 1943 issue of *Life and Letters Today*—and adds that all the published lists of Hanley's works in *Who's Who* and *Twentieth Century Authors* omit it.[13] Both John Fordham and Frank G. Harrington have now written Hanley studies that mention *Resurrexit Dominus,* bringing the total of printed works that do so up to five, but it still seems that most writers today who speak of Hanley have no idea that the book exists.

Given the content of *Resurrexit Dominus* it's unsurprising that it had to be privately printed to bypass the censors. Like *The German Prisoner* (1930) and *Boy* (1931) it reflects Hanley's early tendency towards gothic excesses of horror and depravity, but not even those two works disregard so flagrantly the strict 1930s conventions on inappropriate subjects for literature as Hanley's rarest novel does. It tells the story of Sheila Moynihan, a beautiful eighteen-year-old from the fishing village of Ballinasloe in Galway, sometime in the aftermath of the 1919-1922 Troubles. Sheila and her fellow residents are facing starvation as, for the fifth time, the boats have returned with empty nets. This affects the Moynihan family particularly as they are blamed by the villagers for the state of affairs: some accusing Sheila's father Seamus, a drunkard who has not been to Mass for twenty-two years, for cursing the waters through his irreligion; and some accusing Sheila herself because her habit of dancing naked on the seashore at midnight is thought to have had the same effect. Aside from facing poverty, famine and social ostracism, Sheila also has to single-handedly run the household as her mother is eight months pregnant. Most disturbing of all, Sheila's father routinely subjects her to physical and possibly sexual abuse (Hanley is not completely clear on this latter), and her two pubescent brothers, with whom she shares a bed, have developed a nightly habit of fondling her. The regulations to prevent incest referred to in Chapter Four of *The Road to Wigan Pier* are evidently not in force in Ballinasloe.

To help make ends meet, Seamus arranges for Sheila to be sent away to work as housekeeper for Liverpool-based Father Terrence Hooley, a college friend of the

Ballinasloe priest Father Murphy. She is horrified at the thought of having to leave her home life in the village, though it's hard to see quite why. However, it transpires she was right to be concerned, for Father Hooley becomes consumed with savage sexual desire the moment he meets Sheila. He soon sees an opportunity to act on this, when observing Sheila passionately embracing the greater-than-lifesize sculpture of Christ on the Cross that hangs in the chapel. Her behaviour, while partly an understandable reaction to loneliness and despair, might also recall Ursula Brangwen in Lawrence's *The Rainbow:* a young woman equating the idea of Christ's salvation and love with her own emerging sexual drives. But there are also connections here to key images in Irish Catholic iconography, particularly those drawn attention to by Stan Smith in *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Irish Identity* (2005). Smith observes that the eroticisation of the crucified and bloodied Christ belongs to a tradition of "Sacred Heart sadomasochism," that glamorised, through images of blood-sacrifice, the struggle of the rebels against British imperialism.[14] Hanley's incorporation of these ideas, through Sheila, reminds us of the post-Rebellion, post-Great War setting of his novel—important elements in its overall vision, as we will see later.

Father Hooley, by now almost delirious from his carnal urges, sends Sheila on an errand then hacks the sculpture of Christ down from the Cross, ties himself there in its place, and is hanging there waiting when Sheila returns and enters the darkened chapel to make her nocturnal devotions. Upon feeling Hooley move she believes him to be, as John Fordham puts it, "the risen Christ (the pun very much intended)",[15] and surrenders herself. Amid transports of self-destructive ecstasy, Hooley suffers a haemorrhage and dies. (This recalls a similar incident in John Cowper Powys' 1932 novel *A Glastonbury Romance,* and Hanley, a close friend of Powys, was familiar with the book.)[16]

When Sheila recognises the corpse before her and discovers that she has been ravished by the priest, rather than the Saviour, she loses her mind and flees. Eventually she is found wandering naked and confused in the streets of Liverpool, and is handed over to the Catholic Aid Society by the Police. They in turn put Sheila on the boat back to her home village, only for her to be swept overboard during a storm and drowned. Meanwhile, back in Ballinasloe, Father Murphy has finally convinced Sheila's father to attend Mass, and with renewed hope Seamus and his fellow fishermen have put out to sea in one final attempt to save their families from starving.

The novel ends with their triumphal return, having filled their nets. Sheila's mother, who is aware her daughter is on her way home but knows nothing about what happened in Liverpool, runs joyfully to meet her husband on the shore:

> "Oh, Seamus! Seamus!" exclaimed his wife. "Thank God! Thank God!" She reached out her arms to him. "What fish you have! Isn't God good?"
>
> "Yes," he replied, and lowered his head. "God is good."
>
> "An' Sheila, my own Sheila!" cried Mrs. Moynihan. "Sure she's coming home tomorrow. Oh Seamus! Seamus!" Then suddenly: "Oh Seamus! Darlin'! What's the matter?"
>
> "Sheila was in the first net we pulled in!" he said, and she saw him clench his hands, raise his head once more and stare out across the murmuring waters.[17]

Hanley told Charles Lahr in 1931 that he thought *Resurrexit Dominus* "the best book I have written so far,"[18] but it is difficult to share the author's own view of his novel's greatness. For one thing, the book is so full of plot-holes and continuity errors that in places it reads like a work-in-progress, or at the very least a singularly unpolished piece. In Chapter Twelve Sheila contemplates how rough her hands are looking after "after only a few weeks in England," when in fact she has been there for just under four days.[19] Letters sent between Liverpool and Ballinasloe take less than a day to arrive, despite the fact that that there is only one train a week to the tiny Irish village.[20] Sheila has two first-meetings with the elderly church-warden Mr. Grogan, one in Chapter Five and then another in Chapter Six. Absurdly, characters think and write letters in the same Irish dialect that they speak, complete with phonetic spellings and dropped "g"s at the end of words. And as Hooley's sculpture of Christ is described as "fully ten feet high"[21] in an early passage, the chapel must be very shadowy indeed during the rape scene for Sheila not to notice something is amiss. Such flaws are not uncommon in Hanley's privately-published books of the thirties, which were for the most part composed without the services of an editor. In some of his works it is possible to read into these inconsistencies a deliberate attempt on Hanley's part to subvert realist modes—certainly this is the case with *Boy,* which displays many quirks similar to those of *Resurrexit Dominus*—but for the latter novel such an interpretation would be overgenerous. Its patchiness in the handling of plot and timescale seems to be the result of mere carelessness.

Furthermore, the content of *Resurrexit Dominus* is in many ways troubling however it is interpreted. Again, an editor might have been able to help Hanley

rework the passages where Sheila's emerging sexual drives are mishandled to near-disastrous effect, such as the two moments when Sheila seems to think about how much she enjoys sharing a bed with her lecherous brothers. Equally disturbing is Chapter Four's scene where Sheila is set upon by a middle-aged pervert in a deserted country lane: though she is ultimately appalled and fights the man off, the descriptions of her initial sensations during the assault verge on rapist-apologist. ("She experienced a kind of ecstasy. This wonderful feeling now descended upon her was a poetry expressing itself in silence.")[22] And Sheila herself, as a working-class housemaid, displays certain correspondences with a middle-class male cult that, in the words of Janet Montefiore, regarded female menial workers as "objects of specifically bourgeois desires and fantasies associating working-class women with degrading bodily knowledge of dirt."[23] This conception, which emerged perhaps inevitably from Victorian sexual repression and class rigidity, found its most graphic expression in the mid-nineteenth century poet and diarist Arthur J. Munby, who took especial delight in his working-class servant girl and mistress Hannah Cullwick when she came to him filthy from her day's labours. Fetishism of this kind was still in existence in the 1930s, and Montefiore identifies an undercurrent of it in Storm Jameson's essay 'Documents':

> Storm Jameson, who was no fool, hinted at this structure of feeling when she sarcastically described the typical bourgeois writer's narcissistic voyeurism: "What sights I am seeing! What smells I am enduring! There is the woman raking ashes with her hands and I am watching her!" The labouring woman is thus subjected to a masculine gaze which is fascinated by its own repulsion and desire for the knowledge which her fingers horribly have of dirt and discomfort—a knowledge which the male viewer can only imagine. The relationship between the woman's fingers scraping the table and the observing man is not just the familiar opposition of woman as suffering material body versus man as speculative, active mind; the dirty cracks also imply a fantasy of the female genitals as repulsive, fascinating crevices, not fully knowable by the man. The image is directly comparable to the cold, filthy drainpipe penetrated by Orwell's "slum girl."[24]

There are unmistakeable echoes of all this in eighteen-year-old Sheila Moynihan, with her physical beauty, her heady combination of innocence and latent sexuality, and her tendency to stumble unwittingly from one lascivious interlude to another (in the first four chapters she is lusted after by her two brothers, her father, the man in the lane and Father Hooley) does suggest a heroine of voyeuristic fantasy writing, and at times

this gives the impression that *Resurrexit Dominus* is no more than a wish-fulfilment pulp book for the heterosexual male gaze.

Those who have tried to evaluate the novel have, perhaps understandably, found it hard to look beyond these issues. Edward Stokes' opinion of the novel is probably close to that of most readers when he states that "One is tempted to dismiss the whole book as a sort of ghoulish, macabre farce in the most questionable taste."[25] Though Stokes dedicates several pages of *The Novels of James Hanley* to a reasoned discussion of its content, he concludes: "I do not think that, however it is approached, the book can be considered a masterpiece...it is too confused in meaning and tone."[26] Frank G. Harrington mentions it in passing, commenting only that it makes some interesting points about the unhealthiness of a celibate priesthood and that it is marred by an immaturity of form.[27] John Fordham in *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working-Class* reserves his comments mostly for the circumstances leading up to *Resurrexit Dominus'* publication, and of its content remarks simply that it is an "absurd fantasy" that, "had it been published, would not have served Hanley's reputation well."[28]

The literary supporters to whom Hanley showed the manuscript were likewise guarded in their praise. His friend John Cowper Powys warned that the troubling religious symbolism of *Resurrexit Dominus,* and its portrayal of "all these fellows' penises, their state, shape, that and the heroine coming up against them so very tangibly"[29] made the book effectively unpublishable and likely to cause legal problems for its author. Richard Aldington, normally one of Hanley's staunchest supporters, expressed "severe reservations" when consulted about publishing the book in America.[30] Reginald Moore described *Resurrexit Dominus* as "one of our best books on the theme of modern love,"[31] but his words were probably influenced by his friendship with Hanley: he and his wife Elizabeth Berridge were close to the author, who advised them to move to his own village of Llanfechain and helped them find a cottage there. Meanwhile T. E. Lawrence, who read and enjoyed most of Hanley's early works and followed the development of *Resurrexit Dominus* in manuscript form, considered the work in its full weight and was clearly impressed by some of its features. The character-drawing, Lawrence wrote Hanley in 1931, "is superb,"[32] and he selected two scenes for singular acclaim: Father Hooley's desire-fuelled, self-justifying soliloquy in the latter half of Chapter Six, and the dialogue in Chapter Seven where Hooley and Mr. Grogan discuss the intended rape:

> It was unearthly and yet entirely real: really three-dimensional. I could feel all about the two creatures as they talked. You can make queerness come to life. Will you rave to hear that I said "Dickens" as I read it, though Dickens is not a man I can bear to read?[33]

However, throughout their correspondence Lawrence's praise, though effusive in places, is always accompanied by a note of caution. He was unable to read any greater significance into the tragedy of Father Hooley and Sheila, stating that it "does feel inevitable, or typical: it is individual, perhaps accidental."[34] He also warned Hanley that the end result seemed to him a tale "too trivial for the vast tone of your treatment,"[35] and he feared that readers would struggle to take seriously many of the book's pivotal scenes, particularly the rape on the cross and the twist ending. With characteristic warmth and civility, Lawrence wrote:

> ...you will find that others besides me will take refuge in laughter against your over-dose of terror. I think the book is keyed too high. It is amazing: ingenious: unusual: and carries itself off. I do not think anybody but yourself could have conceived it, or would have attempted it, or could have gripped me, as I was gripped while I read it: but it is a criticism, surely, that I kept on crying out "NO, no" to myself even while I read. You held me, but did not carry me away; and the only justification for extravagance is that it should be wholly successful.[36]

Lawrence's appraisal of *Resurrexit Dominus,* though probably the most enthusiastic of the handful published, ultimately arrives at the same conclusion made by all other commentators: that it is too unconventional and flawed to be considered one of Hanley's better works. I do not intend to dispute the view that *Resurrexit Dominus,* like most of the author's early writing, is uneven. But it is crucial to note that none of its critics has yet considered the novel in what seems to me one of its most important and rewarding contexts: as a piece influenced by an existing corpus of modernist writing on dance. Harrington and T. E. Lawrence felt that the book was "about" the damaging effects of celibacy in priesthood, Stokes believed "its confused but insistent undertones of ritual sacrifice and fertility myth"[37] were the central themes, and Fordham concluded that "Its greater potential lies in its wedding of anti-imperial to anticlerical themes."[38] However, if *Resurrexit Dominus* is assessed as an Asconan work influenced by D. H. Lawrence, it becomes possible to reassess many of the

existing criticisms, or at the very least, show them to have been made without giving full consideration to the range of influences at play in Hanley's work.

