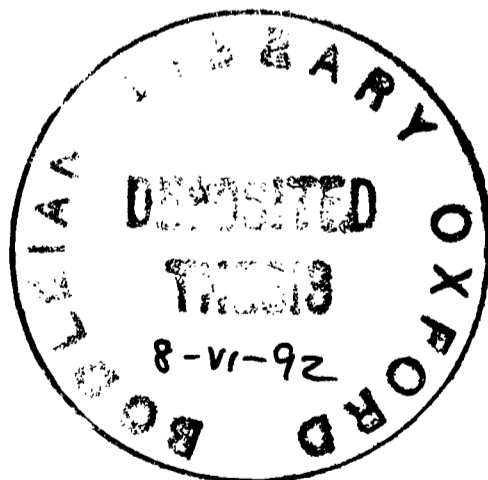


**GENDER REPRESENTATION, SEXUALITY
AND POLITICS IN THE WRITINGS OF
PATRICK HAMILTON**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at the University of Oxford.**

**Brian M. McKenna,
Wadham College, Oxford.**

Trinity Term, 1991.



ABSTRACT

Gender Representation, Sexuality and Politics in the Writings of Patrick Hamilton

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D. Phil. Thesis, Trinity Term, 1991.

This thesis analyzes the drama and prose fiction of the upper-middle-class Communist writer Patrick Hamilton (1904-62), drawing on a considerable amount of primary material. Part of the purpose of the thesis is to restore Hamilton's reputation as a writer of significance by effecting a judicious critical assessment of his unjustly neglected oeuvre. It is argued that throughout his work are discernible traces of a crisis of hegemony which afflicted the British ruling order in the inter-war period and of which one aspect is of special relevance here -- viz., a certain problematization of Victorian and Edwardian codes of English bourgeois masculinity engendered by the Great War and its shell-shocked aftermath and peculiarly operative among those ex-Public School writers who, like Hamilton, were born around the mid-1900s, and became prominent in the 1930s. One, well-known, consequence of this crisis was a sexualized transfer of allegiance by some bourgeois literary intellectuals to the Soviet Union and the working-class; another was a gravitation towards (crypto-) Fascism. From the time of his 1926 novel, Craven House, Hamilton sought to anatomize the potential for fascistic 'evil' latent in the southern English petty bourgeoisie. It is demonstrated that his fictional analyses were rendered more profound by his intellectual assimilation of Marxism from 1933 onwards. It is also shown that the specific appeal of Soviet Marxism for this writer resided in its quasi-religious capacity to satisfy a craving for authenticity in a social world characterized by deceitful quotidian role-playing and, in the drama especially, to facilitate the unmasking of villainy and subserve an obsession with revenge. Congenial to this brand of Marxism, it is contended, is the monologic tradition of the realist novel, to which Hamilton's fiction almost invariably conforms. The Protestant discourse of confession which nurtures that tradition is often discernible in the impulse to confess which tends to characterize the rendition of the sexual in Hamilton's texts and, in general, his problematic representation of gender and sexuality is closely scrutinized. It is concluded that, despite its demonstrable limitations and inherent problems, much of Hamilton's work can be rendered valuable to a contemporary radical audience.

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Special mention should also be made of Nigel Jones, a Brighton-based journalist whose biographical study, Through a Glass Darkly: The Life of Patrick Hamilton, is due from Scribners later this year. Since November 1989, I have been in fairly frequent contact with Nigel, sharing resources and exchanging ideas. My principal debt to him derives from his friendship with Mrs. Aileen Hamilton, Patrick's sister-in-law, whose Brighton house contains a considerable archive of primary material (see the thesis Bibliography for details). I wish to extend my thanks to Mrs. Hamilton herself for allowing me access to her 'trove'.

In July 1930, a Hamilton play called 'The Procurator of Judea' (adapted from an Anatole France short story) was performed at the Arts Theatre, and in January 1931 another piece by him entitled 'John Brown's Body' was performed at the Phoenix by 'The Repertory Players'. I wish to thank the following who helped in the quest for the scripts of these plays: Phyllis Hartnoll (editor of The Oxford Companion to the Theatre), Paul Taylor (Samuel French Limited), J. Conway (Superintendent of the Students' Room of the British Library's Department of Manuscripts), Enid M. Foster (Head Librarian of The British Theatre Association), Derek Forbes (Joint Honorary Secretary of The Society for Theatre Research), Mary Orr Denham (the widow of Reginald Denham, the original producer of Rope and 'John Brown's Body'), and the Theatre Collection staff at the New York Public Library. A copy of 'The Procurator of Judea' is yet to be traced, but there is a copy of 'John Brown's Body' extant in the New York Public Library. Unfortunately, belatedness of discovery, together with lack of space, dictated that I could not discuss the latter

in this thesis; I hope to do so at a later date.

Through John Lucas (to whom thanks are accordingly due), I was put in touch with Arnold Rattenbury, who, as a staff member of Our Time and an organizer of the Communist Party Writers' Group in the 1940s, knew Patrick Hamilton personally. From a (partly taped) conversation I had with him on 15 August 1988, at his home in North Wales, I gleaned much about Hamilton in particular, and the political culture of the English Communist literary intelligentsia of the Thirties and Forties in general. I know from our correspondence that there is much in this thesis of which Arnold would be critical, but I would like to think that our differences are of a (genuinely!) comradely nature. Another of his correspondents, Andy Croft (Department of External Studies, Leeds University), kindly made available a copy of a chapter of his Ph.D. thesis, 'Socialist Fiction in the 1930s' (Nottingham University, 1985) and copies of some letters from Patrick Hamilton to his brother. Similar thanks are due to Arnold Cramp for sending me a copy of the Hamilton section of his Ph.D. thesis, 'Prose Fiction in the 1930s: Elizabeth Bowen, Rex Warner and Patrick Hamilton' (Loughborough University, 1984).

I wish, further, to thank some individuals who have helped me (directly or indirectly) to think through Hamilton's work. Donna Soto-Morettini, at the Central School of Speech and Drama, allowed me to consult (before examination) her Oxford D. Phil. thesis on contemporary British political drama and I would like to thank her for that. I would also like to express my gratitude to the audiences at three seminars (two in Oxford -- at Jesus College and at Christ Church -- and one at the University of Sheffield) at which papers based on the work embodied in the thesis were presented. Thanks are particularly due to Timothy Rivinius of Butler Hospital, Providence, Rhode Island for sending me a paper on alcoholism and obsessive-compulsive disorder following my contribution

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I wish to express my special gratitude to Helen Byrne, my sisters, and my parents, Jean and Patrick McKenna -- for their loving support.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Jeannie Smith, *née* Brown (1916-87), and her sister, Anne Brown (1932-89).

Abbreviations

AHA: Aileen Hamilton Archive.

BBC WAC: BBC Written Archives Centre.

PAT: Bruce Hamilton, 'Patrick -- A Tragedy: The Story of a Personal Relationship' (unpublished TS, c. 1970). [This text is the original typescript of Bruce Hamilton, The Light Went Out: The Life of Patrick Hamilton (Constable, London, 1972), and is a significantly fuller version].

Chapter One

The Beaching of an Anti-Fascist

Whatever became of Patrick Hamilton? He was an extraordinarily good novelist and brilliant writer of stage and radio thrillers. He had an important part to play as one of the urban socialist writers of the Thirties and Forties. And he had his own remarkable way of writing about loneliness and obsession in seedy city streets and pubs.

Hermione Lee, speaking on 'The Late Show', BBC-2, 27 February 1989.

No decade in the past hundred and fifty years has been so barren of imaginative prose as the nineteen-thirties.

George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', in Inside the Whale and Other Essays (1957), London, 1962, 39.

In 1951, Patrick Hamilton wrote delightedly to his brother, Bruce, of the publicity generated by the publication of his tenth novel, The West Pier (the first of a projected series of books based on the criminal character of Ernest Ralph Gorse):

I got an entire page in the Times Literary Supplement -- this being enormously headed: Patrick Hamilton's Novels. Reading this, one cannot but feel that one is at last "home" as a novelist The B.B.C. also gave a half-hour talk (tremendously laudatory) on the books and personality of P.H.¹

Although this programme was given by Hamilton's friend Arthur Calder-Marshall, nevertheless, like the TLS spread, it serves as an index of the considerable prestige which had accreted to this writer by the early 1950s. The four decades since have somewhat obscured Hamilton's achievement. The

¹ Cited in B. Hamilton, Patrick -- a Tragedy: the Story of a Personal Relationship, unpublished typescript, c.1970, 476 [hereafter PAT].

literary history of the 1930s and 1940s has been constructed for us largely in terms constituted by the myth of the 'Auden Generation' as construed, pre-eminently, by the George Orwell of 'Inside the Whale'.

Patrick Hamilton is only one of a constellation of British Marxist writers of the period whose work has tended to be neglected in favour of those who seemed to renege on their youthful Leftism during the early years of the Cold War.² It is part of the function of this thesis to help restore Hamilton's reputation as a writer of significance -- but without resorting to hagiography, or underwriting the notion of a 'canon' to which Hamilton could be said to deserve promotion. The present work is more concerned with *how* his oeuvre can be read than with *why* (although it is concerned with that also): with the ways in which, despite its problems and limitations, this body of work can be rendered valuable to a radical audience of the 1990s and beyond.

The novel which sparked the 1951 panegyric was partly inspired by the career of the notorious sadistic murderer George Neville Heath, who whipped to death a masochistic female partner in a Bayswater hotel on 21 June 1946.³ Heath had been involved with 'a fast and sometimes criminal set of ex-officers and former public schoolboys'⁴ which haunted the fashionable and sleazy areas of post-war London where flourished the culture of the 'spiv'. From the time of the 1926 novel Craven House (and the 1926 General Strike), Hamilton had sought to anatomize the fascistic potential for 'evil' among the southern English petty bourgeoisie. The Heath-like character of Gorse, with his 'toothbrush

² For a recent wide-ranging and sympathetic account of the radical prose fiction of the Thirties see A. Croft, Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s, London, 1990.

³ F. Selwyn, Rotten to the Core? The Life and Death of Neville Heath, London and New York, 1988, 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 .

moustache'⁵ and his somnambulistic love of 'trickery and evil for their own sakes',⁶ was conceived of as the apotheosis of this middle-class maleficence, and it is no accident that his first victim should be Jewish.⁷

By the time of the composition of the 'Gorse' books, however, the political context in which Hamilton's best work had been written had changed. Fascism had been defeated in Europe and stymied at home. An American-led economic boom, together with the Cold War, defined the political situation in what Perry Anderson once called that 'anguished, parched decade'⁸ for the British Left. Hamilton -- who was a reclusive fellow-traveller of the Communist Party rather than an involved activist⁹ -- found himself beached and isolated on the sands of quietist affluence and widespread anti-Sovietism. Accordingly, some of the righteous

⁵ P. Hamilton, Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse (1953), London, 1987, 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷ P. Hamilton, The West Pier (1952), London, 1986, 18-21.

⁸ P. Anderson, 'The Left in the Fifties', New Left Review, 29, January-February 1965, 4.

⁹ There exists some confusion as to the precise nature of Hamilton's relationship with the CPGB. His close friend Claud Cockburn (to whom he was introduced, at King Street, by William Gallacher) testifies that Hamilton was 'never a Communist' but was well-read in Marxism [see C. Cockburn, Crossing the Line, London, 1958, 179]. However, Arnold Rattenbury (who met Hamilton several times whilst working of the Communist literary journal Our Time in the Forties) is adamant that he 'was certainly on my membership list when I was convening Writers meetings in 1944/5 onwards' [from a letter to the present writer, dated 16 August 1989]. Neither I nor a current Hamilton biographer, Nigel Jones, have been able to turn up a Party card for Hamilton and I think we must conclude that he was a kind of licensed fellow-traveller. This status is borne out by a letter from Communist literary intellectual Montagu Slater in the private archive of Hamilton material belonging to the author's sister-in-law, Mrs. Aileen Hamilton [hereafter this archive is referred to as AHA]. Dated '30 October', the letter contains a request for Hamilton to join Naomi Mitchison and James Kirkup (among others) on a Writers Delegation to the USSR. (There is, incidentally, no evidence that he went).

indignation against oppression that pervades his earlier work is missing from the Gorse series.¹⁰

As I shall demonstrate, Hamilton's prose fiction is mostly written from within a 'Protestant' realist tradition congenial to the particular brand of Marxism he espoused; but in the novels he wrote during the early Cold War period the narrative voice is monologic in a particular manner. The orchestrating discourse of these novels is akin to that of an insouciantly jocular barrister whose brief is to prosecute a tricky criminal for whom he entertains a sneaking regard. The narrative is punctuated with such juridic tropes as, 'it is beyond dispute that it is from this type of criminal that the most atrocious criminals emerge',¹¹ and, 'What, it may be wondered, were Gorse's motives in all this? They were, roughly, threefold.'¹² From time to time the narrative voice adopts a 'Dear Readerish' mode -- as when the 'youthful gentle reader'¹³ is assured that men of the ilk of Esther Downes' grandfather (a consumptive 'runner' based at Brighton Station) actually 'existed in the Edwardian era'.¹⁴ The very

¹⁰ Unfortunately there is not space enough here to undertake a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the 'Gorse' novels -- though it should be stressed, of course, that the focus of this thesis is on Hamilton as a writer of the 1930s and 1940s.