Sheila's dance itself, at the end of Chapter Two, is one of the finest moments in that writer's entire oeuvre. Walter Allen in 1948 said of the author that "There is, in every novel he writes, one chapter in which one is ready to swear he shows genius, perhaps twenty pages that affect one like poetry, twenty pages of almost Dostoevskian vision."[39] In *Resurrexit Dominus,* that moment of genius is surely to be found here.

> The girl ran along the shore and she was singing. The sounds were beautiful. Like sounds from viols they were. Sheila sang a lament for Roderig, for Seamus the Great and the Boy who wandered from the day he was born. Great black clouds arose and seemed to follow her as she ran wildly along the shore. The night itself was inspiring. The low murmuring of the waters was the chorus joining in with the lovely naked girl who sped along the edge of the waters. She waved her arms about. Once again the moon came out, and as quickly vanished, for the Ocean Christ was still angry at such nakedness. The girl placed the tips of her fingers to her breasts, which were pear-shaped, and in the moonlight gleamed cold and beautiful like marble. And they too seemed to murmur with something rushing into Life. She ran down to the water's very edge. Great shocks of spray burst in upon the shore, drenching her, for the wind had strengthened. The more drenched Sheila was, the more she sang.[40]

The sequence is reminiscent of Elsie Watkins's dance on the moor in Jack Hilton's *Champion* (1938), discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, though Sheila's nudity sets it apart from the rather more coy narrative style of Hanley's fellow working-class writer. But it is most unlikely Hilton would have read Hanley's 1934 private-subscriber novel with its miniscule print run—rather, it is Hanley and Hilton's shared experience of D. H. Lawrence's works, particularly *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love,* that explains the correspondence. Compare the passage above with Gudrun Brangwen dancing on the shore of Gerald Crich's lake in *Women in Love:*

> Gudrun, looking as if some invisible chain weighed on her hands and feet, began slowly to dance in the eurhythmic manner, pulsing and fluttering rhythmically, making slower, regular gestures with her hands and arms, now spreading her arms wide, now raising them above her head, now flinging them softly apart, and lifting her face, her feet all the time beating and running to the measure of the song, as if it were some strange incantation, her white, rapt form drifting here and there in a strange impulsive rhapsody, seeming to be lifted on a breeze of incantation, shuddering with strange little runs. [41]

Or consider the similarities between this extract from slightly later in Sheila's dance scene:

> The girl sped through pools of light and dark; wherever she ran the black clouds followed, for the Ocean Christ was still angry at her nakedness. She lay upon her belly on the flat sand. She stretched wide her arms and made movements as though swimming. Her breath came quickly. She turned over on her back and stared up at the sky. The many stars appeared as pearls embedded in the vast sheet of grey. Again she sang a lament for the boy who wandered from the day he was born, and again the words were beautiful in sound. She stopped suddenly as though trying to catch the echoes. The stars, the wide expanse of rolling waters answered her in song.[42]

And this section from Ursula Brangwen and Anton Skrebensky's shared moment on the moor in *The Rainbow:*

> Up there the stars were big, the earth below was gone into darkness. She was free up there with the stars. Far out they saw tiny yellow lights—but it was very far out, at sea, or on land. She was free up among the stars.
>
> She took off all her clothes, and made him take off his, and they ran over the smooth, moonless turf, a long way, more than a mile from where they had left their clothing, running in the dark, soft wind, utterly naked, as naked as the downs themselves. Her hair was loose and blew about her shoulders, she ran swiftly, wearing sandals when she set off on the long run to the dew-pond.
>
> In the round dew-pond the stars were untroubled. She ventured slowly into the water, grasping at the stars with her hands.[43]

These comparisons with Lawrence are not to downplay the importance of W. B. Yeats, who, as we can safely assume from the *Resurrexit Dominus* extracts, Hanley also read. Sheila's dance scene strongly suggests a recurring motif of Yeats' Celtic mythology poems, described by Terri A. Mester in *Movement and Modernism* as "A real, solitary female dancer who is foregrounded in the symbolic landscape...She is also young, innocent and virginal and dances 'seemingly alone' in a self-contained, narrow 'luminous circle.'"[44] The idyllic night-time beach recalls identical Yeatsian settings in 'The Wanderings of Oisin', 'The Stolen Child', 'To a Child Dancing in the Wind' and the second stanza of 'Long-Legged Fly', all of which present such a locale as a place of escape from the hardships of the real world. Sheila too visits her "woody shore"[45] to find sanctuary from a world "full of weeping,"[46] though unlike Oisin she is

not given a hundred years to enjoy herself. 'To a Child' and its sequel, 'Two Years Later', resonate particularly strongly with this scene from *Resurrexit Dominus,* for despite her physical maturity Sheila is like Yeats' eponymous character: a beautiful innocent enraptured by her dance and unaware that she is on the brink of her own destruction. This similarity is striking—John Fordham too has noted it—and one can safely conclude that Hanley's vision of Sheila owes much to Yeats' earlier works.

But the writer to whom Haney is most indebted is without doubt D. H. Lawrence. The Asconan idea that "dance expresses the drives, the *im Lebewesen waltenden Triebe* ('the drives that dominate living beings')",[47] voiced by Rudolf Laban and explored repeatedly in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love,* is also central to Sheila in *Resurrexit Dominus.* Like the Brangwen women Anna, Ursula and Gudrun in Lawrence's two-part sequence, Sheila dances in order to explore her erotic self and to come into communion with her sexuality. (As observed in the previous chapter, Lawrence voices his preference for this type of dance by comparing it favourably with Hermione Roddice's mind-based dancing in *Women in Love.)* Hanley writes that "the blood in her stirred wildly;"[48] that her breasts "seemed to murmur with something rushing into life."[49] The songs she sings refer to poignant or powerful male figures such as the wandering boy and Roderig the Great, typical objects of a woman's desire. While she lies back on the sand she whispers "Soon...Yes, soon,"[50] and Hanley closes the chapter by describing how she "stared up hungrily towards the stars."[51]

Sheila suggests the Asconan idea of womanhood in other ways. Green writes that the idea of "an impeachment of man, [and] an enthronement of Magna Mater" ("great mother") was "dear to all Asconans,"[52] and describes how the first visitors to Monte Verita discovered a startling number of peasant shrines to the Madonna. Apparently "More were dedicated to the Saints or to Christ himself, which the immigrants found––gladly found—indicative of a pagan cult of Woman among these supposedly Christian peasants."[53] The idea of a non-Christian reverence towards woman, derived in part from ideas of the Mediterranean Earth Goddess, came to form a part of the Asconan "religion" which Green describes as "erotic and sun worshipping, not ascetic and cross worshipping. The idea of God the Father was replaced by God the Mother, the divinity of Nature and Woman."[54] Sheila Moynihan, whose Celtic first name means literally "woman" and also suggests "Sheilagh na Gig," the pagan depiction of fecund womanhood often incorporated into Irish church engravings, seems to belong to these traditions. The liberation and erotic awareness she arrives at during her dance

is reminiscent too of the "hetaera" or "free woman" as defined by the Asconan writer Franziska Zu Reventlow. Such women, who existed as a concept if not in real life, believed in nudity, free control of the body, openness about sex and freedom from shame and guilt.[55]

The credo identified by Green, which rejected the Holy Father and the Cross for the Magna Mater and nature-worship, seems to me central to *Resurrexit Dominus*. It has gone unremarked or barely touched upon by previous commentators, but running vividly throughout is a gendered bifurcation between the values embodied by Sheila (womanhood, paganism, the natural world and free eroticism) and those embodied by the men who surround her (patriarchy, Catholicism, the capitalist world and the forcible taking of sexual pleasure). Stokes' remark concerning *Resurrexit Dominus'* "confused but insistent undertones of ritual sacrifice and fertility myth"[56] draws perhaps closest to this idea, though even he does not grasp the gender opposition that is the basis of these undertones.

Throughout the novel Sheila is continually oppressed by brutal male figures who are by equal turns outraged by her actions and driven to monstrous desires by her physical presence. Significantly, the figures of patriarchal and religious authority in the book are visibly threatened by the power Sheila's erotic awareness conveys. At the start of Chapter Three she is confronted by her drunken father, who is in transports of fury apparently caused by her nightly dances on the beach:

> "Sure, you're always thinkin'. That's what's wrong with you. But tomorrow when you go over to England you'll have to bloody well work. There won't be any fall-dal-lal-in' over there, by gosh there won't! I heard all about you, though you think I know nothin'. With your runnin' round the damned shore with nothin' on, you bloody heathen, that's what you are, and everybody in the place knows it though they keep their gobs shut. You bloody pagan bitch! Get up to bed out of it now, d'you hear me?"[57]

A similar, though more complex process is at work in Father Hooley. The priest's desire for his servant girl represents a threat to the Christian values he professes to leads his life by, which dictate that as a man of God he should be free of base passions. When he first sees Sheila embracing the sculpture and is inflamed with lust by her nakedness and sexual abandon, his reaction is not so much that of a man aroused as that of one distraught, facing the unexpected shattering of his entire world:

> A pain had suddenly shot through him. He closed his eyes for a moment. His blood was cataract. From time to time he strained his ears for a sound. All was silent. He sat down on a chair, placed the palms of his hands upon his thighs, and began to rock himself to and fro. "My God! My God!" he muttered.[58]

When formulating his plan for the rape on the Cross, both in internal monologue and later in conversation with Mr. Grogan, Hooley repeatedly describes his act as a necessary correction for Sheila; a calculated "humiliation" (to use his word) that will teach her not to commit the "sacrilege" of embracing a holy carving naked and also punish her for subjecting her priest to an "attack by the forces of the flesh."[59] In apportioning blame to Sheila for exposing his weaknesses, and convincing himself that her acts were deliberately provocative, Hooley imagines her as a Salome figure in the *Fin-de-Siécle* mode. But his perception is both subjective and false: Sheila belongs to a later notion of womanhood characteristic of the modernist, not *Fin-de-Siécle* ethos, which imagined woman as blameless innocent or sacrificial victim. This conception owes much to *Le Sacre de Printemps's* depiction of a ritual female sacrifice, and Hanley, in grounding his heroine firmly within it, displays his accord with a specifically modernist aesthetic.