¹¹ Hamilton, 1986, 10.

¹² Ibid., 120.

¹³ Ibid., 74.

¹⁴ Ibid. The description of the unfortunate Mr. Downes senior in The West Pier is squarely based on an important episode from Hamilton's childhood, and is just one indication of how strongly this author's formative years were figuring in his consciousness during the 1950s. The following is Bruce Hamilton's account: 'It was years afterwards that he told me how once he had been coming from Brighton Station with Mummie in a "fly". She must have been returning from some visit, because there was luggage. And, all the way from the station to Number Three, the cab was pursued by a "runner"; one of those pitiful creatures, unemployed and unemployable, who sought a subsistence by chasing after horse-drawn cabs in the hope of earning a few pence by helping with luggage at the end of the journey. Patrick, sitting with

obtrusiveness of this authorial voice increases the 'dialogic' potential of the fiction by implicating the reader as one listening to a speaking voice; this is, however, at the expense of the non-Gorse characters -- who are, in any case, nowhere granted much autonomy in the fictional world of Patrick Hamilton.

Certainly, very little power is invested in Esther Downes, the pretty Brighton shop-girl who is defrauded of her savings by Gorse in The West Pier. Like Pinkie in Brighton Rock, Gorse is presented as a diabolic, misogynistically asexual, figure who ruthlessly exploits a naive young woman. Unlike Pinkie, though, Gorse is a former (minor) Public Schoolboy who shrewdly manipulates Esther's snobbish 'great hankering after gentlemen'¹⁵ in pursuing his nefarious schemes. We have here the ultimate Hamiltonian villain, endowed as he is with a passion for militarism imbibed at his prep school,¹⁶ an explicitly Satanic degree of indifference to humanity¹⁷, an 'unwholesome'¹⁸ linguistic register (fustianly reminiscent of Patrick's pro-Fascist father and would-be historical novelist, Bernard Hamilton),¹⁹ and a 'desire to be connected

his back to the cabman, watched the man in fascinated horror; but I am sorry to have to tell that Mummie ordered him away peremptorily on reaching home, without giving him a halfpenny. Patrick was appalled. He was never to forget the poor fellow's sweating face, laboured breath, and consumptive look. It was perhaps his introduction to the world's suffering.' [PAT, 68].

¹⁵ Hamilton, 1986, 76.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷ Ibid., 57.

¹⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁹ See chapter four for references to Bernard Hamilton's politics, and an account of his characteristically orotund and archaic prose-style. It is convenient to recall at this point that the entire Hamilton family were players in the writing game. Bernard's wife, Ellen Adele Hamilton (*née* Day) had published a few short stories in the Strand and, under the pseudonym 'Olivia Roy', wrote romantic novels with titles like The Husband Hunter and The Awakening of Mrs. Carstairs [PAT, 28]. Her daughter, Helen, adapted some of her brothers' novels for the stage, radio, and television, and

with the motorcar business'²⁰ (invariably a hallmark of evil in a Hamilton character).

The principal device which Gorse uses to separate Esther and his former school-mate, Ryan, is singled out as particularly emblematic of his 'evil' -- viz., the sending of a series of 'disgusting' anonymous post-cards.²¹ Yet there is surely a Laclosian ingenuity about Gorse's chicanery in this regard that commands admiration. Much of the humour of The West Pier derives from the conversational misunderstandings generated by the suspicions planted by Gorse in the 'minds' of Ryan and Esther -- neither of whom is endowed with sufficient wit to confront the other with the anonymous missives. The narrator never allows Gorse's victims to suspect the truth for very long ('Ryan somehow disliked and distrusted Gorse, but it would be absurd to think him capable of baseness of such an order.')²² Esther's incessant objections to Gorse's suggestions are inexorably smoothed over, one-by-one, until she is stripped of every penny she owns and the narrator is 'forced' to comment: 'Much as we may dislike the character of Gorse, it must be conceded that he did things thoroughly.'²³

In a letter to his brother, Hamilton once described Gorse as 'a really wonderful monster of a villain' who would 'at last

wrote at least one play of her own -- 'Honour Thy Father', performed at the Arts Theatre Club in 1938 [ibid., 452]. Bruce Hamilton published a range of novels; of the ten of them he mentions in the first draft of his memoir of his brother he singles out the autobiographical So Sad. So Fresh (1952) as the best of which he was capable [PAT, 513]. He records that Patrick was 'indifferent' to the favourable press accorded the latter and that he was once heard to declare, "'I'm the only writer in this family'" [ibid., 514].

Hamilton's second wife, Lady Ursula Stuart, was also, under the pen-name 'Laura Talbot', a novelist.

²⁰ Hamilton, 1986, 51.

²¹ Ibid., 111.

²² Ibid., 158.

²³ Ibid., 239.

get his deserts'.²⁴ However, the Gorse tetralogy was never finished and, as Bruce Hamilton puts it, its anti-hero 'may be thought of as brewing mischief to this day'.²⁵ The impish word 'mischief' here bespeaks the unintended attractiveness of Gorse, who never actually whips, rapes, or murders anyone. Moreover, the narrator is always on hand to put Gorse safely in his lower-upper-middle class place. For example, his wearing of an old Westminster tie without entitlement is stigmatized as an error by Hamilton, the genuine Old Boy.²⁶ One soon realizes, however, that this treatment of Gorse merely functions, in effect, to grease the wheels of his plots. In other words, the oft-repeated authorial assertion that Gorse's 'strange, sudden, appalling blunders'²⁷ will ineluctably lead him to the scaffold is undermined by the smooth revolutionary movement of the narrative which it simultaneously enables. The (unwitting?) complicity of the narrator with his evil genius is betrayed by such admissions as, 'Gorse, had he not been what he was, might have been a highly successful novelist'.²⁸ Words of approbation indeed. And what (average) male reader is likely to withhold all admiration from a character endued, we are told, with a 'peculiar insight into women's minds'?²⁹

The woman whom Gorse (literally, since he secretly reads her diary) 'reads like a book' in Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse (1953) is Mrs. Joan Plumleigh-Bruce, the Anglo-Indian Colonel's widow who habitually holds court among the middle-aged businessmen who throng her nook at 'The Friar', a mock-Tudor pub in Reading. Through the insufferable language she deploys is flensed the class fraction to which

²⁴ Cited in PAT, 475.

²⁵ B. Hamilton, 1972, 137.

²⁶ Hamilton, 1986, 116.

²⁷ Ibid., 192.

²⁸ Ibid., 233.

²⁹ Ibid., 174.

she belongs. Features of this discourse include: 'native' lexical items like 'taboo'³⁰ and the suffix, '-wallah'³¹ (invariably applied to members of 'the middle-class respectable professions');³² military terms like 'Rules and Regulations';³³ and characteristically clichéd petty-bourgeois collocations such as "voracious" with 'reading'.³⁴ Her literary style -- with its 'use of Wardour Street English gone mad',³⁵ its spurious alliterativeness and so on -- links her both with Hamilton's father and the rest of 'The Friar' crowd. Another linguistic badge of unity with the latter is her fluency in '*Oirish*', a mode of speaking perceptively played as both patronizingly chauvinistic and queerly Narcissistic.³⁶ All things considered, Joan Plumleigh-Bruce is an appalling character for whom little sympathy can be felt when Gorse (now aged twenty-five) swans off with five hundred pounds of her savings. And certainly, to a (pro-) feminist reader familiar with Hamilton's fictional women -- who can be reasonably taxonomized as asexually 'good', as victims-on-display, or as *femmes fatales* -- the depiction of Mrs. Plumleigh-Bruce comes as a comparative relief (understandable qualms about the narrator's equation of her spiritual dislike of the working class and her physical dislike of men³⁷ notwithstanding).

The impulse towards typification evinced in the characterization of Joan Plumleigh-Bruce is accentuated by the nature of the narrative voice in the Gorse novels. The 'Dear Readerism' of these texts combines with the 'campness'

³⁰ Hamilton, 1987, 15.

³¹ Ibid., 3.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 15.

³⁴ Ibid., 37.

³⁵ Ibid., 220.

³⁶ Ibid., 35-6.

³⁷ Ibid., 99.

evident throughout Hamilton's writing to produce a punctiliously pigeonholing discourse. Eve Sedgwick's *aperçu* into the gossip-driven nature of some male homosexual literature is illuminating in this regard:

The writing of a Proust or a James would be exemplary here: projects precisely of *nonce* taxonomy: of the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings of all the kinds it might take to make a world.³⁸

Exemplary here also would be the opening passages of The West Pier:

There is a sort of man -- usually a lance corporal and coming from the submerged classes -- who, returning to England from military service in distant parts of the earth, does not announce his arrival to his relations. Instead of this he will tramp, or hitch-hike, his way to his home, and in the early hours of the morning will be heard gently throwing pebbles up at his wife's window.

It is impossible to say whether he does this because he hopes to surprise his wife in some sinful attachment, or whether it has never occurred to him to use the telephone, the telegraph service, or the post. If the latter were the case one might suppose him to be merely unimaginative: but this type of person is actually far from being unimaginative.

What concerns us here is that such a person certainly belongs to a type, rare but identifiable.³⁹

The narrator then goes on to itemize the characteristics of this putative 'type' ('almost exclusively a male species')⁴⁰ - viz., a 'dumbness and numbness amidst a busy and loquacious humanity', a gravitation towards the Army, and a certain 'slow, pensive' opacity.⁴¹ Finally, the existence of 'innumerable variations within this species'⁴² is adverted to

³⁸ E. K. Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, London and New York, 1991, 23.

³⁹ Hamilton, 1986, 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9-10.

before Gorse is specified. It is the boldness of assertion which is immediately striking about these passages, established from the outset by the concreteness of the opening anecdote. And then there is the contrived semblance of apparent discrimination and seemingly puzzled consideration: 'lance corporal or corporal', 'tramp, or hitch-hike' are examples of the former, and the trope, 'impossible to say', an example of the latter. Of a piece with this penchant for 'nonce-taxonomy' is a surfeit of sententiousness: the statement, '[Gorse] was an incipient wine-snob (perhaps the most unattractive form of snobbery on this earth)'⁴³ from The West Pier is one example of this; another (taken from Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse) instantiates the temptation to spurious Wildean generalization inherent in this kind of sententiousness -- 'This curious sort of thing [i.e., Gorse's swindling of Joan Plumleigh-Bruce] is constantly happening in provincial towns', we are instructed.⁴⁴

This kind of narrative discourse lends itself well to so-called 'black' comedy, and the adverb in the following description by John Russell Taylor of the Gorse saga is surely not infelicitous: '[a] darkly hilarious dissection of middle-class England between the wars'.⁴⁵ Hamilton himself seems to have conceived of the Gorse series as comical in nature; 'I have found a wonderful formula for a Human Comedy'⁴⁶ he once wrote to his brother. The Balzacian adjective qualifying the comic here crops up in the TLS review of Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse: 'inhuman in its handling of inhumanity'⁴⁷ was the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, 1987, 297.

⁴⁵ J. R. Taylor, 'Patrick Hamilton', London Magazine, vol. 6, no. 4, May 1966, 58.

⁴⁶ Cited in PAT, 477.

⁴⁷ Times Literary Supplement, 26 June 1953, 409.

verdict there. This lack of 'humanity' has proved bothersome to liberal critics like Walter Allen who complains that the characters in the first two Gorse books are 'not explored in depth';⁴⁸ instead he judges them to be, 'mere accretions of generalizations about broad categories -- real or otherwise - - of human beings, given the illusion of life by their author's air of knowingness about their habits and haunts'.⁴⁹ This rather naive, liberal-humanist, conception of 'character' is one which we find Hamilton dejectedly internalizing in one of his letters to his brother: 'In Mrs. Plumleigh-Bruce ... I have written about a type, while completely neglecting to create an individual -- the result being lifelessness and unreality'.⁵⁰ (As if the category 'individual' were unproblematic in either 'fiction' or 'reality'!) The note of defeat sounded here betokens a weariness with the Gorse project rendered more explicitly in another context:

I don't think I'd ever have embarked on a series (almost a serial) if I had known what it entailed. When one writes an inferior isolated book one can, after a year or so just write it off as inferior. But with one of a series, one's confidence is shaken, and one's work and enthusiasm about the whole thing is seriously endangered.⁵¹

This jadedness finds expression, moreover, in the very letter of the text. In Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse we catch the narrator sighing, 'As Gorse's methods with Mrs. Plumleigh-Bruce have been so often demonstrated and illustrated before, it would be wearisome to give in detail the conversation about the car which took place between the two.'⁵²

Ultimately, Hamilton's increasingly jejeune Gorse books

⁴⁸ W. Allen, Tradition and Dream: The English and American Novel from the Twenties to Our Time, London, 1964, 202.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cited in PAT, 528.

⁵¹ Cited in *ibid.*, 529.

⁵² Hamilton, 1987, 274.

represent a decadence: there is accomplishment here still, but the narrative voice seems unable to muster the same degree of political indignation as animates the earlier works. Nevertheless, the first two of these novels ill-deserve to be trashed, *a la* Priestley,⁵³ and indeed it could be argued that their very 'decadence' renders them more palatable to a modern audience than, say, Craven House -- hence Allan Prior's recent successful dramatizations of The West Pier and Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse.⁵⁴

The very success of the Prior adaptations points up a paradox in the case of Patrick Hamilton (to use a juridical trope appropriate for this justice-obsessed writer). For whereas some of his work -- such as the stage thrillers Rope and Gaslight, and the radio plays Money with Menaces and To the Public Danger -- has famously inhabited the realm of mass culture, his name is much less well known. In the field of literary history, the most egregious recent example of this neglect is the fact that Valentine Cunningham's gargantuan study, British Writers of the Thirties (1988), does not even mention Patrick Hamilton's name. Perhaps an explanation for this lacuna is to be sought in Cunningham's unwarrantedly severe denigration of Arnold Rattenbury's laudation of both Hamilton and the Left Review scribes -- a viewpoint bodied out in the collection of essays edited by John Lucas, The

⁵³ J. B. Priestley, 'Introduction', P. Hamilton, Hangover Square (1941), London, 1956, repr. with intro. by J. B. Priestley, 1974, 7.

⁵⁴ Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse was expanded by Allan Prior into a six-part London Weekend Television Series called 'The Charmer', first broadcast in 1987. The woefully mis-cast Nigel Havers played Gorse and Rosemary Leach, Joan Plumleigh-Bruce. Bernard Hepton played a (successfully) vengeful Donald Stimpson and Fiona Fullerton a new character called Clarice Manners - an upper crust young woman willing to join in Gorse's sado-masochistic games. Gorse is, in this version, eventually hanged for murder, having failed to worm his way into 'Society'. The West Pier was also adapted by Prior and performed (appropriately enough) in Brighton, at the Pavilion Theatre, from 28 March to 8 April 1990. George Dillon was a rivetingly sinister Gorse and Tracy Brabin a simpering Esther Downes.

1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy (1978). His case against this heterodoxy seems to be wilfully misconstrued since it imputes to the Rattenbury-inspired reading a quixotic ideological project that is, in truth, quite foreign to it -- namely, to substitute the Auden Gang with Randall Swingler and company. Cunningham concedes that, 'Edgell Rickword, Montagu Slater, Randall Swingler, and other fiercely uncompromising writers belong to the literary '30s', then adds irrelevantly, 'They don't however comprise the whole, nor central part of the decade.'⁵⁵ (No prizes for guessing who does.)⁵⁶ The excessive downgrading of the achievement of the CPGB's pronouncedly English intelligentsia is one structural to the position of address built into British Writers of the Thirties, which is reminiscent of a Guardian editorial about an industrial dispute. Brooking no compromise, Cunningham writes: 'My account of the '30s ... refuses to concede the extremist case to either the Jola-ists or the Marxists of the '30s'.⁵⁷ This account tends to think the British literary Thirties in terms of a binary opposition that was never the whole story: 'At the heart of '30s critical disagreements is the contention between the opposed ideas about language and writing that issued on the one hand in *Finnegans Wake* ... and on the other in Moscow-based Socialist Realism',⁵⁸ asserts Cunningham. And yet, as I shall show in chapter eight especially, the Zhdanovite doctrine of Socialist Realism had remarkably little influence on that brigade of British Communist literary intellectuals who clustered around Left Review and Our Time. Having

⁵⁵ V. Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties, Oxford, 1988, 17.

⁵⁶ For a recent acerbic critique of the 'Auden Generation' myth which dominates the reading of 1930s poetry, see A. Caesar, Dividing Lines: Poetry, Class and Ideology in the 1930s, Manchester University Press, 1991.

⁵⁷ Cunningham, 1988, 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

evoked and commentated on this rather dubious tug o' war, Cunningham is able to snip the rope and reiterate (albeit in more detail) the deadly familiar story of *The God that Failed*: and indeed it is of little surprise to find him at the end of his tome writing of how the '30s experience constituted 'a voyage out of Utopian notions of innocence into a kind of Christian awareness of sin'.⁵⁹

Despite the preceding comments, however, the fundamental achievement of British Writers of the Thirties ought not to be scanted. Its imaginative recreation of a multi-layered discursive structure of feeling imbricated in an entire literary generation yields many telling connections. For example, Cunningham's concatenation of male homosexuality, the legacy of the Great War ('the absent soldier father'),⁶⁰ and a particular strain of upper-middle-class Thirties English radicalism is convincing and vindicates the welcome historicity of his semiological enterprise.

Unfortunately, though, Cunningham's analysis of the sexualized 'going over' of a generational segment of bourgeois literary homosexuals to the side of the (male) workers in the agon of classes⁶¹ is tainted with what could be construed as an element of homophobia. It is surely rather callous to register only in passing that 'the way literary homosexuals conducted their literary affairs' took place in 'a legal context not of their own making'.⁶² 1930s 'cottaging' in pursuit of

⁵⁹ Ibid., 467.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁶¹ A good example of which is given in the following comments by Christopher Isherwood (in a television interview in 1974): 'What I in fact started to encounter was the German working class: and there was an escape there from the upper-middle class to which I belonged -- sort of landed gentry background. And I wanted to be with these boys, not really just for sexual reasons, nearly so much as to escape into another sort of world.' [Cited in A. Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain, Oxford, 1989, 65.]

⁶² Cunningham, 1988, 150.

men in uniform is certainly readable as a thrilling 'way of being ... in the First War by proxy',⁶³ but one should not forget that it was also an index of a terrible degree of oppression. Nevertheless, Cunningham is, one must concede, justified in pointing out that the generational 'misogyny ... rife in this period'⁶⁴ was not irreconcilable with the espousal of a specific kind of male homosexual identity. For example, Isherwood conceptualized his own sexual identity as a choice which we can see as both rebellious and matrophobic:

Damn Nearly Everybody. Girls are what the State and the Church and the Law and the Press and the Medical Profession endorse My mother endorses them too. She is silently, brutishly willing me to get married and breed grandchildren for her If boys didn't exist, I should have to invent them.⁶⁵

This choice was made in the context of what has been described as 'a more widespread crisis of masculine identity, connected ... with a political scepticism offset by a craving for ambivalent strong leader-figures'⁶⁶ prevalent among ex-Public School male intellectuals born around 1904. This particular generation had experienced the Great War (and its shell-shocked aftermath) at a culturally close second hand, registering its problematization of the codes of masculinity inherited from the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and yet also feeling obscurely guilty.⁶⁷ Here is Isherwood (famously) again:

we young writers of the middle 'twenties were all suffering, more or

⁶³ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁶⁵ C. Isherwood, Christopher and His Kind, London, 1977, 17.

⁶⁶ The Birmingham School of Contemporary Cultural Studies English Studies Group, 'Thinking the Thirties', in F. Barker *et al.* (eds), 1936: The Sociology of Literature -- Practices of Literature and Politics, Colchester, 1978, 6.

⁶⁷ See chapter two for the detail of this argument.

less subconsciously, from a feeling of shame that we hadn't been old enough to take part in the European war Like most of my generation, I was obsessed by a complex of terrors and longings connected with the idea of "War." "War," in this purely neurotic sense, meant The Test. The Test of your courage, of your maturity, of your sexual prowess: "Are you really a Man?"⁶⁸

Noel Annan has pointed out that the cult of homosexuality which 'during the inter-war years suffused European culture' derived much of its torque from a reaction against 'the Victorian ideal of marriage', in general, and the glorification of 'the innocent wife and child-bearing mother',⁶⁹ in particular. And so an entire generation of bourgeois male writers conjoined political radicalism with a repudiation of the role of *paterfamilias*. The impact of this generational crisis of masculinity upon the life and work of Patrick Hamilton (born into an upper-middle-class family in Hassocks in 1904) will be made clear during the course of this study.⁷⁰ For the moment I wish to stress that this phenomenon is merely a part of a more general crisis of hegemony which afflicted the European ruling order between the wars. It is perhaps underappreciated that the endungeoned considerations of Antonio Gramsci on the

⁶⁸ C. Isherwood, Lions and Shadows, 1938, London, 26.

⁶⁹ N. Annan, 'In Bed with the Victorians', New York Review of Books, 20 November 1986, 15. I was directed to this article by a reference in Frank Kermode's History and Value (Oxford, 1988, 25); in general, Kermode's book makes much of the sexualized nature of the 'going over' of a swathe of upper-middle-class intellectuals to the side of the workers in the class struggle in the 1930s.

⁷⁰ Hamilton's rejection of the conventional role of bourgeois husband and father is particularly remarkable. Indeed, so opposed was he to procreation that he compelled his brother to use contraceptives [PAT, 354]. His first marriage, to Lois Martin, was sexually dead [B. Hamilton, 1972, 64-5], and his second, to Lady Ursula Stewart, was childless. For a full account of the life of Patrick Hamilton, see the forthcoming biography by Nigel Jones, Through a Glass Darkly (Scribners, London, November 1991).

dialectic of coercion and consent in the rule of the bourgeoisie took off from a historically specific situation: the failure of 'hegemony' in 1920s Italy.⁷¹ The central political question of the Twenties and Thirties was, according to Gramsci: 'How to reconstruct the hegemonic apparatus of the ruling group, an apparatus which disintegrated as a result of the war, in every state throughout the world?'⁷² Part of the problem was the sexually-freighted disaffection of bourgeois youth with the old order -- and this was to be made all the more acute with the polarization of those self-same youth by the form which the resolution of the bourgeoisie's crisis of hegemony tended to take: Fascism or crypto-Fascism. Gramsci contended that this (relative) shift in the economy of bourgeois power, involving (*inter al.*) the supra-class elevation of the figure of 'the charismatic leader',⁷³ from the pole of consent to that of coercion occurred not just in Italy and Germany, but in Britain too:

A Caesarist solution can exist even without a Caesar, without any great, "heroic" and representative personality. The parliamentary system has also provided a mechanism for such compromise solutions. The "Labour" governments of MacDonald were to a certain degree solutions of this kind; and the degree of Caesarism increased when the government was formed which had MacDonald as its head and a Conservative majority.⁷⁴

Nor was the United Kingdom bereft of hard-core Fascism. Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, founded in the autumn of 1932 and twenty-thousand strong by 1934,⁷⁵

⁷¹ cf. Nicos Poulantzas: 'The inability of any class or class fraction to impose its hegemony is what characterizes the conjuncture of fascism'. [In Fascism and Dictatorship (1970), trans., Judith White, 1974, London, 1974, 72.]