The rhetoric Father Hooley discourses to Mr. Grogan is, furthermore, mere self-justification for an intended rape, and we will see that Hanley makes this explicit later in the book. But as with most rapes, there is a genuine urge to do the victim harm as well as use her for the satisfaction of sexual cravings, and in Hooley this emerges from the sense of threat that Sheila has imposed on his life and beliefs. Men intimidated by women who convey a strong erotic awareness through dancing naked is a recurring motif in the works of D. H. Lawrence. Will Brangwen in *The Rainbow* responds to his pregnant wife Anna's nude dance with a combination of bafflement, anger and fear, primarily because in the throes of her dance she "knew no man," becoming "a strange, exalted thing having no relation to himself:"

> It hurt him as he watched as if he were at the stake. He felt as if he was being burned alive. The strangeness of her dancing consumed him, he was burned, he could not grasp, he could not understand. He waited obliterated.[60]

The model here, drawn again from Lawrence's reading of Nietzsche, is the Bacchante. Will in this scene recalls the character Maurice in Lawrence's short story

'Sun', whose wife Juliet leaves middle-class married life in England to experiment with nudism and nature-worship in South America, and so discovers "quite another sort of power, something greater than herself, flowing by itself."[61] After realizing this erotic potential Juliet cannot return to the life with Maurice she has known, and Maurice himself, as he gazes at his naked wife, recognises that she has attained a quality of life in which he can expect to play no part. ("He was dazed with admiration, but also at a deadly loss. What should he do with himself?")[62] In *Women in Love* this gender opposition is turned into a physical confrontation with the scene of Gudrun dancing naked before Gerald Crich's highland cattle. Mester writes:

> She confuses and stuns the cattle, artistically manipulating them as elements in her dance fantasy. The dancing now becomes a "constitutive symbol" of an earlier scene when Gudrun observed Gerald violently compel his horse at a railway crossing. The cattle, belonging to Gerald, are a synecdoche for his maleness. Gudrun, jealous of Gerald's masculine will and social / economic power, appropriates for herself his earlier aggressiveness in brutally mistreating his horse. Gerald, on hearing the cattle, rushes in and tries to stop her dance by insisting on the herd's danger. Gudrun, intoxicated by her violent gestures, responds by striking him in the face. Her act of dominance looks ahead or "illumines" the "final blow" to Gerald at the end of the novel.[63]

Sheila never draws power from her dance to attack masculine authority as vigorously as Gudrun does, remaining a victim of her male oppressors all through *Resurrexit Dominus*. However, the way that her dancing and her nudity produce such violent urges in her father and Hooley nonetheless has clear parallels with this Lawrentian motif, in which the heightened erotic awareness of woman leads to antagonism from unenlightened man.

But it's not just the mortal men of Hanley's novel who oppose the Asconan ethics Sheila represents: the gendered bifurcation runs deeper than the superficial, pervading the religious imagery too. During the dance scene Hanley tells us three times that the "Ocean Christ" is angry at Sheila's nakedness, suggesting that the Ballinasloe villagers are quite right to suspect that Sheila's pagan activities have cursed the waters and caused the current famine. John Fordham's observation that this "Ocean Christ" is associated with "the Fisher King or symbolic Ichthus"[64] is probably correct: Hanley, like T. S. Eliot, would seem to have been familiar with Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) in which such pagan gods are discussed. But whatever else Hanley's deity of the ocean might be, he is apparently both a male and a vengeful

god, punishing the transgressions of two with the starvation of many. It takes the return-to-the-fold of one of these and the sacrifice of the other to restore the status quo and make the Ocean Christ benevolent again. Significantly it is the male transgressor, Sheila's father, who is given a chance to make reparations by returning to regular worship. A female transgressor such as Sheila can placate the Ocean Christ only with her death.

During the novel Sheila repeatedly prays to the Holy Virgin, a figure of inviolate femininity, and derives strength and hope from doing so. But whenever she puts her faith in a man or male image associated with the Catholic Church, she comes to some harm. Father Murphy sends her to Liverpool on the pretext of helping to support her family, and so sets the girl on the path to her own destruction. (It's strongly implied in the early chapters that Murphy and Father Hooley are in cahoots, and have a long history of the one sending the other local girls for him to act out his depravities upon, though Hanley contradicts this later in the book.) Hooley, another priest and Murphy's friend, plays the active role in Sheila's despoiling and descent into madness. The image of Christ, "God the Son," metamorphoses into a mere man who subjects Sheila to his violations. The "Sacred Heart of Jesus" medallion, which Mrs. Moynihan gives her daughter just before she leaves Ballinasloe and which she is still wearing when she is found wandering delirious after the rape, prompts the Liverpool Police to hand Sheila over to the Catholic Society who send her on the sea crossing where she meets her death. The "Ocean Christ" himself claims her life, and then the male figures of Christianity enjoy one final cruel joke. Sheila's body is hauled in by the fishermen on what would have been her nineteenth birthday, the Feast of Saint Anthony, who is known as the "finder of things lost." Sheila's mother hopes that the Saint will be true to his role and return her absent daughter to her on that day, and he does, but hardly in the way Mrs. Moynihan would have wanted.

As most commentators have remarked, the dénouement of *Resurrexit Dominus* strains credulity. Stokes declares that "even Dickens or Hardy would scarcely have dared"[65] such an ending, and T. E. Lawrence tactfully wrote Hanley that "the final coincidence, though perhaps the only way of ending a book keyed so high, is rather a coincidence, isn't it?"[66] It is true that an over-reliance on coincidence weakens many of Hanley's early works—the short story 'Stoker Haslett' is a prime example—but John Cowper Powys was correct in observing that *Resurrexit Dominus,* as with *Boy,* deliberately departs from realist modes in favour of a more surreal, modernist

approach. Thus Powys' words to Hanley in a 1931 letter come closest of all to appreciating the writer's intention:

> ...you tend to desert natural verisimilitude and bleak realism for a symbol[ic] and mythic dimension only *remotely* possible, but at the same time extraordinarily telling and rounding off the whole tale so very well.[67]

However, I cannot agree with the two existing published views on what this "symbolic and mythic dimension" represents. Both Stokes and Fordham believe that Sheila is "redeemed" by her death; that, as Fordham puts it, her "essential identity with nature" allows her to become "a sacrifice to the Ocean Christ."[68] Firstly, traditional ideas of sacrifice are weakened by the fact that Sheila, following the incident in Father Hooley's chapel, is no longer a virgin. But more to the point, it was clearly established during Sheila's dance scene in Chapter Two that her Asconan eroticism and communion with nature are at odds with the "Ocean Christ." Her being devoured by such an entity cannot reasonably be interpreted as "fruitful and redemptive;"[69] it is a tragic ending to the novel, a triumph of its darkest elements. For however much Sheila may at times resemble nothing so much as a fantasy object for self-indulgent heterosexual men, with her nubile good looks, her skirt-dropping and her disturbing fondness for fumbled libidinous encounters, Hanley plainly wishes us to see her as the force for good in the novel. She appears as an embodiment of female power and happiness that stands in opposition to the vengeful male forces that have sought throughout to desecrate and crush her. The "Ocean Christ" belongs in this latter group, and nothing redemptive can come of Sheila's demise in his embrace.

There are parallels between *Resurrexit Dominus* and *Der Bärtige* ("The Beard"), a dance-drama of 1914 devised by founder Asconans Otto Gross and Hans Brandenburg which shares in *Le Sacre de Printemps's* mythos of predatory and destructive masculinities. Green describes the content of this production, in which "a father—danced in a gigantic and terrifying bearded idol-mask—destroys his wife and then invades and ruins the erotic lives of his son and daughter. At the funeral of his wife, their mother, he fixed his desire upon his daughter."[70] The father in Gross and Brandenburg's tale is a creature of violence, voracious sexuality and incestuous urges, all of which Sheila must face both from Seamus Moynihan and Hooley, who as a priest would also be addressed as "Father." Although it is unlikely that Hanley would

have heard of a piece as obscure as *Der Bärtige, Resurrexit Dominus'* outright condemnation of patriarchal authority participates in fundamentally the same Asconan ethic as that dance-drama.

The ending to Hanley's novel, however, is not entirely bleak: there is hope, though I would contend it does not come from the quarter Stokes and Fordham identify. Rather, it is that Hanley, in a manner similar to D. H. Lawrence in *The Rainbow,* symbolically anticipates the downfall of the organised Christian Church and the oppressions it stands for. The incident of Father Hooley and Sheila may well be, as T. E. Lawrence put it, "individual, perhaps accidental,"[71] but Hanley also infuses his story of an isolated encounter with a powerful suggestion of downfall on a larger scale.

To repeat, Hooley's overwhelming desire for Sheila indicates the failure of a Christian doctrine that orders its holy men to forsake the pleasures of the flesh. In Father Hooley's conversation with Mr. Grogan, he attempts to justify his plans, both to himself and the church warden, as a religious mission to do the will of God: he holds forth on how Sheila's licentious habit of going naked before the Saviour is clearly a divine punishment on her father for not attending Mass, and says of the intended rape that "if I accomplish this I will have renewed my whole self, taught a lesson to the girl, and perhaps have a salutary effect in a most secretive way upon the evilness of her father."[72] However, In Chapter Thirteen, by which time Hooley is in the chapel making preparations for the deed itself, Hanley reveals that all his talk of salvation and carrying out God's retribution was nothing the priest believed in himself:

> How elaborate the whole scheme was, how he had tried to bewilder this simple old man, to tie him up in a philosophical and spiritual web, and behind all this hocus-pocus there was merely this young girl, fresh from Ireland, whom he wanted, urgently, violently, for he felt destruction itself lurking in his blood.[73]

The urge for mortal pleasures has conquered the spiritual goals of Catholicism. Hooley's rape of Sheila serves two symbolic purposes: firstly, replacing Christ with the priest is a rather heavy-handed way of expressing that any religion organised by men, and which depicts its divinities as men, will be subject to the violence and lust of men. There was never truly an individual of Christlike goodness, for all men are

closer to father Hooley in their capacity for evil. Secondly, the incident symbolically articulates that a religion that began with the death of a man on the Cross is ending around two thousand years later with the same event. When Mr. Grogan calls round the next morning and discovers Hooley's corpse, he also finds the original statue of Christ, lying behind the altar with its head and body ruined. One of the working-titles for *Resurrexit Dominus,* "The Death of Jesus," makes explicit the link between Hooley's demise and the greater collapse of the religion of men.

The world of *Resurrexit Dominus* is on the brink of apocalypse, and it owes its state principally to Ascona and D. H. Lawrence. Numerous references to the Irish Troubles make it clear that Sheila is growing up in the aftermath of huge upheavals, the result of the rebellion at home and the Great War overseas. Hanley, like Lawrence, is at once concerned about the changes wrought by such massive social turbulence and yet hopeful that a better world can be brought about now the old one is gone. Here is to be found the element of optimism in the otherwise pessimistic ending of *Resurrexit Dominus.* By the conclusion both Father Hooley and Sheila are dead, but, in the context of the greater social changes Hanley incorporates into his novel, the priest belonged to the old order that has died with him while the girl was a part of the new age that continues to take the place of the old. Like Lawrence's Asconan heroines, Sheila is best interpreted as a conduit for higher forces. She is in the Lawrentian mode of "Not I but the wind that blows through me," or Yeats' "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" Indeed, Mester states that a possible interpretation of Yeats' *A Vision* is to see the image of the dancer as symbol of a new world that will emerge from the chaos of post-1916 Ireland, and it may be that this motif from Yeats influenced *Resurrexit Dominus* as his poetry did.[74] Sheila's dance places her in harmony with a power that, like the one Juliet in Lawrence's 'Sun' also realizes through nude dance, is "something greater than herself."[75] Her individual death is tragic, but it will not affect the process of reshaping already begun. The world has changed; new forces are coming into play.

Chapter Nine

"Naked Unaccommodated Man:" Liminal theory and the question of minor literature

1) The controversial history of James Hanley's Boy

The novel *Boy,* released in 1931, was James Hanley's fourth published work. It tells the disturbing tale of Arthur Fearon, a working-class thirteen-year-old from Liverpool who is taken out of school early by his violent, abusive father and forced into a hard manual job on a docked ship. The frail Fearon is brought close to physical and emotional collapse by a single day of this, and, disgusted by the behaviour of the other boys he works with and tired of the brutal beatings he endures at home, stows away that night on a ship called The *Hernian*. After several days at sea, a crewman finds him hiding half-dead in a coal-bunker and he is resuscitated, only to be raped by the ship's steward. The sailors treat Fearon like a slave, verbally and physically abuse him and continue to make sexual advances upon his person, but the experiences do not destroy Fearon. He is keen to learn and be accepted, and on the unexpected death of the lookout man he is promoted to the rank of ordinary seaman by the captain. He also makes friends among the crew, but when the ship arrives at Alexandria one of them takes Fearon to a brothel where the boy's adolescent sexuality is aroused for the first time in an encounter with a young prostitute. The next evening he sneaks ashore, meets another girl and contracts syphilis. The *Hernian* leaves port and Fearon's condition steadily worsens, until, near death and writhing in the agony of his illness, he is smothered in a mercy killing by the drunken captain.

Like most of Hanley's early writing, *Boy* is a story of terrible events. Fearon, a physically beautiful youth violated and killed by coarsened and depraved men, recalls two other characters in early tales by Hanley: Otto Reiburg, sexually tortured and killed by two repulsive infantrymen in *The German Prisoner* (1930), and handsome young Chris Dunfey in the short story 'Feud' (first published 1931), who is murdered and dumped overboard by a pair of ageing and grizzled seamen. The fear that a whole generation of bright, hopeful young men had been wiped out and replaced by Yeats' rough beasts or Eliot's hooded hordes was commonplace among writers

immediately after the First World War, and Hanley, who lost an older brother at the Somme, may have been influenced by it. However, the way that Hanley's early works infuse this preoccupation with undercurrents of homoeroticism and powerfully-charged sexuality is one of the most interesting aspects of his writing, and *Boy,* the longest of his homoerotic texts, is the one in which these ideas are played out to the fullest.

Boy has been a controversial work of English literature ever since it was banned as an obscene publication in 1934, supposedly because its portrayal of homosexual practices was unacceptable by the standards of the thirties. (The censorship case was actually to do with the fourth edition of the book, published three years after its original release, and the problem seems to have had more to do with the that version's cover which played very much to the novel's heterosexual content.) Readers may also recall media coverage of the long-awaited 1990 reprint of the book by Andre Deutsch; a brave decision given the recent enactment of the 1988 Local Government Act, with its notorious clause 28 which ruled against "promot[ing] the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship."[1] (The timeliness of Deutsch's reprint makes up for the fairly low quality of the edition itself, which is badly punctuated throughout and gives the wrong date for the trial on the cover.) Because of the media attention it has attracted over the last six decades, *Boy* has been one of the most commented-on of all 1930s working-class novels; the fact that Hanley is the best known of the four writers of this study is in no small part due to *Boy.*

However, the attention *Boy* has received, even when this has been sincere critical coverage as opposed to the sensationalist speculation banned books attract, has concentrated only on its significance as either gay or socialist writing. The novel does not stand up to either of these interpretations at all well. It's true that it is an important work in that it has the courage to admit that shipboard homosexuality does happen, when most writers of the thirties preferred to avoid the subject. (Although, as John Fordham observes, references to it in Melville, Whitman and Malcolm Lowry illustrate that there were such goings-on, and as does article 5 of the 1921 Merchant Shipping Bill, which imposed new penalties on captains who allowed "gross indecencies" to take place on their ships.)[2] However, *Boy's* portrayal of gay life at sea—only in the form of vile advances made by filthy drunken men, or as full male rape—presents a thoroughly unsavoury view. Paul Baker and Jo Stanley in their book

Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea state that *Boy* "could be taken to make a firm and negative *de facto* connection between homosexuality and abuse at sea," and that sex in the context it portrays is "more about men exercising power over other men than about gay identity."[3] Boy's only scene of consummated gay sex is a rape in which there is nothing reciprocal about Fearon's experience. The steward's appalling acts are very much sexualised aggression rather than aggressive sexuality; we are told that he is heterosexual and has a wife and son back home. The encounter leads to no sensuous awakening in Fearon, who is conscious only of the disgusting noises, feelings and smells he is subjected to and repulsed by. This passage is typical of the scene as a whole:

> He uttered no further sounds for the man's mouth had now completely covered his own. And this mouth sucked rather than kissed him. The boy's whole being revolted, but he was powerless. The steward continued to suck at the boy's mouth. The boy felt sick, the smell of beer and whisky was in his nostrils, and he imagined a horde of worms were creeping slimily about his face.[4]

There are many instances where Hanley's writing deploys homoerotic motifs in an effective and sensitive way, but works like *Boy* and *The German Prisoner* are also occasionally troubling in their conflation of homosexual activity with violence, corruption and death. It's worth noting too that Hanley, just one year after *Boy* was published, had begun to refute, with a note of paranoia, the view that homosexuality on board ship was widely practiced.[5] These authorial mixed feelings towards *Boy's* theme inevitably weaken its status as a pioneering work of gay literature.

Similarly, as much as *Boy* resembles the style of "proletarian" writing that emphasises unflinching descriptions of working-class hardship and suffering, it ultimately fails as a didactic socialist novel too. Edward Stokes is correct to observe that "the implication that the novel contains a great deal of unfictionalised exposition and doctrinaire didacticism is quite untrue,"[6] though it is understandable that such an implication could have been detected. *Boy* stands up fairly well as a socialist novel in that it certainly gives us an unflinching picture of the dreadful circumstances of boys like Fearon, taken out of school at too young an age and made to do man's work. Chapters three and four, which describe his one day of toil on the docks, are a particularly galling read full of foul conditions, rank odours and arduous labour. The relentlessly bleak and disturbing novel does not suggest any way that these

circumstances can be improved, but that in itself need not damage its status as a socialist work: as I discussed in Chapter Two, many such books take the approach of simply showing the reader how hard things are, and holding that up as sufficient proof that the lives of workers must be changed. The early chapters of *Boy* do draw certain links between economic conditions and the suffering of Fearon's social class: his schoolmaster does all he can to keep his promising student in education but is well aware he cannot stand in the way of the parents' demands, having "been a teacher too long amongst the poor children not to know how useless things were,"[7] and likewise the headmaster recognises that the boy is destined to be "nothing else but a moneymaker."[8] When Fearon himself challenges his mother over the decision to send him to work, she weakly replies: "Mustn't it be plain to you, that things are bad with us? Many another boy has had to do the same thing as you have. It couldn't be helped. Your father's money is of little use here, Arthur. Besides, very soon they'll be getting rid of him."[9]

Boy, with the unrelenting horrors it subjects its hero to, and its tragic and appalling ending, could never be classed as socialist realism. A work with such an overwhelmingly pessimistic tome would have no place in a Zhdanovite canon. However, it could be mistaken for a "proletarian naturalist" novel of the kind described in this thesis's second chapter, or suggested by John Lucas in *The Radical Twenties:* concentrating on the privations of working-class home life and employment, and "drably defeatist" in its politics.[10] However, such a reading of *Boy* overlooks the stark isolation of Fearon in his plight. This cannot be described as a novel about the suffering of the working-class, as Fearon is the only working-class character in it who seems anything less than happy with his lot in life. He is conspicuously unlike his parents, his fellow child-workers on the docks and the sailors on the *Hernian,* none of whom accept or even understand his desire to stay in school and not resign himself at thirteen to a life of manual work.

George Orwell makes a remark in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that has some relevance here: "there is not one working-class boy in a thousand who does not pine for the day when he will leave school. He wants to be doing real work, not wasting his time on ridiculous rubbish like history and geography."[11] I do not suggest that Orwell's generalisation is an unquestionable truth, but it does provide a counter-argument to interpretations of *Boy* that might suppose Hanley intends Fearon's terror

and dismay at having to join the world of work to be taken as representative for his whole social class.

Boy's highly condensed timescale also makes it difficult to read as realist tract or political novel. The events depicted cannot take place over much longer than ten days, and in this time Fearon is taken out of school, forced into dock work, stows away on a boat, is raped by a sailor, has two encounters with prostitutes in Alexandria, becomes ill with syphilis, and is murdered. Critics have observed that the packing of so many ordeals into such a tiny stretch of time makes it hard to believe that this story could really happen, and any novel that tries to impress upon its readers that it describes existing circumstances of the real world must surely preserve the illusion that its events might occur.[12] Indeed, Fordham argues that *Boy* makes so few gestures towards preserving this illusion that it must be concluded that Hanley's aim in the novel was not to produce a realist narrative of any kind, socialist or otherwise:

> Hanley...was moving increasingly beyond the boundaries of conventional realism. To read *Boy* is to come close to realizing what Adorno implied by his enthusiasm for certain forms of European expressionism which "attest[ed] more authentically to the fact that society was moving into a realm of horror" than do the more explicit indictments of an Ibsen or Gorky. It is a work that exists on the borderline of Strindberg's "formal innovations (the dissolution of dramatic realism and the reconstruction of dream-like experiences)" and Hauptmann's naturalism. Whereas *Boy* begins with the grim realms of Liverpool slum life, it defies and naturalist or realist expectations and, as Adorno says of Hauptmann's *Hannele*, "causes faithful, naturalistic depiction to pass over into ferocious expression."[13]

These two fraught interpretations of *Boy,* then, have conspired with its censorship history to obscure the more productive and interesting readings that Hanley's novel might lend itself to. One of these is as a "liminal" text, in the terms described by Arnold van Gennep. In many aspects the novel plays out ideas concerning liminality that van Gennep and his successor, Victor Turner, deal with, while in other ways it departs strikingly from their theories. The aim of this chapter, then, is to discuss Hanley's *Boy* in this previously unexplored dimension.

2) Liminal theory as seen by Hanley

Van Gennep, a contemporary of Emile Durkheim, Marcell Maus and Henri Hubert, is thought to have produced the founding text on liminal theory with *Les Rites de Passage* (1909),[14] and Turner, drawing upon and expanding the works of van Gennep along with those of Durkheim, Max Weber, Edward Evans-Pritchett and Bronislaw Malinowski, made significant further developments in the field with such studies as *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) and *The Ritual Process* (1969).[15] Both men lived for years among tribal societies different to their own, and conducted studies into those communities' ritual practices in an attempt to find common features underlying all forms of human symbolic behaviour.

The term liminality first appears in *Les Rites de Passage*, and is used in the context of two different types of ritual. One of these, which van Gennep describes as "rites which accompany and bring about the change of the year, the season, or the month,"[16] will only be touched upon here. Of more importance is the second type of liminality, which is found in rituals that initiate a subject into a new status, group or role. In his inaugural work van Gennep concluded that "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another,"[17] and his term *rites de passage,* generally translated as "rites of passage" though Solon T. Kimball suggests that "rites of transition" might be closer to the original meaning, describes the ritual activities that must be carried out to mark the occurrence of each of these passages.[18] Turner, in *The Ritual Process,* details Van Gennep's theory as to the pattern these rituals inevitably conform to:

> Van Gennep has shown that rites of passage or "transition" are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen,* signifying "threshold" in Latin), and aggregation. The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phrase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated.[19]

It is agreed by all writers on ritual practices that the rituals accompanying puberty are one of the most important of these rites of passage, comparable to or even greater in significance than the ceremonies associated with birth, marriage, elevation to higher social status, and death. A crucial aspect of van Gennep's work, and of relevance

here, is his contention that "social puberty," as he terms it, is distinct from physiological puberty; that the two are "essentially different and only rarely converge."[20] Although this is one of his more controversial assertions, his argument is sound enough: most cultures choose a standard age at which their initiands are thought ready to go through rites-of-passage rituals and put all their young through these rituals when they reach it, but the physiological changes of puberty happen to different people at different ages and puberty can be characterised by any number of bodily changes that do not occur at the same time.[21] *Boy* is, at the very core, a tale of a prepubescent male forced to take initiations into the world of adult sexuality when he is quite manifestly not ready to do so.