⁷² A. Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks, ed. and trans., Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, London, 1971, 228.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

represented another kind of resolution of the inter-war crisis of bourgeois masculinity than that of the Auden Gang.⁷⁶ It was the rise of Fascism both at home and abroad which, above all else, turned writers like Patrick Hamilton to the revolutionary Left. As Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann put it:

all over Europe democratic strongholds appeared to be going down in front of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, with, it was believed, the connivance of the British Government. And there seemed to be a sinister parallel in the government's tolerance of Mosley and its behaviour towards the fascist dictators abroad.⁷⁷

Hamilton's migration to the far Left took a very specific form though. His adherence was first to the (available) texts of Karl Marx, then to the Soviet Union, and then to the CPGB (especially its Left Review/Our Time segment). The Trotskyists he impugned as full of 'filthy humbug and invidiousness',⁷⁸ while he venerated Stalin as a 'great man' endowed with a prose style both 'lucid' and 'semi-paternal'.⁷⁹ The Marxian element in Hamilton's work is, in part, explicable in terms of a quasi-religious craving for authenticity in a social world dominated by quotidian play-acting. In this respect, the appeal of an especially muscular form of Marxism most probably resided in its claim to be able to penetrate the Mask of Appearance and lay bare the True essence of the Real in an especially no-nonsense manner. And

⁷⁵ N. Branson and M. Heinemann, Britain in the Nineteen Thirties, London, 1971, 281.

⁷⁶ T. Mason makes the point that, in Germany, the 'activist Nazis were for the most part young middle-class men in a state of partial but violent rebellion'. [In 'Open Questions on Nazism', R. Samuel (ed.), People's History and Socialist Theory, London, 1981, 209.]

⁷⁷ Branson and Heinemann, 1971, 295.

⁷⁸ P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, Norfolk, 1938 or 1939 [AHA].

⁷⁹ P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, 35a Hart Street, Henley, 23-7 April 1939, 5 [AHA].

certainly we shall find, in the discussion of Hamilton's prose drama and fiction in this thesis, the theme of *unmasking* to be almost naggingly reiterative. Often it is combined with a (sometimes sentimental) valorization of the Theatre -- which is where Hamilton went to University; and it is always facilitated by the ostensibly Truth-bellowing theodicy of Stalinism.

Hamilton's attachment to 'dialectical materialism' could well be construed as a form of addiction; and like his addiction to alcohol,⁸⁰ he was to sustain the habit until his death, from cirrhosis of the liver, on 23 September 1962.

When Michael Holroyd says of Hamilton that he 'drank to be rid of himself'⁸¹ he is, at best, half-right. Primarily, like many other revolutionaries, he drank to get rid, temporarily, of capitalism. And, as a goodish Marxist, he would have recognized his drinking as an imaginary resolution of a set of real contradictions. The American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon is an example of another (better) Marxist who periodically hit the bottle in order to 'get away from some insurmountable problem'⁸² thrown up by the political struggle against a seemingly unbudgeable social system. In a recent study of the social meaning of addiction, Stanton Peele points out that: 'A society -- and all the subsocieties to which people belong -- creates a need for an addictive experience by setting forth key values that are not realizable.'⁸³ There must have been many moments in (say)

⁸⁰ I try to thematize Hamilton's alcoholism specifically (in relation to confessional discourse, the gender politics betokened by his work, and his Marxism) in a paper entitled "'Confessions of a Heavy-Drinking Marxist': Addiction in the Work of Patrick Hamilton" -- presented to 'Literature and Addiction', an interdisciplinary conference held at the University of Sheffield, 4-7 April 1991.

⁸¹ M. Holroyd, speaking on 'The Late Show', BBC-2, 27 February 1989.

⁸² S. Gordon, in L. Evans (ed.), James P. Cannon As We Knew Him: By Thirty-three Comrades, Friends and Relatives, New York, 1976, 58.

Henley-on-Thames in the 1940s when the values set forth by the subsociety with which Hamilton fellow-travelled, the CPGB, seemed unrealizable, and it is to his credit, in my view, that he kept the faith exemplified in the following 1950s anecdote while others of his generation had, so to speak, given up the ghost:

"The Communist Manifesto" (1848) begins with the words "A spectre is haunting Europe: it is the spectre of Communism".

This nowadays reminds me of the ghost story about the man who woke in the middle of the night and saw a hideous spectre grimly pointing at him. This went on for about three minutes. Then the man said "Well -- if you've got nothing better to do, I have" and settled down in the bed and went fast asleep.

I fear that the "spectre haunting Europe" has been given exactly the same treatment as the one in the story.

It seems that Capitalism is a sort of Rasputin, who, you'll remember, simply would not die But at last he died -- and so will Capitalism.⁸⁴

⁸³ S. Peele, The Meaning of Addiction: Compulsive Experience and its Interpretation, New York, 1985, 129.

⁸⁴ P. Hamilton, cited in PAT, 547.

Chapter Two

Revenge of the Male Hysteric

Here they savour a freedom from all social constraints, they compensate themselves in the wilderness for the tension engendered by protracted confinement and enclosure within the peace of society, they go back to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey as triumphant monsters who perhaps emerge from a disgusting procession of murder, arson, rape, and torture, exhilarated and undisturbed of soul, as if it were no more than a student's prank, convinced they have provided the poets with a lot more material for song and praise. One cannot fail to see at the bottom of all these noble races the beast of prey, the splendid blond beast prowling about avidly in search of spoil and victory

Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, trans., Walter Kaufmann, New York, 1969, 40-1.

'Master of Melodrama': this was the appellation which occurred most naturally to the writer of the New York Times obituary for Patrick Hamilton in 1962. 'For more than 30 years,' commented the obituarist, 'Anthony Walter Patrick Hamilton raised goosepimples on millions of theatregoers, and his plays are likely to continue to do so as long as thriller melodramas remain popular.'¹ Today, Alfred Hitchcock's Rope (1948) and George Cukor's Gaslight (1944) are better known than their original author, whose own versions remain out of print -- despite a feminist-influenced resurgence of interest in melodrama as a genre which foregrounds women.²

¹ New York Times, 25 September 1962, 37.

² A feminist production of Gaslight was staged at the Albany Theatre in London in late 1990, directed by Teddy Kiendl. Its programme features a quote from Adrienne Rich's On Lies Secrets and Silence which back-handedly testifies to the play's real presence in anglophone culture: 'Women have been

In this chapter, I shall discuss Rope -- Hamilton's 'De Quinceyish essay in the macabre'³ -- and in the next, I shall deal with both Gaslight and The Governess (a 'Victorian melodrama' performed in 1946). My discussion of these pieces will be informed especially by the historical and theoretical work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Elaine Showalter on the concepts of homosocial/sexual bonding and 'male hysteria'.⁴ I shall begin, therefore, with an account of that inter-war 'crisis of masculinity' which seems to have bedevilled many of the male writers of Hamilton's generation and social class, and which was, in him, particularly pronounced. By the end of the discussion of Hamilton's stage thrillers, it should be possible to educe discernible connections between, their symbolic content and dramatic forms, the 'crisis of masculinity', and the Stalinophile politics which Hamilton came to espouse.

In her work on the homosocial bonding between men which promotes the marginalisation of women in our society, Eve Sedgwick foregrounds the traumatic homophobia which lies at the heart of patriarchal culture:

Because the paths of male entitlement, especially in the nineteenth century, required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most reprobated bonds, an endemic and ineradicable state of what I am calling male homosexual panic became the normal condition of the male heterosexual entitlement.⁵

driven mad, "gaslighted" for centuries by the refutation of our experience and our instincts in a culture which validates only male experience.' [See A. Rich, 'Women and Honour: Some Notes on Lying', in On Lies, Secrets and Silence, 1979, repr., London, 1980, 190.]

³ Patrick Hamilton, Rope, London, 1929, ix.

⁴ See: Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, Between Men, New York, 1985, and Elaine Showalter The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980, London, 1985. I would like to thank Paddy Lyons, of the English Department at the University of Glasgow, for suggesting the relevance of Eve Sedgwick's work to a reading of Rope.

⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'The Beast in the Closet; James and the writing of

This 'panic', generated along the continuum of male homosocial/sexual relations has been catalysed and intensified historically inside certain introversively masculine enclaves within British culture: such as the Public Schools, Oxford and Cambridge colleges, and the armed forces. Sedgwick singles out the army as a prime exemplification of the simultaneous '*prescription* of the most intimate male bonding and the *proscription* of the (remarkably congnate) "homosexuality"'.⁶ In this milieu, 'promotion' and repression are intensified and produce particularly vivid results.

The incubus of the Great War entailed a traumatic 'return of the repressed' for many of the young men born in the decade prior to that of the so-called 'Auden Generation'. The intensified code of masculinity by which the soldiers were expected to live and die was too much for many. By the end of the war some eighty thousand cases of 'shell shock' had passed through army medical facilities, and there were twenty army hospitals dedicated to the care of 'male hysterics'.⁷ Having been previously accultured in the 'emotional disguise of civilian life'⁸, these young men had reacted to the horrors of the war by repressing signs of fear, and had thereby fallen mentally ill. The English psychiatric profession thus found itself compelled to apply neurasthenic categories, which it had formerly reserved for women, to the 'flower of English manhood': apposite indeed since it was clear that 'the Great War, the "apocalypse of masculinism" feminized its conscripts by taking away their sense of control.'⁹

This 'feminization' extended, naturally enough, to quasi-

Homosexual Panic', in Ruth Bernard Yeazell ed., Sex, Politics and Science in the Nineteenth Century Novel, Baltimore, 1986, 151.

⁶ Sedgwick, 1986, 152.

⁷ Showalter, 1985, 169.

⁸ Showalter, 1985, 170.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

homosexual attachments and even homosexual practices. Those officers culled from all-male Public Schools would, of course, have been readily familiar with such modes of behaviour, but also more generally, as Paul Fussell puts it, 'the atmosphere of the war was intensely, if unconsciously homoerotic'.¹⁰ Indeed, according to Elaine Showalter, some of the most celebrated writers who served in the trenches -- Wilfrid Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Ivor Gurney, and Beverly Nichols -- were both shell shock cases and (at least latent) homosexuals.

However, the literary survivors of the carnage were somewhat tardy in getting their experiences into print. The paucity of recollective literature written by veterans, published during the early and middle Twenties pays mute testament to the repression that was underway. Showalter discusses the role played by women novelists like Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf in mapping the connections between war-time 'male hysteria' and that whole gamut of routine bourgeois male social obligations obtaining in peace-time.¹¹ However, I wish to argue that an analogous articulation-by-proxy of the psycho-social difficulties induced by the War can be discerned in the work of writers like Christopher Isherwood and Patrick Hamilton: authors attuned to a certain crisis of upper-class masculinity but bereft of any terrible trauma needing repression.

Like Hamilton, the 'Auden Gang' had experienced the mythologies of the War at a culturally close second-hand -- as adolescent Public Schoolboys -- and had come to maturity in its shell-shocked aftermath. In his novel, The Memorial (1932), Isherwood conjoins war-induced neurasthenia and homosexuality in the figure of Edward Blake -- a wounded airman, ridden by guilt because of his own survival in the context of the death of his best friend and idol, who leads a

¹⁰ Paul Fussell, cited in Showalter, 1985, 171.

¹¹ Showalter, 1985, 191-4.

dissolute life, fronted by a mock-marriage and spiced with a succession of one-name boys. Constant dissimulation, eternal posturing, intermittent periods of exile, and abject failure are his lot in life.

By contrast, Patrick Hamilton's 'Edward Blake' -- Rope's foppish poet and wounded ex-officer, Rupert Cadell -- cuts a rather different figure. The agent of retribution against the play's Nietzschean killers, Cadell rouses himself from his Firbankian languor to impeach the society which breeds their kind:

One gentleman murders another in a back alley in London for, let us say, since you have suggested it, the gold fillings in his teeth, and all society shrieks out revenge upon the miscreant. They call that murder. But when the entire youth and manhood of a whole nation rises up to slaughter the entire youth and manhood of another, not even for the gold fillings in each other's teeth, then society condones and applauds the outrage. How then can I say that I disapprove of murder, seeing that I have, in the last Great War, acted on these assumptions myself?¹²

Of course, contrary to the ironic rhetorical question, he *can* disapprove since his experience of the War has problematised the meaning of 'manhood' which officially framed it: adrift of his old masculinist moorings, he can discern the link between the murderous proclivities of the fascistic Wyndham [sic] Brandon and that 'manly' defence of 'little Belgium' whose scars he continues to bear.