Hanley, of course, would not have read Turner in 1931, and it is most unlikely he would have read van Gennep; *Les Rites de Passage* was not translated into English until 1960 and nowhere is there any evidence that Hanley spoke French well enough to make it through so dense a text. But van Gennep's work, as Solon T. Kimball writes in his introduction to the 1960 edition, was the continuation of an "intellectual ferment"[22] that began in the first half on the nineteenth century with the founding anthropological works of Adolph Bastian and Auguste Comte, and was furthered in the latter half by Herbert Spencer and Lewis H. Morgan's new interpretations of Darwinism and E. B. Tylor's theories of "animism." Their ideas were already recognised by 1909, and van Gennep in *Les Rites de Passage* was adding to an existing corpus of knowledge. On van Gennep's particular area of research, Kimball writes:

> Systematic ethnographic studies of peoples from all portions of the globe had begun to make their appearance. Accounts frequently used for comparative analysis included descriptions of the native Australians, the Todas of India, the Masai of Africa, and numerous other tribal groups in America, Asia, and Africa. These detailed descriptions were a welcome addition to the earlier accounts provided by missionary, traveller, or colonial administrator.[23]

This growing interest in tribal cultures and primitivism was pervasive indeed in the intellectual disciplines. Much of the modern dance described in this study's previous two chapters, from *Le Sacre de Printemps* to the Asconan movement, owes much to it. Martin Green notes that Carl Gustav Jung, who visited Ascona, believed that a new primitivism based on sun-worship would replace the existing social and religious

world order.[24] In English literature such ideas are most detectable in stories including D. H. Lawrence's 'The Woman who Rode Away' (first published 1925) and W. Somerset Maugham's 'Rain' (1921). In 1913 Lawrence read Jane Ellen Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* which was published that year, and her anthropological theories came to influence both his writing on pre-industrial cultures and his view, discussed in the previous two chapters, that modern society prevented man from attaining a healthy awareness of his inherent instincts and drives.[25] Justin Replogle observes that W. H. Auden held similar views to this Lawrentian perspective, though Auden's anthropological interests also derive from the ideas of John Layard and Homer Lane,[26] who were themselves influenced by Malinowski.[27]

All I have done here is touch fleetingly upon the impact of new anthropology upon the art and literature of the early twentieth century, as sadly there is insufficient space in this chapter to fully chart the intricacies of this interdisciplinary dimension. For the purposes of the present discussion, T. S. Eliot should be concentrated on as he is of particular relevance. Eliot was greatly influenced by the idea that all human beings are essentially alike regardless of when, where and how they live, and that the myths and rituals of ancient cultures can be used to interpret the present. This is the principle he uses to unite the disparate elements of *The Waste Land,* and the reason why the characters in *A Game of Chess* are, as Terry Eagleton observes, "all, in one way or another, associated with primitive or classical myth."[28] Eliot writes in the notes to his epic poem that it has two anthropological sources: he is "indebted in general" to J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough,* a work which "has influenced our generation profoundly," but most central of all to the poem is Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance,* published in 1920.[29] Weston's book, which discusses fertility cults and the Grail legend, provided a founding vision that motivated much of Eliot's writing including *The Waste Land:* the idea that there is "a common principle underlying all forms of human life."[30]

In the chapter of *From Ritual to Romance* titled 'The Sword Dance', Weston draws parallels between the Indian Dance of the Maruts, the classical Greek Kouretes and Korybantes, and her contemporary form of modern dance, in order to argue that the Kouretes is "an Initiation Dance, analogous to those discussed by M. van Gennep in his *Rites de Passage.*"[31] This direct reference to van Gennep shows that his work was known in the 1920s, and though there was not yet an English translation of *Les Rites de Passage,* the ideas discussed in that book were accessible to the likes of

Hanley and Eliot through writers such as Weston. Initiations are also discussed in Weston's sections on Mithraism and the Attis Cult, the "Perilous Chapel" segments of the Grail legend, and the links between traditions of the Mystery and Masonic ritual. On sword-dances, mummers' plays and Morris dances she remarks that they are "an inherited tradition from our warrior ancestors...solemn, ceremonial (in some cases there is reason to believe initiatory) dances, performed at stated seasons of the year...[and]...designed to preserve and promote the regular and ordered sequence of the processes of nature."[32] It is in rituals relating to initiation and the seasonal cycle where liminal theory is at its most relevant. Weston's work illustrates how debates of liminality were current at the time she was writing, even though the term itself might not have been used.

Hanley may not have read van Gennep, but most intellectuals of the thirties did read *From Ritual to Romance,* usually as a result of reading *The Waste Land,* and in Weston's work many of van Gennep's ideas are played out. We shall see later that it appears quite likely Hanley did read Weston, but even if he did not, he must have become aware during his period of exhaustive study and self-teaching over the twenties that such debates were in the air. My use of van Gennep and Turner to discuss the content of *Boy,* then, is not to make the absurd suggestion that there is a direct link between that novel and two studies its author could not have read. How far Hanley intended *Boy's* events to enact ideas of liminal theory, and how far its correspondence to these ideas is coincidence, we may never fully know. But van Gennep and Turner are used because they put into words more clearly than any other writers on liminality the debates that were current at the time *Boy* was written.

3) *Boy* and rites of passage rituals

Liminality, margins and initiations might be said to be the central themes of *Boy.* Fearon is on a number of metaphorical thresholds as the novel commences: he is about to leave school and take up adult work, and at thirteen years of age he is on the brink of puberty. He is also portrayed throughout as effeminate, not yet "manly," very much a child rather than an adolescent male. Hanley tells us that "Most of the other boys were bigger, more robust, more hardened to things,"[33] and a teacher asks early in the novel "Fearon, why can't you be manly like the rest of my boys and tell me what is wrong?"[34] Fearon is contrasted physically with his father in the first

chapter to show how he differs from that grown man. Everything about the boy is tiny and light: he has a "small and slender frame," he is "thin, and certainly undersized," "his neck was thin," and "His hands were thin, almost bloodless, and the fingers tapered to a point much like those of a woman."[35] His father, on the other hand, is referred to as "that huge individual" and "a very hairy individual," with a "heavy face" and "heavy jaws and huge mouth," whose "hands were huge, very red, with great blue veins running almost to the finger tips."[36] Hanley wants us to note the deliberate comparison between these two physical descriptions, which occur in the same chapter and within a few pages of each other. The repetition of "thin" in the account of Fearon is set against corresponding repetitions of "huge" and "heavy" in the description of his father, and even the difference between their fingertips is drawn attention to. Hanley also points out shortly after his delineation of Mr. Fearon that the boy's mother is sturdier than her son too: he tells us her "great back appeared like that of a coal-heaver."[37]

From these early passages, *Boy* seems to be shaping up to be the kind of *Bildungsroman* in which the hero, a weakling at first, is tested by the trials of life and emerges stronger and fully matured from his experiences. And sure enough, amid the opening chapters' endless presentations of Fearon as a puny whelp, and exhortations from his family and teachers that he be more like a man, come a number of events that van Gennep would term "rituals of status elevation," which, we might assume on a first reading, will initiate the boy into puberty and eventually bring him to full adulthood. Though the whole novel tells the story of these transitions over its roughly ten-day span, Fearon's experiences can be separated into three sections: firstly his day working on the docks, where an actual structured initiation ritual takes place; secondly his voyage on the *Hernian;* and thirdly his two fateful encounters in the Alexandrian brothels. Hanley appears to instil in these events a rich profusion of symbolism that invokes contemporary ideas on the initiation rituals of primitive cultures, and he may be deliberately drawing a link between the modern-world instances of the narrative and the debates on liminality that were current around the time of his writing. I do not wish to dwell excessively on the details here, for, as noted earlier, much of the apparent interplay between *Boy* and liminal theory may be unintentional. It is sufficient to briefly list the most noteworthy examples.

"The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both." (Turner, *The Forest of Symbols,* p. 94.)

Fearon is taken away from school at the start of the novel and placed into an entirely unknown world of hard manual dock work. His initiation by the other boys follows shortly, mirroring the structure of ritual identified by van Gennep. When he stows away on the *Hernian,* the phase of separation is even more absolute than the previous one: Fearon cuts himself off not only from family and school, but also from the community, city and country that is all he has previously known, entering a space that is entirely new geographically as well as ideologically. Alexandria too, into which Fearon is taken for his initiation into heterosexual activity, is separate from any life he has previously known by virtue of being a foreign country.

One of the words van Gennep uses for the liminal subject is "passenger," and this is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, a passenger is precisely what Fearon is during the *Hernian* chapters, and the Greek reading of the word "limen," meaning "port" or "point of departure," also supports van Gennep's idea of social or spiritual detachment reflected by physical distancing. The possible play on the word "passenger" is also relevant here: a passenger is one involved in passage, and here this may relate to either geographical space or the passages of the body. Stan Smith writes that this latter interpretation is among those implied in the line from T. S. Eliot's poem 'Gerontion': "History has many cunning passages."[38]

The novice is considered dead...it lasts for a fairly long time and consists of a physical and mental weakening which is undoubtedly intended to make him lose all recollection of his childhood existence. (Van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage,* p. 75.)

Fearon, exhausted after his day of dock work in the bilges and engines, is on the verge of collapse and falls asleep in a boiler. He is dragged out by the other boys to be initiated. Stowing away on the *Hernian,* he hides in a coal bunker and is in there for days, coming close to death before he is accidentally discovered. Turner states that in the cultures he observed, "The Neophyte may be buried, forced to lie motionless in the posture and direction of customary burial, may be stained black...The metaphor of dissolution is often applied to neophytes; they are allowed to go filthy and identified with the earth, the generalized matter into which every

specific individual is rendered down."[39] Van Gennep states that "Where the novice is considered dead, he is resurrected and taught how to live, but differently than in childhood."[40]

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom and ceremonial. (Turner, *The Ritual Process,* p. 95.)

This accurately describes Fearon's status when he comes on board The *Hernian,* which is not a passenger ship and belongs to a company that has stopped taking on boys as crewmembers. Consequently there is literally no place for Fearon on board, and though the sailors set him to work straight away, nobody seems to have any real clue what to do with him. The Captain initially plans to hand him over to the authorities in Alexandria when they dock, but can only think to pass him to his steward when it comes to finding something for him to do on the journey. Both the steward and the bosun flatly refuse to take Fearon under their wing, and the cook, who grudgingly admits he might be able to find a use for him, says: "I'm afraid, sonny, that you have placed yourself in a bit of a mess, for as things stand at present you aren't even a member of the crew. You'll just be used, as the saying is."[41]

Turner comments that "Liminal entities may be represented as possessing nothing,"[42] and Fearon has no belongings but the clothes he stands up in and "a pair of dungaree trousers and a jersey that one of the sailors had given him."[43] He is not even paid for his work at first, until the lookout man dies and he is taken on as an ordinary seaman. Turner also observes that in some cultures, novices' "very names are taken from them and each is called solely by the generic term for 'neophyte' or 'initiand.'"[44] I can find only one instance when a member of The *Hernian's* crew refers to Fearon by his name, and for the rest of the time he is called "boy," "sonny" or, most commonly, by a term of insult.

Neophytes...may be symbolically assigned characteristics of both sexes, irrespective of their biological sex. (Turner, *The Forest of Symbols,* p. 98.)

From the very beginning of the book, Fearon is ceaselessly assigned female characteristics: his headmaster thinks his fingers are "much like those of a woman,"[45] his father constantly berates him for not being manly enough, and crewmen on the *Hernian* observe that he is "like a little girl,"[46] has "slender white hands like those of

a girl,"[47] and that he "should have joined the Brownies."[48] The double meaning of this last word was in use by 1931 (Hanley uses it in *Boy* and *The Furys* in this context) and it points to how Fearon's gender identity is rendered yet more ambivalent by the four seamen who treat him as a woman, raping him or making sexual advances. Furthermore, the insults they heap on Fearon compound his androgynous status, by on the one hand assigning him feminine characteristics ("Cissy,"[49] "wimp,"[50] "twim,")[51] while on the other jibing about his incipient male sexuality, mostly in the form of masturbation jokes. ("Been using two hands, have you?"[52] "How's your arm?"[53] "Which hand did you use last night?")[54] As Fordham remarks, ""Sexuality becomes the site, the crucial space for the determination of identity, so much so that Arthur becomes convinced that his inchoate manhood is being called into question."[55]

Neophytes...are often disguised, in masks or grotesque costumes or striped with white, red or black clay, and the like. (Turner, *The Forest of Symbols,* p. 98.)

Van Gennep regards such daubing as a non-permanent version of the physical mutilations that many cultures make upon their young to mark the coming of a new phase in life, which may include body-piercing, tattooing or circumcision. Weston, calling on van Gennep when writing about the Greek Kouretes, observes: "daubing the skin with white clay is a frequent practice in these primitive rituals. To this I would add that it is a noteworthy fact that in our modern survivals of these dances the performers are, as a rule, dressed in white."[56] During Fearon's initiation in the engine room, the other boys coat him in shale oil and cotton waste. The white-coloured waste stands in here for the white clay referred to in the segment above, indicating a final link between Hanley and van Gennep via the studies of Weston.

The correspondence with liminal theory expressed by Hanley in these examples, and his skill at weaving such ideas into his narrative, is understandable given the common ground between personal experience and the status of liminal entities as discussed by van Gennep. To fully grasp this dimension a key text is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature.* Of particular importance is Deleuze and Guattari's contention, also applied to Hanley's works by Howard Slater, that "if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible

community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility."[57] Van Gennep uses "margin" and "limen" as synonymous terms, so if we speak of Hanley as being "in the margins" it becomes possible to interpret him as a liminal figure, just as it is for his character Arthur Fearon.

Hanley's life was without doubt one spent "betwixt and between," to use Turner's phrase. He was a working-class Liverpool-Irishman who left school at an early age like most boys of his social background, worked at sea for a time and then, again like many other young working-class men of the time, did his stint in the infantry when the First World War began. But in 1919 he left his job after one last voyage and spent the next decade reading broadly and teaching himself to become a writer, while taking a succession of jobs on land, mostly railway work, to support himself. After finally publishing his first three books he moved to Wales, and, after moving around between a few Welsh villages, settled in Llanfechain and lived there for most of the rest of his life.[58]

Like many other writers of the modernist period, Hanley can therefore be seen as a kind of exile. He lived in neither the working-class Liverpool-Irish community he was born into, nor the world of London society and its literati, apparently feeling he could not fully belong in either. His dilemma is one shared by many other working-class writers of the thirties, and indeed provincial middle-class ones such as Dylan Thomas: on the one hand wanting to become published authors and being encouraged by established literary figures, and on the other unable to forget that writing was considered a bourgeois pursuit and that for them to take it up would be to abandon part of their class identity. A writer who struggled with this same dichotomy, and with whom Hanley bears comparison, is D. H. Lawrence. Like Hanley, Lawrence's working-class origins were central to his reception in the literary world, he attracted both critical approval and a measure of controversy as a writer, and also lived in self-imposed exile for many years. As discussed in the previous chapter Hanley, like most working-class writers of the thirties, was inspired by Lawrence, whose influence is detectable in *Boy* as it is in *Resurrexit Dominus* (1934) and many of his other works. Fearon's reluctance to follow his parents into manual work recalls both Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers* and also the hero of Hanley's first novel *Drift* (1930), a work which calls upon of Lawrence a good deal. (Edward Stokes suggests that the very title *Drift* was "suggested by Lawrence's well-known description of Paul Morel towards the end of his novel, 'naked of everything, with the drift towards death.'")[59] The influence of

Lawrence is also evident in the prose style of *Boy,* particularly in the sex scenes. Compare this, from *Women in Love:*

> Unconsciously, with her sensitive fingertips, she was tracing the back of his thighs, following some mysterious life-flow there. She had discovered something, something more than wonderful, more wonderful than life itself. It was the strange mystery of his life-motion, there, at the back of his thighs, down the flanks. It was a strange reality of his being, the very stuff of being, there in the strange downflow of the thighs. It was here she discovered him one of the sons of God such as were in the beginning of the world, not a man, something other, something more.[60]

with this from *Boy:*

> He lay. A peculiar silence filled the room. Thought her sleeping and immediately his hands began to explore, to divine, to receive their sustenance of feeling, to know and to pluck from that moment something that like knowledge was new, and strange and vital to himself. To draw out that moment of time and bliss and abandonment the richness that in its very essence was a candle flutter, a flame come and gone, a flower opened and closed, a note heard and forgotten, a song sung and ended.[61]

Peter Marks has observed that Lawrence "often remains a liminal figure," excluded from the "Men of 1914" literary group,[62] and Bonnie Kime Scott agrees that Lawrence's "origins as the son of a coal-miner and a schoolteacher place him in a decidedly different position on the social scale from Pound, Lewis, Eliot or even Joyce."[63] Michael H. Levenson adds that "the movement [of modernism] is that associated with Pound, Hulme, Ford, Lewis and Eliot; Joyce, Woolf and Lawrence loom on the periphery."[64] Somebody else standing alongside Lawrence on this periphery, or margin, or limen, must surely be Hanley.

This interpretation is useful for arriving at a full appreciation of *Boy's* final chapters, for as much as that novel in its early chapters appears to conform to themes and ideas popular among writers on liminal theory, it ends in a manner that confounds any reading of it as a text about Fearon's initiation into adulthood and adult sexuality. Van Gennep writes that "Coitus as the final act in initiation ceremonies I interpret...as a rite of incorporation."[65] If this is so, and if we read Fearon's voyage on the *Hernian* as a metaphor for van Gennep's liminal phase, then we might expect the boy's sexual consummation with the first Alexandrian prostitute to form his "phase of reaggregation or reincorporation." Though the ritual in the engine room, and the rape

on board ship, can both be seen as earlier initiations into the sexual world, this is Fearon's first mutually consenting encounter and his first intimate moment with a woman. It should, then, bring the boy into adulthood, making a man of him and earning the respect of the shipmates who so far have treated him as a child. This would complete the van Geneppian pattern of separation-limen-reincorporation that Hanley has so closely adhered to up till now, and would also meet our expectations of *Boy* as a novel.

But nothing of the sort happens. Fearon's dalliance brings him no awakening to the joys of adult sexuality: after the disastrous experience he certainly feels different, but this is phrased in terms of regret and sorrow. Hanley tells us the boy's eyes "were without expression, they had lost their former sparkle," and the following line "Something in the boy seemed to have died"[66] grimly presages the fate that his meetings with prostitutes will soon lead him to. There is also none of the acceptance into adult society that the end of a rites-of-passage puberty ritual is supposed to bring. Donagan, the irresponsible but not unlikeable sailor who takes Fearon on his first trip to the brothel, clearly feels he will benefit from the experience, as his comradely ribaldry and staunch defence of the boy show. ("He can mount as good as anybody.")[67] But everybody else on The *Hernian* seems to loathe Fearon with even more intensity for what he has done. Indeed, it's startling and more than a little peculiar how every single man on the ship seems to turn against him. The bosun, the bosun's mate, the Captain, the diver in the port watch, the First Officer and the quartermaster all bombard Fearon with verbal abuse or dreadful warnings about what will happen to him if he tries it again, even though some of them have previously treated him with kindness. Furthermore, with the one exception of Donagan, none of the friends Fearon has made on board attempt to stand by him. It's true that the other crewman do not seem to hold Donagan in high regard (the steward refers to him as a "mad Irish bastard"),[68] and also that Fearon's friend Larkin has already warned the boy to "keep away from tail in Alexandria,"[69] but what about O'Rourke, who has "photographs of naked women"[70] on his wall and previously encouraged Fearon to go and find a girl when they docked? Surely we could expect at least him to take the boy's side? It's hard to understand why the entire ship unites to condemn Fearon in this way, just because he has been with a woman. If *Boy* as a whole is the story of Fearon's initiation into manhood, and if the voyage to Alexandria is indeed a metaphor for van Gennep's liminal phase, then it ends with the very opposite of what

we have been led to expect. Far from initiating Fearon fully into the adult world, his first heterosexual encounter turns him into an outcast.

Fearon, still hoping sexual consummation can make him something more than a mere boy, becomes desperate for a second visit to the girl. ("Men boozing ashore at every port," he mutters, "Bringing women on board, though a boy mustn't do that. Oh no. You're only a bloody boy. Boy or no boy, they won't come it over me after this.")[71] Considering he seemed terrified throughout his first encounter and fell into a fit afterwards, his sudden eagerness here seems a rather awkward transition; I tend to agree with Edward Stokes that "both Arthur and his creator seem to have forgotten that Arthur is only pretending to be fifteen."[72] But this time, the consequence of his actions is far worse that just earning the scorn of his shipmates, for he goes with a different girl and contracts the fatal dose of syphilis that ultimately leads his Captain to perform the mercy killing that ends the book.

It's a shocking conclusion for a novel whose early chapters so strongly suggest that this will be the tale of Fearon's successful journey into manhood, especially since such conventional *Bildungsromans* were so popular during the modernist period. Annis Pratt uses Joyce's Stephen Dedalus as her model when she states that all heroes of *Bildungsromans* and quest narratives go through "initiatory adventures that consummate in the simultaneous discovery of woman and earth,"[73] while Christopher Isherwood in *Lions and Shadows* said of his "specifically male" generation that the "cradle to the coming of age novel" was the symptomatic text.[74] Furthermore, much of *Boy* closely resembles a commonplace of thirties literature discussed by Samuel Hynes, Stan Smith, Valentine Cunningham, Janet Montefiore and others: the journey or frontier narrative, principal examples of which include *Over the Frontier* by Stevie Smith (1938), *The Wild Goose Chase* by Rex Warner (1937) and *Journey to the Border* by Edward Upward (1938). Montefiore states that detectable in these works is a tendency to "represent a subjective progress towards Marxist enlightenment through the metaphor of traversing a borderland."[75] The *Hernian's* voyage does suggest this; after Fearon is discovered in the coal-bunker it is mentioned that the ship has already passed the fastnet, so turning back is impossible. But the "Marxist enlightenment" Montefiore refers to never comes. For one thing Fearon dies, but it's significant that shortly before this he gives up on all his aspirations to escape the working-class life he was born into:

> Why had he done such a foolish thing [stowing away on The *Hernian*]? After all, the lads amongst whom he worked at the docks, they were happy. At the end of the day's work they could always go home to a good meal and after that there was a football or cricket match or the pictures. But there was nothing here. Nothing at all. What a fool he had been, what a ridiculous show he had made of himself. Promising himself that one day he would walk the bridge as the first officer or captain. Why, if his father saw him in that position he'd collapse. But now it was his turn to collapse. He had to undo all the things. Begin everything again. Recant. Reveal his vanity and determination for what they really were. Ghosts and nothing more.
>
> "I'm a soft bugger all right," he said to himself. "A real noodle as mother would say. Well, I give in. I give in entirely. I'll go by what they say in the future. Though I did have a lousy rotten time stuck in those bunkers."[76]

The boy who throughout the novel has variously planned on being a teacher, a chemist or an officer, now decides that he will just stick to being an obedient uncomplaining drudge instead. Not that he even has the chance to do that—soon after making this speech, he is dead.