The repression by Hamilton of his own probable homosexuality can be plausibly traced back to his time the Colet Court Preparatory School where the older boys habitually beat those juniors who refused to engage in mutual masturbation -- a practice which, according to his brother Bruce, induced in the young Patrick 'fascination, tempered by some disgust and strong moral reprobation'.¹³ This horrified

¹² Hamilton, 1929, 64.

fascination at the spectacle of male homosexuality later wrote its way into the semiotics of Rope. During his time at Westminster, he became obsessed by 'lascivious thoughts'¹⁴ concerning a boy who was known throughout the House (which was Grant's) as the resident 'whore' -- although it would seem that his 'lack of enterprise' ensured that his desires went unconsummated.¹⁵ Bruce Hamilton also testifies that his brother's first marriage was not consummated on honeymoon in Brittany at the end of 1930,¹⁶ and records a rather peculiar comment made to him by Patrick at Henley in 1946: 'What a pity one of us isn't a woman. Then we could have got married and been together always'.¹⁷ Patrick Hamilton evidently had his own dimension of 'homosexual panic' to add to the inter-war crisis of masculinity.

However, whether repressed homosexual¹⁸ or simply heterosexual manqué, one feature of the life of Patrick Hamilton does open itself out, almost too easily, to textbook psychoanalysis: his troubled relationship with his father, Bernard -- who, among other things, was a would-be historical novelist with a flair for self-dramatisation and a bitter envy of his son. In the 1900s and 1910s, his long absences from the family home were punctuated by tyrannical visits during which he would upbraid his small children in 'parade-ground

¹³ PAT, 92.

¹⁴ Ibid., 123.

¹⁵ Ibid., 124.

¹⁶ B. Hamilton, 1972, 64.

¹⁷ Ibid., 108.

¹⁸ Hamilton's repressed homosexual tendencies resurfaced towards the very end of his life. Of his nephew (the present Earl of Shrewsbury) he is reported to have said (to his second wife, Lady Ursula Stewart): "I love Charles. I love that boy. I wonder why he is so attractive. Beautiful -- I imagine Lord Alfred Douglas must have looked rather like that, but he, I suppose, was rather a little beast." See PAT, 664.

language'.¹⁹ Yet rather than simply recoil from his bullying father, Patrick proceeded to emulate Bernard in every possible respect, whilst at the same time frustrating the latter's attempts to spoil his chances of a literary career. With regard to one such attempt, Hamilton wrote to his father in the following terms: 'I very much appreciate your kindness and care for me, but I must ask you, *on no account to attempt to get a job for me, as I would not take it, however good it might prove.*'²⁰ Thus we have perhaps an instantiation of the Freudian fable of the sadomasochistic ego, whose smouldering resentment of the super-ego is matched only by its continual craving for the 'Father's' love and approbation.²¹

Bernard, 'nobly trying to conceal some inevitable chagrin',²² was present at the opening night of the production of Rope presented by Reginald Denham at the Ambassadors Theatre on 25 April 1929,²³ in which the murderers were played by Brian Aherne and Anthony Ireland, and the part of Rupert Cadell was played by Ernest Milton. These performances Denham described among 'the most exciting ... to be enacted between the two world wars';²⁴ the play itself --

¹⁹ B. Hamilton, 1972, 7.

²⁰ P. Hamilton, letter to Bernard Hamilton, West Kensington, 28 August 1924 [AHA].

²¹ The formulation used here derives from Terry Eagleton's exposition of Freud's conception of the human psyche as sadomasochistic in The Ideology of the Aesthetic (Oxford, 1990): for example (275) -- 'If the self craves its own confinement, then, it also reaps delight from seeing its gaolers brought low -- even if the result of this, in an increasing dialectic, is guilt, further submissiveness, and yet more pleasure in dethroning the despot.'

²² B. Hamilton, 1972.,56.

²³ The first performance of the play was enacted by The Repertory Players at the Strand on 3 March 1929 -- R. Denham, Stars in My Hair: Being Certain Indiscreet Memoirs, London, 1956, 147.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

which ran for nine months first time around -- he described as 'epoch-making'.²⁵ Before extracting for fuller discussion some of the motifs of this 'horror play',²⁶ I shall outline its plot and detail its characterization.

The plot, famously but here briefly, is this. The scene is laid in the late 1920s. Two wealthy Oxford undergraduates, inspired by a fascistic (mis)reading of Nietzsche, have murdered a fellow student at their shared Mayfair flat and have concealed his corpse in a trunk. The action of the play then unfolds during the dinner party which they hold that evening -- with food laid out on the altar-like trunk itself and, in a quasi-cannibalistic ritual, consumed by, among others, the dead student's father and his aunt. The two murderers seem to be homosexual and their crime is eventually exposed by the play's other gay character -- the ex-army officer-turned poet, Rupert Cadell.

In The Light Went Out, Bruce Hamilton suggests three stimuli for Rope: the notorious Leopold-Loeb 'killing-for kicks' case in Chicago; Patrick's fascination for 'the dramatic possibilities of having a languid, affected, and seemingly ineffective character coming out with tremendous force at a climactic crisis'; and the social situation of the overstaying guest.²⁷ The first of these influences was explicitly repudiated by Hamilton in a misguidedly apologetic preface to the published text of Rope: 'I cannot recall this crime having ever properly reached my consciousness until after "Rope" was written'.²⁸ However, the context of this remark is an attempted denial of the accusation that he had written a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hamilton, 1929, viii.

²⁷ B. Hamilton, 1972, 55.

²⁸ Hamilton, 1929, ix.

tawdrily sensational crime play. In any event, Rope invokes the famous Chicago killing almost automatically by virtue of its period and subject-matter.

On 31 May 1924, at the height of the Jazz Age, Richard A. Loeb and his lover Nathan F. Leopold confessed to the motiveless murder of an adolescent schoolboy called Bobby Franks. Like their victim, the two killers were the sons of immensely wealthy local businessmen. They were, in addition, adherents of a fascistic conception of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Nathan, in particular, was exceptionally intelligent -- reportedly endowed with an IQ of 200 and already, at the age of nineteen, a Phi Beta Kappa university graduate.²⁹ Together with his eighteen-year-old friend, Richard Loeb (who had just recently graduated from the University of Michigan), Nathan was rescued from the electric chair by the advocacy of Clarence Darrow, a celebrated socialist lawyer with a reputation for defending difficult cases. Rather less mercy was to be extended by the ex-'Nietzschean'³⁰ socialist playwright Patrick Hamilton to 'his'

²⁹ M. McKernan (ed.), The Crime and Trial of Leopold and Loeb, London, 1925, 111.

³⁰ Hamilton's enthusiasm for Nietzsche dates from early 1927 and was, from the beginning, couched in terms parodic. A letter to Bruce Hamilton of 14 March 1927 features 'a parody of the work of the celebrated Mad Philosopher -- Neitsche [sic]' which imitates one of the discourses in So Spake Zarathustra. Nevertheless, he described this book (in another letter - - of 6 April) as 'the greatest, most inspiring book ever', and tried to live his life according to its precepts. He adhered to a very rationalist version of the philosophy of Nietzsche, hoping it would help him to forswear the temptations of the bottle and the flesh. For example, he 'spake' thus to his brother in a letter written in February 1927: 'when you take pride in conquering yourself, do not flatter your Will for having accomplished it, but flatter your Intelligence. By which I mean this -- that all decisions to forego a delight rise from nothing but your logic and your brain, which make it clear to you that the indulgence of that delight will be harmful and give you more sorrow

Leopold and Loeb. Interestingly, the two self-styled Chicago supermen were Hamilton's exact contemporaries -- scions, like himself, of a bourgeoisie with post-war hegemony problems.

The principal villain of the Hamilton piece is called (perhaps significantly) Wyndham Brandon³¹ and is described in the play-text as 'tall, finely and athletically built and blonde ... quietly and expensively dressed ... and very well off.'³² To one only superficially acquainted with the cultural codings with which the category 'homosexual' has been freighted over the last century, such a description might seem anomalous. However, the cultivation/cultification of an intensified machismo has always been a constituent element of the culture of the bourgeois segment of the English homosexual community (manifest, for example, in the relentless pursuit of clean-limbed young Guardsmen by what Fussell calls the 'gentle literary fantasists'³³ of Victorian England); as Eve Sedgwick writes:

Unlike aristocratic homosexual men whose strongest cultural bond was in the end than the delight can outweigh it needs a brilliant intelligence (such as you and I claim to have) in order to See what is harmful. When you know a thing is harmful you cannot do it'. This same letter evinces the germinating seeds of a commitment to Marxism in the way it foregrounds Zarathustran aphorisms, such as the one cited below, which bespeak a problematic of 'necessary sacrifice' and teleologism consonant with the theodicy of Marxism-Leninism: 'I love those who do not seek behind the stars for a reason to perish and be sacrifices, but who sacrifice themselves to each in order that earth may someday become beyond-man's. I love him who liveth to perceive, and who is longing for perception in order that someday beyond- man may live. And thus he wills his own destruction.' (All extracts are from letters in AHA).

³¹ Significantly, that is, not just because of the christian name of Wyndham Lewis, but also because Bernard Hamilton always used to boast that he was descended from the ducal families of Hamilton and Brandon -- see PAT, 2.

³² Hamilton, 1929, 19.

³³ P. Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory, Oxford, 1977, 279.

with Catholic Europe (especially with the countries where the permissive Code Napoleon was in force), the educated middle-class man looked to Classical Sparta and Athens for models of virilizing male bonds, models in which the male homosocial institutions (education, political mentorship, brotherhood in arms) and the homosexual seemed to be fully continuous, and fully exclude the world of women.³⁴

The figure of Wyndham Brandon can be read as incarnating a proto-fascist variation on this theme.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, his philosophical heroes are Thomas Carlyle ('He's got guts, anyway', he says to Cadell in defence), and Nietzsche.³⁶

Rope also reveals Brandon to be a gallows-humourist - one who brazenly and amusingly adverts to his crime under that classic sign of the 'love that dare not speak its name', irony. In the following interchange, Brandon skates on thin ice by toying with the suggestion of one of his dinner-guests, Leila, that he has concealed a dead body in the trunk.

Brandon. Yes. I've got the key [to the trunk]. It's in my waistcoat pocket.

Leila. Well - hand it over and let's have a look inside.

Brandon. I'm hanged if I do.

Leila. But why *not* my dear? if you're (*tug*) really (*tug*) innocent - you can prove it, dear.

Brandon. But how often do I have to tell you, Leila, that I am *not* innocent? My hands are red with a crime committed less than three hours ago.³⁷

Brandon then succeeds in diverting Leila by indulging her in the

³⁴ Sedgwick, 1985, 207 .

³⁵ Hamilton's stylization of Brandon as an Aryan blackshirt (and of Granillo as a Latin Catholic) can be construed as a device whose purpose was to defuse the anti-semitism surrounding the press publicity given the Leopold-Loeb case (both murderers were of German-Jewish stock and the killing was assimilated into the traditional Christian discourse of ritual murder). Whether this device was successful (or indeed could have been successful given the notoriety of the case in the Twenties) is a moot question.

³⁶ Hamilton, 1929, 50 and 87.

³⁷ Hamilton, 1929, 61-2.

'strongman' mini-drama which she devises for both himself and fellow guest, Kenneth Raglan. Kenneth, as we have already learnt, had 'fagged' for Brandon at their old Public School: gushingly, he informs the latter, 'Of course, I used to think you an absolute *hero* in those days'.³⁸ For his part, Brandon recalls nostalgically the days when he 'was always more or less popular with the juniors.'³⁹ Considerately, he gives Kenneth a reminder of those half-forgotten schooldays in the form of the vicious 'Chinese Burn' which terminates Leila's little game.

The other half of the play's bachelor boy couple, Charles Granillo, also traces the roots of his relationship with Wyndham Brandon back to the dormitories and gymnasia of the selfsame Public School. However, unlike Brandon, Granillo stands heir to that traditional lineage, on the margins of English culture, of the *aristocratic* homosexual. This figure connotes a rather different set of features, which 'include effeminacy, connoisseurship, high religion, and an interest in Catholic Europe.'⁴⁰ The text of the play describes Wyndham's 'Granno' as 'expensively and rather ornately dressed in a dark blue suit. He wears a diamond ring. He is dark. A Spaniard. He is enormously courteous -- something between a dancing-master and a stage villain.'⁴¹

This stereotypical understudy for a Jacobean stage malcontent is, however, depicted quite favourably by Hamilton: 'To those who know him fairly well, and are not subject to Anglo-Saxon prejudices, he seems a thoroughly good sort.'⁴² This portrayal of Granillo is one which contrasts significantly with that of Brandon -- namely, as a pathological Aryan. Indeed, Granillo's whisky-sodden remorse and his hysterical

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Sedgwick, 1985, 93.