Jack Hilton's *Laugh at Polonius: or, Yet There is Woman* (1942) provides a relevant comparison with *Boy* in that it is the very kind of "initiatory adventure" story that Montefiore refers to. Hanley and Hilton each had different objectives in producing their respective novels, and the content of *Polonius* can be used to illustrate how far removed *Boy* is from the pattern of the conventional working-class *Bildungsroman.* The tale of Leslie Stott, detailed at length in the first chapter of this thesis, is similar to Arthur Fearon's in that it too involves a number of initiations—into mill-work, into adolescence, into sexuality—but each of these make Hilton's hero stronger, taking him through the liminal phase and bringing him into manhood. In an interview with Andy Croft, Hilton made a remark that reveals much about the personal perspective that informed his writing, and sets it apart from Hanley's:

> I only wanted to be a two hours a day socialist. I wanted to play football, and I wanted to enjoy myself, and wanted to read different kinds of books. I couldn't accept that kind of total life. And so I never accepted. I still mixed with many of them and you could say in some ways I was slightly, occasionally a neo-Communist.[77]

The fact that Hilton's words recall, unintentionally, Fearon's speech when he decides to give up all his hopes and ambitions, is proof enough that *Boy* could never belong to the school of hopeful socialist fiction Hilton specialised in. Hanley's portrayal of a

working-class youth's adolescence and initiation into adult life can seem pessimistic indeed when it is compared with its equivalent in the writing of Hilton. It might be argued, then, that through *Boy* Hanley expresses his own struggle to be accepted into bourgeois intellectual society: that status-elevation is impossible for working-class writers like him, and that his own marginal or threshold status, like Fearon's, will never improve. But it is crucial to note that *Boy* is not mere passive mirroring of Hanley's autobiographical details. Hanley, as I hope to have argued convincingly in this chapter, would appear to have known about liminal theory as theory, and cannot be said to have only experienced liminality through the circumstances of his life. *Boy* deliberately draws a connection between key anthropological ideas the position working-class writers like Hanley found themselves occupying in 1930s British society.

In undermining his own liminal metaphor in the final chapter of *Boy,* Hanley resists the idea that "incorporation" into a particular set of values brings any adequate solution. In the thirties there was every reason to feel this way. Both Communism and fascism had begun to exploit the more sinister dimensions contained within the idea of incorporation, and had shown its potential as a means of subordination and control, leading to enforced conformity to state regulations with severe punishments for those who stepped out of line. Hitler's concentration camps, Stalin's gulags and even the literary dictates of Zhdanov, discussed at the beginning of this thesis and throughout, are manifestations of this. Hanley was also aware of another principal contention of the present study, that working-class writers of the thirties were prone to incorporation within prescribed literary categories, which failed to adequately represent the depth and complexity of the work they produced. *Boy's* rejection of a happy ending brought about by the completion of Fearon's liminal stage makes the argument that happiness is not necessarily brought about by rites of incorporation. Hanley, whose position as a modernist "exile" betwixt and between the working- and middle-class was of his own making and one he clung to fervently, recognises that there is much to be said for a liminal status. For it was there, in Hanley's experience, that a working-class writer of the 1930s could find true creative freedom.

Conclusion: Some Thoughts

It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to existing bodies of work on 1930s working-class writing and lead to further research and findings in this important field, so much of which remains unexplored. One particular area of investigation touched upon by my work, which, regrettably, I did not have the space to give full consideration to, is the intricate series of influences that art, dance and anthropological theory exercised over writers and poets of the modernist period. This is glanced at only fleetingly in my final four chapters, and there is potential here for rewarding further study. Similarly, my focus on four different neglected writers meant that I was unable to provide comprehensive studies on any of them that gave full consideration to the entire range of the works they produced. While a handful of published books on Hanley exist, there remains a pressing need for dedicated critical studies of Garrett, Hilton and Phelan. This, of course, could also be said of most of the working-class writers from my period of study.

Through my research into working-class writing I have discovered that moments of especial interest in this research area have coincided with times of notable tumult and upheaval that affect the working class in particular. The twenties and thirties were such a time, as detailed in my introduction, and from them came the writing that has been the subject of the present study. Likewise in the Thatcher years of the 1980s, which brought miners' strikes, power cuts, race riots and unemployment figures topping three million, new awareness of working-class culture was once again detectable. Indeed, a symptom of this was a rekindling of interest in literature of the thirties that also dealt with the suffering of the poor and underprivileged in changing times. In the eighties new collections of Garrett's stories were released, works by Hanley were reprinted, and Worpole's seminal *Dockers and Detectives* was published.

It seems that in the opening years of the twenty-first century many of the concerns that the working class faced during these two earlier periods of turmoil are beginning to resurface. The last half-decade has brought strikes in the education, transport, public and emergency service sectors, fascist rallies descending into violence in Bradford and Oldham, economic uncertainty in the wake of the September the Eleventh terrorist atrocities, huge fatalities among working-class soldiers sent to war

in Afghanistan and Iraq, and a national media that preaches equality and tolerance whilst privileging an exclusivist middle-class perspective. Perhaps a new period is approaching in which the working class will once again find a voice of resistance, challenge and subversion through literature, and perhaps, therefore, it is timely that we remember the lessons of the past if we are to understand the conflicts of the future.

—August 2005

Notes

Introduction

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Chapter One

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"Feeling is like poison and a certain kind of high explosive": torture, homoeroticism and subversion in James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*.

During the First World War, two British working-class infantrymen become separated from their patrol in the trenches of France. They encounter a young German soldier who surrenders and becomes their captive. He is then savagely beaten, sexually tortured and murdered, shortly before the two British troops are themselves killed in a bombing raid. That's the premise of *The German Prisoner*, James Hanley's second book, and one of the most powerful, harrowing and important works he ever produced.

It's unlikely that any conventional publisher would have accepted The German Prisoner in 1930, when censorship rules concerning overtly violent or gay writing were extremely severe. Two years later, publishing house Boriswood were faced with legal action when Hanley's novel *Boy*, which they had released the previous year in 1931, was judged an obscene libel. Boriswood pleaded guilty and were fined a total of £400, while the book itself was banned and remained so for almost sixty years. *Boy*, a disturbing work in its own right, deals with many of the same themes as *The German Prisoner*, but even so does not have the impact and overwhelming horror of Hanley's earlier work. This perhaps explains why *The German Prisoner* was produced as a luxury edition, with vellum pages and a gilt-stamped buckram cover, priced at one guinea, and-crucially-privately printed, to allow its unconventional content to bypass contemporary publication laws.

Richard Aldington, whose financial assistance was essential in producing *The German Prisoner*'s print run of five hundred, was a staunch supporter of Hanley's works. His introduction to the edition anticipates the objections that such a story would raise in a typical bourgeois readership, before going

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on to pugnaciously champion the emerging form of 1930s working-class writing to which Hanley can be said to belong:

> Here we see human nature ruthlessly exposed in its most abject and terrible circumstances; we see the unspeakable wrong which is worked upon human souls by those who are supposed to be its guardians and guides. Why are these men in this hell? Mr. Hanley leaves us to find the answer. But what force and vitality there are in this presentation of men driven to madness under the inconceivable stress of modern war...
>
> "But," it will be said, "there are so many dreadful dirty words in the talk of these two men. Even though they are tortured to madness, we cannot sympathise with men who talk like that."
>
> Well, you ought to. You were not afraid to send men to that hell, you did everything you could to get them there, and congratulated yourselves on your patriotic fervour. (2)

Aldington's warmth and respect for Hanley is not to be questioned, and his preference for powerful, hard-hitting writing over bourgeois art-for-art's-sake recalls the sentiments expressed in his own story of World War One, *The Death of a Hero* (1929). (3) However, Aldington's interpretation of *The German Prisoner* itself is not without faults. It's not sufficient to say that the sole purpose of Hanley's text is to impress upon its readers the corruption and depravity that working class soldiers were reduced to in a war for the upper classes' sakes. I would like to argue that Hanley wants us to understand more than Aldington's reading suggests, and that the real function of *The German Prisoner* is to subvert certain key bourgeois concepts associated with the Great War, thereby providing a uniquely working-class voice.

The first problem with Aldington's appraisal of *The German Prisoner* is that if Hanley's intention is to portray "men driven to madness by the inconceivable stress of modern war," then he has chosen a strange pair of protagonists with which to do so. Of the two British soldiers, the Irishman Peter O'Garra is

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the one we learn more about and it is from his perspective that the majority of the story is told. On page eight Hanley presents us with a list of no fewer than twenty-three terms of insult by which O'Garra has been known over the last fifteen years, including "Belfast bastard," "misanthrope," "sucker," "blasted sod," "strange man," "toad" and "pervert."(4) This last one is clearly justified even if the others are not, for we are told that O'Garra has a habit of stalking and frightening women back home in Ireland. (There are two references to his "lonely nights, those fruitless endeavours beneath the clock in Middle Abbey Street.") (5) But unsavoury as O'Garra seems, his Mancunian crony and squadron-mate Elston is even worse. Apparently, "When he [O'Garra] had first set eyes on Elston, he had despised him, there was something in this man entirely repugnant to him." (6) One hardly likes to think what kind of "something" could be so appalling to a man like O'Garra. But my purpose in drawing attention to all this is to argue that surely, if Hanley's intention is to show working-class men brutalised by the horrors of modern war as Aldington suggests, then why does he involve characters who seem immensely brutalised from the very beginning? Wouldn't it make more sense to portray Elston and O'Garra as more conventional working class characters, not possessed of their debased and repulsive tendencies at first, but developing them as a result of the hardships they face?

John Fordham makes a similar point when he remarks that *The German Prisoner* "is a curious story from one whose writer's sense of mission derives from a desire for working-class emancipation, since its two soldier protagonists from the ranks are represented as unspeakably sadistic."(7)Certainly Hanley presents us with an unflinching view of their sadism in the torture scene itself, which in places becomes difficult to read. It takes some effort to look beyond the stark portrayal of violence but, if we do, we can observe two important elements that contribute much to the deeper meanings of this story. One is the strong undercurrent of homosexual desire, about which more later, and the other is the political and psychological dimensions behind the act of torture itself.

Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and*

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Unmaking of the World provides an attempt to theorise the politics of torture. She begins by arguing that "To have pain is to have certainty;" or to put it another way, pain is one of the most vivid and indisputable emotional states.(8)Somebody in pain will be in no doubt as to whether they are in pain, and though they may be able to convince others that they are not, the sufferer cannot fool him or herself in this way.(9) For Scarry, the undeniable reality of pain is at the core of the political intent behind the act of torture:

> The physical pain [of the victim] is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of "incontestable reality" on that power that has brought it into being. It is, of course, precisely because the reality of that power is so highly contestable, the regime so unstable, that torture is being used. (10)

This interpretation is useful in understanding the activities of Elston and O'Garra as they set about inflicting agonies on the eponymous German prisoner, Otto Reiburg of Muenchen. The two British soldiers repeatedly announce their opposition to Reiburg's leaders, countrymen and nation, thereby associating themselves with Britain and her allies in the War's greater scheme. ("We're trapped here. Through you. Through you and your bloody lot. If only you hadn't come.")(11) In perverting the role of "defenders of the nation" Elston and O'Garra legitimate the atrocities they commit upon Reiburg, convincing themselves that their acts of violence are carried out in the name of King and country. According to Scarry, one of the functions of torture is to establish a framework of allegiance and opposition:

> Pain is a purely physical experience of negation, an immediate sensory rendering of "against," of something being against one, of something one must be against. Even though it occurs within oneself, it is at once identified as 'not oneself," "not me," as something so alien it must right now be gotten rid of... it is the very nature of torture to in each present moment identify, announce, act out in brutality, accusation, and challenge the state of its own otherness, the state of being against, the fact of being the enemy.(12)

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The warring faction that Elston and O'Garra ally themselves with can be seen as a "contestable power" or "unstable regime" in two ways. Firstly, their assertions that their deeds are only what their nation demands of them in wartime are tenuous, to say the least. They are simply two rogue soldiers in a trench, separated from all their commanding officers, acting without the orders or approval of any higher-ranking figure. What power they have over the situation in a non-military sense is also dubious, for although they successfully dominate their prisoner, both know that an untold number of enemies, hidden in the fog, have them surrounded. Their torture of Reiburg can be seen as a desperate attempt to cling to some illusion of power over the opposing faction, whilst both British troopers steadily descend into madness caused by this terrible fear for their lives. Hanley portrays their breakdown into paranoia and delusion in every graphic detail: their repeated and obsessive cries that there is no escape, their verbal and physical fights with each other, and their increasingly deranged view that Reiburg is the one personally responsible for the War and all their suffering. Just before the final torture scene in which Reiburg is killed, Elston screams at him:

Make the funkin' fog rise and we'll give you anything. Everything. Make the blasted war stop, now, right away. Make all this mud and shite vanish. Will you. You bastards started it. Will you now. See! We are both going mad. We are going to kill ourselves.(13)

The defenders of Britain and all her values are in reality no more than two madmen fearing their deaths, which duly come to them in the story's final paragraph. But the power they claim to represent is unstable for another reason, and that is because the very idea of nineteenth-century British values and the politics of Empire were thrown into question by the events of the Great War. New technology and new methods of fighting changed the way in which battles were fought, and made it clear that wars such as those previously won by the British Empire would not come again. The world had changed, and a new form of combat now brought fatality statistics so high that men were reduced to

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nothing but numbers. For many, a telling symbol that the old order had passed and a new, darker age was beginning was the enormous losses that were suffered among the younger generation, such as in 1916 when thousands of British youths were unceremoniously slaughtered during the Battle of the Somme. (Hanley' s elder brother Joe was among them.)(14) Events such as this led to a growing fear that the natural order had been sacrificed, and continuity and social stability were now under threat from the new, advancing class of Yeatsian "rough beasts."

Otto Reiburg can be seen as an image of doomed youth after this fashion, while Hanley's descriptions of O'Garra and Elston repeatedly portray them as brutal and physically repellent. There is an abundance of animal imagery: Elston has teeth "like a horse's,"(15) O'Garra is referred to as a "rat,"(16) and the two men maul Reiburg's body "like mad dogs."(17) Furthermore, in a descriptive passage comparing Elston and Reiburg's physical appearances, we are told that "Nature had hewn him [Elston] differently, had denied him the young German's grace of body, the fair hair, the fine clear eyes that seemed to reflect all the beauty and music and rhythm of the Rhine."18 In this way *The German Prisoner* is similar to Hanley's later short story 'Feud', in which once again an old order represented by a beautiful youth is crushed by coarse and savage men.(19) When O'Garra (who is marginally more sympathetic than Elston) bursts into tears upon first seeing "the stream of blood gush forth from the German's mouth,"(20) his weeping can be interpreted as an unconscious response to the death of civility that he is enacting. And in participating in this shift to barbarism, thereby undermining the values they claim to be upholding, the two British soldiers render the power they represent all the more contentious.

The German Prisoner's gay overtones are never made explicit, as they are in the book's companion piece *A Passion Before Death*, but they are no less powerful for it. They emerge in various different forms throughout the text, the first of these being a suggestion of homosexual attraction between the two

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British soldiers themselves. This dimension is only ever hinted at, most strongly in the paragraph below when Elston and O'Garra are fleeing from the attack that will separate them from their squadron and land them in the fateful trench:

And now every sound and movement seemed to strike some responsive chord in the Irishman's nature. He hung desperately onto the Manchester man. For some reason or other he dreaded losing contact with him. He could not understand this sudden desire for Elston's company. But the desire overwhelmed him. (21)

When Otto Reiburg stumbles into Elston and O'Garra clutches, the story's homoerotic elements take on a stronger and much more loathsome form. Perhaps because of this unrealisable desire between the two British troopers, or perhaps because O'Garra (as we know from the accounts of his activities on Middle Abbey Street) is already sexually frustrated, their torture of Reiburg rapidly becomes as lascivious as it is violent. From his first appearance, perceived through the eyes of Elston and O'Garra, Reiburg is described in romantic, sensuous terms: Hanley dwells upon his body, "as graceful as a young sapling," his hair, "as fair as ripe corn," his "blue eyes, and finely moulded features. As the torture progresses, Hanley remarks of Elston that "There was something terrible stirring in this weasel's blood. He knew not what it was. But there was a strange and powerful force possessing him, and it was going to use him as its instrument. (23) We see this force at work during Elston and Reiburg's moments of physical contact during the violence, which are strongly erotic in tone. ("Elston, on making contact with the youth's soft skin, became almost demented. The velvety touch of the flesh infuriated him.," (24)) What follows is the final segment of the torture scene, in which the death-blow is struck:

O'Garra shouted out;

"PULL his bloody trousers down."

With a wild movement Elston tore down the

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prisoner's trousers.

In complete silence O'Garra pulled out his bayonet and stuck it up the youth's anus. The German screamed.

Elston laughed and said: 'I'd like to back-scuttle the bugger."

"Go ahead," shouted O'Garra.

"I tell you what," said Elston. "Let's stick this horse-hair up his penis."

So they stuck the horse-hair up his penis. Both men laughed shrilly.

A strange silence followed.

"Kill the bugger," screamed O'Garra.

Suddenly, as if instinctively, both men fell away from the prisoner, who rolled over, emitting a soft sigh - Ah . His face was buried in the soft mud.(25)

Here the climax of the torture scene parallels the climax in a sexual act. Overt gay elements are prominent: the repeated use of the word "bugger," the fixation on Reiburg's anus and penis, and Elston's remark about "back-scuttling" leave us in no doubt that homosexual desire is apparent here. (Shortly after this scene, Elston remarks, apropos of nothing: "The last time I fel l asleep I did it in my pants. It made me get mad with that bugger down there. Though we're not told what exactly he did in his pants, the most likely suggestion for a man Elston's age would be a nocturnal emission, prompted by his attraction to Reiburg, which he dealt with through the torture that followed.) The scene also contains some more oblique gay symbolism: the bayonet "enters" Reiburg as a phallus would, and the event that this leads to his death is described in language that recalls the "little death," or orgasm. Hanley presents the violence committed by Elston and O'Garra in a manner that acts out, with monstrous transformations, the practice of homosexual congress.

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In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry describes this transformation as one of the key elements of torture. In order to objectify the disappearance of anything in the world external to the victim's pain, "Everything human and inhuman that is either physically or verbally, actually or elusively present.. .become[s] part of the glutted realm of weaponry; weaponry that can refer equally to pain or power. (27) The human body can become a weapon against itself if contorted or abused; language becomes a weapon through verbal connection with non-present objects (there are torture methods called "the submarine," "the Vietnamese tiger cages," "the parrot's perch" etc.),(28) and torturers are known for taking everyday objects not intended for violent purposes and using them as instruments for doing harm. (29) Elston and O'Garra's weapon is a bayonet, an object designed to cause injury, but it's still possible to see something of the transformation Scarry describes in the metaphorical process whereby the male phallus becomes a steel blade. Through the symbolic metamorphosis of the one to the other, an organ that should allow the ultimate sharing of human experience (the sensations of sexual intercourse) instead brings a completely internal experience that the two other men do not share (Reiburg' s pain).

Of course, as Hanley is well aware, homosexuality played an important part in the lives of many British soldiers of the First World War and informed much of the writing they produced. Paul Fussell remarks that young middle- and upper-class officers, coming to the front line from public school and used to life without female company, found comfort and satisfaction in a tender, romantic, sublimated and temporary homoerotic desire that recalled the crushes on older boys of their earlier adolescence.(30) Fussell states that gay writers of the Great War such as Wilfred Owen called upon a literary tradition that portrayed soldiers as homosexually desirable, dwelling on their youth, virility, cleanliness and heroism. The original source for writing of this nature is the Classical texts of Greece and Rome, but its modern-world equivalent can be said to begin with Whitman, followed by Hopkins and Housman and continued in the immediate pre-War years by the Aesthetic movement and the Uranians.(31) This pre-existing tradition informed the front-

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line homoeroticism identified by Fussell, which he recognises as a purely bourgeois interest. Of working class infantrymen he makes no serious mention, and is content to remark in passing that "Of the active, unsublimated kind [of homosexuality] there was very little at the front."(32)

The German Prisoner focuses on a very different social class, and a very different type of homosexual activity, to the one Fussell concentrates solely upon. However, there's a strong suggestion of the young, desirable and chaste soldier ideal in Reiburg himself, whose blond hair, extreme physical beauty and (initially) unsullied aspect are all characteristics the Uranians and Aesthetics sought in such a figure. By presenting Reiburg as an object not of some romantic, unfulfilled desire but rather of a violent desire that manifests itself in physical brutality and murder, it's as if Hanley is challenging the sexual ideals associated with upper-class officers just as he challenges the ideals they were supposed to be fighting for. *The German Prisoner* is a story that overturns all our assumptions about the Great War and the men who fought in it, providing a working-class perspective that is very different; so different it is often unsettling to read, but which remains unflinchingly expressive throughout.

Hopefully all this illustrates the flaws in Richard Aldington's view that Hanley's story presents the working class simply as victims; innocent pawns unspeakably corrupted when forced to endure hell in the name of the social order above them. Rather, Hanley's work is deliberately subversive-it unbalances established bourgeois beliefs about the War and presents the experiences of those whose voices have been excluded from histories of the event, which have for the most part been documented by and for the middle and upper classes. Hanley's working class soldiers are not pleasant men to read about, but it is not his point that they should be, any more than he intended for us to see them as sufferers under a higher power. Hanley's aim is to provide an authentically working-class voice, one that we may not always want to hear, but which will nonetheless be heard over the bourgeois voices that surround it. Aldington's

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introduction comes closest to Hanley's original intent at its very end, when he writes:

> Gentlemen! Here are your defenders, ladies! Here are the results of your charming white feathers. If you were not ashamed to send men into the war, why should you blush to read what they said in it? Your safety, and indeed the almost more important safety of your incomes, were assured by them. Though the world will little note nor long remember what they did there, perhaps it will not hurt you to know a little of what they said and suffered.(33)

Notes

1) John Fordham, *James Hanley, Modernism and the Working Class*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002, p.146.

2) Richard Aldington, 'Introduction', in James Hanley, *The German Prisoner*, privately printed by author, 1930, pp.4-5.

3)Fordham, p.97.

4) Hanley, p.8.

5) Hanley, pp. 22-3.

6) Hanley, p.10.

7) Fordham, p.96.

8) Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.13.

9) Scarry,p.4.

10) Scarry, p.27.

11) Hanley,p.32.

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12)Scarry, p. 52.

13) Hanley,p.31.

14) Fordham, p. ix.

15) Hanley, p. 29.

16) Hanley,p.27.

17) Hanley, p. 32.

18) Hanley, p.32.

19)Fordham, p.99.

20) Hanley, p. 27.

21) Hanley,p. 18.

22)Hanley, p.24.

23) Hanley, p. 25.

24) Hanley, p. 32.

25) Hanley, pp.32-3.

26) Hanley, p.33.

27)Scarry, p.56.

28) Scarry, p. 44.

29) Scarry,p.41.

30) Paul Fussel, The Great War and Modern Memory, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp.272-4.

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31) Fussell, pp.281-3.

32) Fussell, p. 272.

33) Aldington, in Hanley, p.5.

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