⁴¹ Hamilton, 1929, 19.

⁴² Ibid.

jumpiness provide much of the play's incidental, almost Ortonesque,⁴³ humour: one example is the heart-stopping scene in the dark near the beginning of Act Two, where Granillo accidentally touches the silhouetted body of Brandon, who is perched on the trunk, and emits a 'muffled scream' of terror.⁴⁴ In a similar vein, we have the following 'hysterical' exchange between the two murderers concerning the incriminating cinema ticket which had belonged to their victim, Ronald Kentley, and which by this moment is in the possession of Rupert Cadell:

Brandon. You've got that little ticket, haven't you? You'd better give it me and we'll destroy it right away now.

Granillo. What ticket?

Brandon. Ronald's ticket.

Granillo (*vaguely, only half realising the significance of what he has been asked*). What Ronald's ticket?

Brandon (*tersely, yet still quite coldly*). Oh, don't dither, Granno. Ronald's ticket, Ronald's Coliseum ticket.

Granillo. Ronald's Coliseum ticket.

Brandon. Sh! Not so loud, you fool. Yes.

Granillo. I haven't got the Coliseum ticket.

Brandon. Don't be a fool Granno. I gave it to you.

Granillo. You didn't give it to me.

Brandon. (*clenching his hands and looking at the other*). Granno! ⁴⁵

Granillo's dumbly repetitious responses here are of a kind familiar to us all -- the genus of the desperately wishful lie. He now embarks upon a frantic search of his pockets before resuming an absurd attitude of feigned ignorance:

Granillo (*hoarsely*). You didn't give it to me. I never had it.

Brandon (*looking at him with a kind of calm rage*). I gave it into your hand.

⁴³ Indeed, the central theatrical semiotic of Rope -- the onstage spectacle of a corpse in a box -- is, obviously, reminiscent of that of Loot (1967), Orton's great burlesque of melodrama.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, 1929, 51.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

Granillo. You didn't. I never had it .

Brandon. I gave it into your hand!

Granillo. See if you've got it.

Brandon. I haven't got it, I tell you. Where is it?....

Granillo. Shshshsh! I put it in my waistcoat pocket.

Brandon (*shouting*). You put it in you waistcoat pocket! You put it in your waistcoat pocket! Where is it *now!* Where is it *now!*⁴⁶

As Rupert now stealthily enters the room, the audience is confronted with a familiar scene which tends to engender an identification with the plight of Brandon and Granillo: have we not all been discovered by a guest at some time, while embroiled in a row that has gone from a whisper to an imprudent scream? The audience thus finds itself implicated in the 'bad jest' perpetrated by Granillo and Brandon and the 'thrilling' question which increasingly foregrounds itself is: 'Will they get away with it?' The other 'thrilling' aspect of the situation which likewise constructs the spectator as fascinated voyeur devolves from the connoted relationship between Brandon and Granillo. As David Miller puts it of the Hitchcock film version:

we are continually put in the position of being just about to see what we are waiting for; and the desire for the spectacle of gay male sex is intensified accordingly into that pleasurable (because all but unpleasantly) prolonged state of suspension we call suspense.⁴⁷

The man who puts an end to the first aspect of the play's sense of suspense is Brandon's very own schoolboy hero, the twenty-nine year-old Rupert Cadell: now lame in one leg and rather 'foppish in dress and appearance',⁴⁸ but with a sword sheathed in his walking-stick.⁴⁹ His conversation is

⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁷ D. A. Miller, 'Anal Rope', Representations, 32, Fall 1990, 124.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, 1929, 31.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, the Hamilton children grew up believing -- rightly or wrongly -- that among the family heirlooms was a sword-stick which had belonged to Lord Byron. This is plausible because one of their ancestors, a

hallmarked by affectations which verge 'on effeminacy':⁵⁰ he speaks in a syntactically complete register which bespeaks a neatly polished linguistic self-regard. Typical of his penchant for the epigrammatic is his comment to Granillo about his literary magnum opus: 'it promises to be not only one of the best things I have ever written, but the very best thing I have ever read.'⁵¹ In this, and in his liberal use of alcohol as an intellectual stimulant, he can be read as the play's 'Patrick Hamilton' figure. (Cadell even refers to the lure of 'Omarism'⁵²-- the doctrine which valorizes evanescent pleasures and which was celebrated in literary London at the Omar Khayyam Dining Club of which Patrick had recently become a member.)⁵³

If Cadell's vengeance on the murderers then betokens a wish-fulfillment for Patrick Hamilton -- the triumph of a 'Scarlet Pimpernell' figure who re-affirms his problematic masculine identity by brandishing a secreted rapier at villainy -- he also explicitly represents the 'public in general'.⁵⁴ And it is in society's name that he berates the malefactors at the finish: 'You are going to hang, you swine! Hang - both of you - hang!'⁵⁵ By betraying them like this, by whistling up those front-line custodians of the heterosexist mores of bourgeois society, the police, Cadell could be construed as constituting himself as a 'good' sexual subject, in opposition to Brandon and Granillo. However, it is also possible to read, and to produce,

Colonel Thomas Wildman, was a friend of Byron at Harrow, and later bought Newstead Abbey from him in 1817 for £94, 500. See PAT, 3-4. Like Cadell, of course, Byron was a lame-footed, foppish fighter with homosexual inclinations.

⁵⁰ Hamilton, 1929, 31.

⁵¹ Ibid. 42.

⁵² Ibid., 75.

⁵³ B. Hamilton, 1972, 49.

⁵⁴ P. Hamilton, 1929, 82.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 90.

Cadell's exposure of their crime as an act which does not imply a renunciation of the sexual orientation he seemingly shares with them.

After all, righteous avenger though he may be Rupert Cadell is not above lampooning the inanities of the heterosexuals in the room. In so doing he also plays the functional role of comically dissipating tension. For example, after Leila has stumbled unwittingly, and he has tumbled wittingly, onto the truth of the 'chest picnic', Rupert takes time out to parody the prattle about the movies which Leila and her incipient partner, Kenneth, launch themselves into:

Leila. Talking of murderers -- have you seen that new thing on at the New Gallery?

Raglan. Yes, I saw that. Isn't it good?

Leila. Yes. *Isn't it good?* I didn't like *her*, though, much -- the woman [just to clarify her gender!] -- I didn't think she was much good.

Raglan. No, *she* wasn't much good [even polite disagreement is occluded by this kind of interaction]. That other film was good, though, wasn't it? [the previous topic has evidently been exhausted already]

Leila. Yes. *Wasn't it good?*

Raglan. Yes, it was good, wasn't it?

Rupert. The Lord look down upon us. We have fallen amongst fans.⁵⁶

The banalities now start to come fast and furious as the conversation becomes ever more vacuous:

Leila. But then John Gilbert *always* had a moustache, didn't he?

Raglan. Oh no. Rather not. I've seen him in thousands of ones without. All the early ones.

Rupert (*despairingly*). The early ones!

Leila. By the way, did you see Ronald Colman in that thing with Vilma Banky? I've forgotten what it was called -- the Wonderful Something -- or something -- you know -- it was all sort of -- *you know*....

Rupert. I, for one, at the moment of speaking, do not.

Raglan. Yes, I know what you mean. The Wonderful -- I've forgotten what -- it was jolly good, wasn't it? What do you think of her -- Vilma Banky?

Leila (*disparagingly*). Oh -- I don't know Like all *these*, you know....

Rupert. I once went to the pictures and saw Mary Pickford.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 38.

Raglan. Oh -- how did you like her?

Rupert. Oh, I don't know. Like all these,⁵⁷ you know....

Leila. What was she in, anyway?

Rupert. I can't quite recall. The Something Something, I think. Or something like that. (Pause.) Something very like it anyway.⁵⁸

In this parodic demolition of film causerie, Cadell operates as the chosen vessel for Hamilton's fort é -- the anatomisation and critique of hackneyed social discourses.

Rope's heterosexual characters function then as mere foils to the barbed wit of its gay young villains and hero; indeed, the entire action of the play consists of an elaborate practical joke played by Brandon and Granillo and detected by Rupert Cadell but completely missed by Kenneth, Leila, Mrs. Debenham, and Sir Johnstone Kentley. The three male homosexual characters are epistemologically privileged while the four heterosexuals are placidly nescient. And while the former are given all the good lines, the latter are restricted to platitudes. Consequently, Hamilton's Rope seldom 'feels' like an anti-homosexual play, so valorized is its dominant discourse of high camp.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ There is a similar interchange featuring this dismissive phrase in Hamilton's first novel, Monday Morning, London, 1925, 13. It is used in that instance to debunk the literary pretensions of Anthony Charteris Forster.

⁵⁸ Hamilton, 1929, 39-40.

⁵⁹ Later in life, Hamilton encapsulated his own views on homosexuality in a 1954 letter to Bruce in which he fulminates against the 'sensational prosecutions' then being brought by the police in the wake of the defections of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean: 'The police, naturally, love to victimize any one well known. Press and public too ... Here you have a perfectly ordinary young man (with a liking, no doubt, for Boy Scouts, Airmen, and other male whores) being fantastically pilloried -- and convicted on the word of the male whores.... In my tolerance for homosexuality I personally go further than the average civilized person, who is so often heard saying that it is all right provided "they don't corrupt the young". I don't see this. I don't think the young are corruptible. I think that homosexuality is something constitutional -- you either have it or not' [PAT, 545]. The notion expressed here that homosexuality is an entirely innate condition rather than a possibility open to

Kenneth, also at Oxford, is described disdainfully by Brandon as 'about the most perfect specimen of ordinary humanity attainable'.⁶⁰ He arrives on stage, overdressed and nervous. His opening conversational gambits consist of inane echo-questions:

Brandon. And of course all this place is simply covered (*pouring*) with books.

Raglan. Covered with books?

Brandon (*coming down with drink*). Yes. I've come into a library.

Raglan. Come into a library?⁶¹

'Gin and It' in hand, Kenneth then proceeds to descant affectedly upon his passion for Edgar Wallace. His female counterpart, Leila, 'has no ideas' and also shares Kenneth's 'tendency to conceal that deficiency with a show of sophistication. Her conversation is ridden with cliché and Hamilton stocks her *parole* with pretentious, 'many-syllabled and rather *outré* words.'⁶² For example, the modish word 'weird' recurs five times in six consecutive utterances in an early exchange.⁶³

Admirably accomplished though this linguistic hallmarking of Kenneth and Leila may be, however, its neatness should not blind the radical spectator to its sexist implications in Leila's case. For Leila in particular is satirized for daring to wear

most people, only *partly* 'biological', is not one which is likely to find much favour with lesbian and gay activists today -- however, these are surely not the words of a homophobe.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, 1929, 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 27-8. The colloquial vocable which is most frequently attached to the discourse of Brandon, Granillo, and Rupert is 'queer': see Hamilton, 1929, 42 (twice), 49 (once), 50 (once), 56 (once), 73 (once), and 88 (once). According to the QED, this word was -- in the meaning of 'male homosexual' -- originally of U.S. provenance, and was first used, in print, in an English context by Auden. Hamilton may well have picked up its 'slang' meaning in the theatre in the Twenties.

the mask of irony without proper male entitlement. Time and again she skittishly alludes to the body in the trunk in a desperately ironic mode -- 'Oh my dear! You've forgotten! He's got his murdered man in here!'⁶⁴ This debarring of Woman from the Club of Irony is reminiscent of a similarly occlusive move made by Christopher Isherwood in Goodbye to Berlin when he continually positions Sally Bowles as a scatter-brained, anti-semitic, ingénue. Sally is a frequent victim of Isherwood's penchant for irony. Moreover, when she has the audacity to try on a bit of this irony for herself, both she and her butt are outflanked by first 'Christopher', as focaliser, and then Isherwood, as narrator:

'You know, Fritz darling,' said Sally, puckering up her nose at me , "I believe the trouble with you is that you've never really found the right woman."

" Maybe that's true --" Fritz took this idea very seriously. His black eyes became liquid and sentimental; "Maybe I'm still looking for my ideal."

'But You'll find her one day, I'm absolutely certain you will.'" Sally included me, with a glance, in the game of laughing at Fritz ...

"Don't *you* think so?" Sally appealed to me.

"I'm sure I don't know," I said. "Because I've never been able to discover what Fritz's ideal is."

For some reason this seemed to please Fritz.⁶⁵

Being 'in the know' about the subtextual gay lifestyle pursued by William Bradshaw/Christopher Isherwood, the reader is thus empowered to smirk at Sally's stabs at being sophisticated, just as being 'in the know' about the corpse in the trunk elevates the spectator above Leila Arden in Rope.

The play's only other female character, Mrs. Debenham, is described pithily in the text as 'a nonentity':⁶⁶ which indeed she is. Her brother, Sir Johnstone Kentley, also has little to

⁶⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁵ Christopher Isherwood, Goodbye to Berlin (1939), London, 1977, 32-3.

⁶⁶ Hamilton, 1929, 29.

say for himself: however, there is embodied in the character of the victim's father a symbolic value absent from that of his Aunt. Unlike the brash Wyndham Brandon, Sir Johnstone is a listless and gentle old patrician who 'has been in a position of total authority throughout the greater part of his life, and has no need to assert himself'.⁶⁷ The gratuitous act of violence inflicted on the Kentley family in Rope can then be read as a blow against the *ancien régime*, cognate with the seduction of a portion of the British ruling-class by Fascism in the 1930s.

The victim of this *acte gratuit* is the biggest foil of them all: Ronald Kentley, that *döpplegänger* for Kenneth Raglan who was 'so frightfully good at sports'⁶⁸ and whose motivating fear in life was -- in Brandon's words -- that they would not 'think him a man'.⁶⁹ We never actually see this body in the trunk/closet; instead the corpse of Ronald Kentley functions as a given, or as a 'lack' -- a mere object of that desire to kill which is at the heart of Rope/rape.

The killing for kicks of the athletic Ronald Kentley by Brandon and Granillo is the first aspect of this play with which I wish to deal in more depth; related to this theme is the homosexual encoding of the two killers and it is this feature which I shall discuss second. The 'shame' Hamilton evidently felt over Rope, his obsession with retributive punishment as instanced in the play, and the description of it as an 'anti-capitalist thriller' will then each be discussed in turn. Finally, I shall comment on Alfred Hitchcock's bowdlerised film version of the play.

The Nietzschean leitmotif of Rope -- that of the motiveless murder -- is most famously to be located in the work of André Gide. The café waiter in the latter's Le Prométhée mal enchainé expounds the doctrine of *l'acte gratuit* in the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 35.

following terms:

*Non, mais gratuit: un acte qui n'est motivé par rien. Comprenez-vous? intérêt, passion, rien. L'acte désintéressé; né de soi; l'acte aussi sans but; donc sans maître: l'Acte autochtone?*⁷⁰

In Les Caves du Vatican, written on the eve of the Great War and translated into English two years prior to the publication of Rope, Gide distilled the celebration of casual murder as the epitome of human liberation into the action of his prepossessingly sinister bisexual character, Lafcadio Wluiki, who pushes a stranger off the Rome to Naples train.⁷¹

Hamilton's play might seem to be an extended study of this putatively transgressive act: it is also, however, a critique. For the gravamen of Rope is the point that there is no such thing as '*une acte autochtone*'; instead, all actions are dyed indelibly with social meanings, all 'individual' identities are culturally encoded. Wyndham Brandon finds himself enmeshed in a sub-Nietzschean discursive fantasy which has deadly implications for him also; he did not invent the 'blond beast' persona of which he is, in a sense, the misguided victim. As Rupert Cadell trenchantly informs him, the aestheticized autotelic murder can never coincide with its idea of itself: consequently, 'murder will out':

Rupert. Because, dear Brandon, that sort of murder would not be motiveless murder at all. It would have a quite clear motive. Vanity. It would be a murder of vanity. And because of that, the criminal would be quite unable to keep from talking about it, or showing off -- in *some* fantastic way or other ... He won't hide it up. He wants to boast about it -- and say something -- do something -- it may be something only just slightly *outré* -- which gives him away.⁷²

⁷⁰ C. D. Bettinson, Gide: Les Caves du Vatican, London, 1972.

⁷¹ A. Gide, The Vatican Cellars (1914), trans. D. Bussy, 1927, London, 1969, 187.

⁷² Hamilton, 1929, 67.

The point is highlighted by Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer in their radical feminist investigation of the phenomenon of sexual murder, The Lust to Kill, when they remark of Gide's proto-existentialist position: '*anti-social acts are not always asocial acts: they are frequently underpinned by existing social meanings.*'⁷³ And subject therefore to social retribution of the kind evinced in Rope; retribution which is consonant with The Lust to Kill's central plea:

We must aspire to an equal and feminist future in which murder is no longer a metaphor for freedom, in which transcendence is not the only possible self-affirmation and in which the lust to kill has no place.⁷⁴

The worthiness of this sentiment would seem to be vitiated somewhat for a radical audience of today by Hamilton's ostensibly 'unsound' depiction of his killers as homosexuals. Once again, though, an affinity can be found in the work of the great homosexualist writer, André Gide -- albeit one devoid of Hamilton's condemnatory edge. The text of The Immoralist (1902, translated, 1930), traces out the line of development of its main protagonist, Michel, from Occidental bourgeois respectability towards an amoral Oriental bisexuality beyond 'culture and decency and morality'.⁷⁵ Conventional married love is conceptualized by Michel as entropizing, and is correlated with the total regulation of natural forces.⁷⁶

Gide is careful, however, not to extol Michel's philosophy: the first-person narrative is framed by an authorial Preface

⁷³ Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder, Cambridge and Oxford, 1987, 61.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 177.

⁷⁵ Andre Gide, The Immoralist (1902), trans. D. Bussy, 1930, London, 1960.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 71.

which posits the book 'as little an inditement as an apology'⁷⁷ and by a distancing letter, from a narratee. However, it is the godless Michel who conquers tuberculosis by virtue of his will-to-power, while his pious wife, Marceline, succumbs to the disease. Gide also depicts the increasingly frequent nocturnal forays made by Michel as liberating, whereas, by contrast, Hamilton's Rupert Cadell is made to condemn by allusion such profligacy. The pertinent passage here is that in Act Three wherein Rupert announces his ambition to do 'up to date' Oliver Goldsmith's Nightpiece⁷⁸ and thereby make contemporary the condemnation of the night-stalking reprobates to be found there:

But let me turn from a scene of such distress to the sanctified hypocrite, who has been talking of virtue till the time of bed, and now steals out, to give a loose to his vices under the protection of midnight; vices more atrocious, because he attempts to conceal them. See how he pants down the back alley, and, with hastening steps, fears an acquaintance in every face May his vices be detected; may the morning rise upon his shame: yet I wish to no purpose; villainy, when detected, never gives up, but boldly adds impudence to imposture.⁷⁹

Unlike Goldsmith, however, Hamilton clings pertinaciously to the possibility of exposure and revenge, in his puritanical re-accenuation of Gide's preoccupations.

A deeper taproot, perhaps, of the 'killing for (sexual) kicks' depicted in Rope is what John Bayley describes as Hamilton's literary mortmain from his (sometimes) Calvinistic father: 'a touch of Scottish diablerie with affiliations in James Hogg'.⁸⁰ And certainly the eldritch pursuit of George Cowan by Robert Wringham, which is the substance of the 'Editor's Narrative' in The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a

⁷⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁸ Hamilton, 1929, 76.

⁷⁹ Oliver Goldsmith, The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, vol. i, ed., Arthur Friedman, Oxford, 1966, 432-3.

⁸⁰ John Bayley, London Review of Books, 1 October 1987, 6.

Justified Sinner(1824), 'offers a portrait of male homosocial desire as murderous resentment',⁸¹ which is reminiscent of Rope. What Eve Sedgwick says of Robert in Between Men maps point-for-point onto Wyndham Brandon, who also conceptualizes himself as a 'justified sinner':

Robert cannot desire women enough to be able to desire men through them; instead, identifying hatingly with them he hatingly throws himself at the man who seems to be at the fountainhead of male prestige.⁸²

Can this affinity with a novel in the the Gothic tradition also be said to signify a shared set of homophobic thematica? Hamilton does, after all, seem here to construct homosexual men as natural killers, indulging in unnecessary murder as insouciantly as 'they' (could be said to) indulge in (procreatively) unnecessary sex: is this not classic paranoid homophobia? Moreover, Rope also portrays its main homosexual killer, Wyndham Brandon, as fascistic: could this not be construed as an outrageous insult to the gay men who perished in the Nazi concentration camps?

To be fair to Hamilton, the affirmative due to these questions must needs be contextualized historically. At the end of the Twenties, the Nazi movement was not especially known for its animus towards Germany's 1.2 million sexually-active homosexuals. It is likely that many Party leaders regarded homosexuality as an index of moral decline, and loathed the famous Magnus Hirschfeld 'Institute of Sexology' in Berlin, which they duly closed. However, Hitler himself seems to have been indifferent to the sexual proclivities of Ernst Röhm, chief-of-staff of that half-million

⁸¹ Sedgwick, 1985, 102.

⁸² Ibid. 102.

strong plebeian army, the SA.⁸³ Only later, obsessed with the low birth-rate, did the Third Reich turn on homosexual men with an unbridled genocidal savagery.

In the late Twenties this lay, however, in the future, and throughout the Thirties British Leftists were quite often reprehensibly culpable of conflating fascism with an ultra-masculine homosexuality. For example, as late as 1940, Victor Gollancz's 'Left Book Club' could publish, without comment, a dystopian feminist novel entitled Swastika Night by Katherine Burdekin, which depicts a future Nazi Europe, societally constituted by male homosexual bonding and based on the absolute reduction of women to the status of hideous, segregated, breeding animals. Similarly, Rex Warner's anti-totalitarian satirical allegory The Wild Goose Chase (1937) stigmatizes androgynous bisexuality -- literalized in a degendering surgical operation -- as apolitically complicit with a peculiarly English form of fascism.

Moreover, Rope's portrayal on stage of three gay men, in a play which was to become an enormous commercial success, was, arguably (though not, of course, indisputably), transgressive in and of itself in 1929. Troublesome enough certainly to embarrass the older, more conservative Bruce Hamilton into an anxious and absurd disclaimer in his biography of his brother:

Brian Aherne as the First Murderer, Brandon ... was also a tower of strength. His powerful masculinity was needful, for with a weaker Brandon Rope is rather curiously [sic!] apt to seem like a play about homosexuals.⁸⁴

⁸³ See, Hans Peter Bleuel, Strength Through Joy: Sex and Society in Nazi Germany, London, 1973, 96.

⁸⁴ B.Hamilton, 1972, 57.

This disavowal would have been unlikely to appease the righteous wrath of the British Empire Union who wrote angrily to the BBC, following the radio broadcast of Rope (transmitted in January, 1932), in the following terms: 'a play of this description cannot but encourage in morbid and degenerate minds *that morbid tendency* which leads to the crimes depicted in this play.'⁸⁵[My emphasis].

Furthermore, Rope's three homosexual characters are not simply despicable, by any means. Indeed, the most 'Wildean' of them all is none other than Hamilton's instrument of vengeance, Rupert Cadell -- who, moreover, postpones the scene of discovery until after the heterosexual characters have vacated the stage.⁸⁶ Also, as I commented earlier, the play itself tends to function in such a way as to generate identification with the plight of Brandon and (especially) 'Granno': will they, we are tempted to wonder, 'get away with' the murder of the 'closet' in the cassone, whose representative on earth is that upper-class twit, Kenneth Raglan?

This rather flippant account of the spectator's dilemma

⁸² Cited in, Val Gielgud, British Radio Drama: 1922-56, London, 1957, 166.

⁸⁶ It could, on the other hand, be argued that in so doing Rupert is simply protecting the innocently ignorant characters, and as positioning himself to be their prolocutor at the finish. The availability of this interpretation would depend on how the piece was produced, and how received by a specific audience. My own particular problem with the ending lies in its uninterrogated endorsement of a retributionist theory of justice -- a pertinacious element in Hamilton's work, especially in his drama. Nevertheless, I see no reason why Brandon and Granillo's crime should go unchecked: it is true that Fascism is often transgressive, but transgression is surely not always a positive term for radical thought. In any case, it is unreasonable to overlook the fact that the very form in which the play was cast, and the 1920s West End audience for which it was originally written, demanded the triumph of 'good'.

lies, however, at the heart of what Hamilton described, in a letter to his brother written in 1939, as the 'slight feeling of shame' that he had 'always had in "Rope".'⁸⁷ This feeling of shame -- ascribable, most probably, to the play's amoral 'surfacism' -- is also attested to by the very fact that Hamilton should have felt compelled to write a 'Preface on Thrillers' for the published edition of the play. In this Preface, he invokes, 'Poe and Ambrose Bierce, and portions of Shakespeare, and portions of Dickens,'⁸⁸ in support of the properly 'disgusting' nature of the thriller genre. He then goes on to adduce the allegedly cathartic effect of the 'stimulant of horror' as a justification for having written within, and profited enormously by, such a mode: 'in "Rope" I have gone out to write a horror play and make your flesh creep If I have succeeded you will leave the theatre braced and recreated, which is what you go to the theatre for.'⁸⁹ Yet, this rationalization notwithstanding, the sense of 'shame' remained with Hamilton throughout the Thirties: why was this so?

In part, the answer lies, I think, with the sense of disquiet ineluctably induced by the moral ambiguity which the aestheticization of murder in Rope bespeaks. A 'de Quinceyish essay in the macabre', the play's moral purpose is as predictably subverted by Style as is, for example, the opium-eater's classic treatise, On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts (1827). In the latter, the lecturer's *initial* move is to separate out the ethical and the aesthetic as equally valid categories by which to assay an act of murder; however, the

⁸⁷ Letter from Patrick to Bruce Hamilton, Henley-on-Thames, 23-27 April 1939, 4 [AHA].

⁸⁸ Hamilton, 1929, viii.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

aesthetic inevitably begins to privilege itself as the 'lecture' develops:

Murder ... may be laid hold of by its moral handle ... or it may also be treated aesthetically, as the Germans call it -- that is, in relation to good taste.⁹⁰

People begin to see that something more goes to the composition of a fine murder than two blockheads to kill and be killed - a knife - a purse - and a dark lane. Design gentlemen, grouping, light and shade, poetry, sentiment, are now deemed indispensable to attempts of this nature.⁹¹

The German aesthetics to which De Quincey is referring, was developed in the eighteenth century from Baumgarten through to Kant as a discourse which occupied that terrain ignored by Cartesian High Rationalism -- namely the particularities of sensuous human experience; it was thus a discourse of the body.⁹² In British literary culture in the epoch preceding De Quincey's, however, 'aesthetics' had become congruent with the project of 'Manners'. As Terry Eagleton puts it:

Manners for the eighteenth century signify that meticulous disciplining of the body which converts morality to style, deconstructing the opposition between the proper and the pleasurable. In these regulated forms of civilized conduct, a pervasive aestheticizing of social practices gets under way: moral imperatives no longer impose themselves with the leaden weight of some Kantian duty, but infiltrate the very textures of lived experience as tact or know-how, intuitive sense or inbred decorum.⁹³

⁹⁰ T. De Quincey, Murder as One of the Fine Arts. The English Mail Coach and Other Writings, vol iv of The Works of Thomas De Quincey. "The English Opium Eater", Edinburgh, 1862, 7.

⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

⁹² The formulation of my argument here is indebted to the first and second lectures delivered by Terry Eagleton in October, 1987, at the University of Oxford, in his series entitled 'Aesthetics and Ideology from Kant to Derrida': now materialized as the first two chapters of The Ideology of the Aesthetic, Oxford, 1990.

⁹³ T. Eagleton, Oxford, 1990, 41.

With De Quincey, this aestheticization of human life colonized the territory of murder -- that ultimate stylization of one body by another. In the case of Rope, the body-sculpture in the trunk -- the corpse of Ronald Kentley -- is eroticized, endowed as it presumably is with a strangulation-induced erection.

In the 1854 Postscript to On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts, De Quincey suggests that this earlier essay was analogous to Jonathan Swift's A Modest Proposal, whose very 'monstrosity was its own excuse'.⁹⁴ However, this is not entirely correct. For Swift's satirical tract was a bitterly ironic polemic against English indifference to the fate of the Irish people; its egregious hypothesis has a cutting edge noticeably absent from De Quincey's entertaining accounts of the circumstances surrounding actual murders.

The fear that a similar lack was immanent to Rope is the highly plausible explanation for Patrick Hamilton's 'shame' concerning the play, especially given his obsession with retributive punishment. The Times Literary Supplement wrote of Hamilton that he 'was in the best sense an adolescent writer, delighting in the final scene when the villain gets his comeuppance';⁹⁵ but it is, I think, better to locate Hamilton's craving for the vengeful Law of the Father in childhood, rather than in adolescence. This quasi-religious cast of mind, with its concomitant faith in a Last Judgement, finds its wrathful articulation in Rope in the commination delivered against the killers by the seemingly emasculated figure of Rupert Cadell: 'for your cruel and scheming pleasure, you have committed a sin and a blasphemy against that very life which you now find yourselves most precious'.⁹⁶ A 'sin and a blasphemy': odd words these for such a self-confessed atheist as Cadell;

⁹⁴ De Quincey, 1862, 67.

⁹⁵ Times Literary Supplement, 14 July 1972, 796.

⁹⁶ Hamilton, 1929, 89.

shibbolethic words ritually invoked to serve an attempted re-affirmation of masculinity.

Inscribed within this puritannical topos is, however, a sub-text which could be more properly described as socialist in proclivity. According to Arnold Rattenbury, who met Hamilton during the War whilst working under Randall Swingler at Our Time, Patrick regarded both Rope and Gaslight as 'frontal assaults on capitalism'.⁹⁷ This genuflection towards socialism is more pronounced in later plays -- which post-date his conversion to Marxism in 1933 -- such as The Duke in Darkness (1941), and The Man Upstairs (1954). However, its presence in Rope is, as I argue below, discernible also -- albeit in a more exiguous form.

In his assessment, in Theatre Today in 1946, of Hamilton's achievement as a dramatist, Eric Capon registers the import of Wyndham Brandon as a fascistic type, and suggests a correspondence with the sinister activities of a Mayfair-based 'gang of young men with the highest social pretensions and an almost mystical pursuit of violence',⁹⁸ who terrorized London in the early Thirties and inclined themselves towards Mosley as the decade wore on. The allusion to Goldsmith's A City Nightpiece by Rupert Cadell, referred to earlier, suggests a deeper critique of that inter-war malaise of English bourgeois society which could be said to have fomented such well-heeled hoodlums as Wyndham Brandon. In the original text, which Cadell wishes to resurrect in order to indict the decadence of the great capitalist metropolis of contemporary London, Oliver Goldsmith fulminates against the immorality of Ancient Rome:

Here stood their citadel, but now grown over with weeds; there their senate-house, but now the haunt of every noxious reptile; temples and

⁹⁷ Arnold Rattenbury, in conversation with the present writer, 15 August 1988.

⁹⁸ Eric Capon, 'The Strange Case of Patrick Hamilton, Theatre Today, iii, December, 1946, 6.

theatres stood here, now only an undistinguished heap of ruin. They are fallen, for luxury and avarice first made them feeble. The rewards of state were conferred on amusing, and not on useful members of society.⁹⁹

'Their senate-house': the phrase recalls Lenin's description of the Houses of Parliament to Trotsky, on the latter's arrival in London in 1902;¹⁰⁰ 'the useful members of society' invokes that class of people to whom Hamilton was to look for ultimate social vengeance.¹⁰¹

In the year following Capon's conspectus of Hamilton's drama in Theatre Today, the British Press was full of presentiments concerning Alfred Hitchcock's filmed version of Rope. It was to be the first colour film made by the 'master of suspense' and was to keep faith with the stage version by being shot uninterruptedly at one shooting: it was, in short, to be a major cinematic event.¹⁰² As it turned out, the technical peculiarities of the production proved deleterious to the piece: garish 'Techicolour' was evidently inapt for a 'homosexual' play to which darkness and concealment were so crucial;¹⁰³ moreover, the necessity for the camera to duck behind objects

⁹⁹ Goldsmith, ed. Friedman, vol i, 1966, 431.

¹⁰⁰ Leon D. Trotsky, My Life (1971), London, 1975, 147.

¹⁰¹ It should be emphasized, though, that when Rope was written, Hamilton's politics were more naively liberal than socialist. For example, the figure of Sir Johnstone Kentley is sentimentally presented as a good-hearted bookish old patrician whose 'Universe' will, as a result of his son's murder, be 'blackened and distorted beyond the limits of thought' (to use Cadell's words) [89].

¹⁰² David Millar correctly makes the point that all the blether about the technicalities of the film have tended to obscure what is really interesting about Rope -- viz. its connoted representation of male homosexuality: see Miller, 1990, 115-7.

¹⁰³ Reginald Denham stressed the importance of darkness to the execution of the original production of Rope in his memoirs. He records that during the first ten pages of the script the stage was only illuminated by candles -- to great effect, apparently. See Denham, 1956, 148.

while a new camera took over, inevitably entailed a loss of precision. According to Bruce Hamilton, although his brother had been 'hoodwinked into actual participation in the early stages'¹⁰⁴ of the making of the Hitchcock version, he disliked the final product 'intensely.'¹⁰⁵

Substantively, Hitchcock's version of Rope (like George Cukor's version of Gaslight) was something of a palimpsest. Yet, Hitchcock would, on the surface, seem to have been the ideal director for the film: he had much in common with Hamilton, being of much the same age, coming from southern England, and, more to the point, fascinated by the theme of guilt-sharing; he also shared Hamilton's penchant for the comic dissipation of suspense. However, producing for an American market at the end of the Forties, Hitchcock was compelled to re-mould the play accordingly.

Judging in part on the basis of the 'Book of the Film' of Rope, written by D. G. Ward and derived from the Arthur Laurents screenplay, the film makes the following divigations. Firstly, the play is subtly changed to suit a more homophobic and less positively camp sensibility:¹⁰⁶ Brandon (played by the immaculately dressed John Ball) is depicted as an effete heterosexual with 'leanings', rather than as a 'macho' homosexual; he stutters and has problems with a champagne cork. Moreover, a motive of heterosexual revenge is imputed to his killing of (here) David Kentley. Philip (that is, Granillo), the focaliser of Ward's novelisation, foregrounds Brandon's motivation thus: 'He [Philip] had never gone out with her [Leila, here 'Janet'], but he had seen her often, particularly during her pre-Kenneth period, when for a time Brandon had pursued her vigorously.'¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Rupert Cadell is not, as he was in

¹⁰⁴ B. Hamilton, 1972, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 122.

¹⁰⁶ For a trenchant critique of the homophobia of Hitchcock's Rope, see Miller, 1990.

¹⁰⁷ D.G. Ward, Alfred Hitchcock's 'Rope': Book of the Film, London, 1948.

the stage play, a near contemporary of the killers, mixing in the same social/sexual milieu and traumatized by the Great War and its massive crisis of masculinity. Instead, he is an avuncular old schoolmaster-turned-publisher, played in the film by the hopelessly mis-cast James Stewart.

Secondly, all of the play's heterosexual ciphers are transmuted by the film into powerful characters. Leila becomes 'Janet', an independent woman who works for a woman's magazine, and is affianced to the body in the trunk. Her most recent affair was with Kenneth and she had previously been involved with (of all people!), Brandon. Kenneth meanwhile is transformed into 'one of the few really bearable people he [Philip] had ever known [sic!]',¹⁰⁸ and the victim's father is now a belligerent old man, ready to trade verbal blows with Brandon over Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment.

Thirdly, the film's deracination of the play from the concrete discursive formation and social setting within which it was originally imbricated -- namely a sub- Nietzschean riposte to a culturally specific crisis of masculinity and the English upper-class nexus of Public School/Oxford/Mayfair -- fatally re-accentuates Brandon's motivation. There is no speech analagous to Cadell's commination against the carnage of the Great War. James Stewart's final verbal assault against Brandon implicates a somewhat different explanation for his misdeed than that evinced by Ernest Milton in the stage version:

There must have been something very deep in you, from the very first, that let you do this monstrous thing - just as there has always been something deep in me that could never let me do it - or be a party to it now. You've strangled the life out of a fellow human being who could live and love as you never could -- and never will again.¹⁰⁹ [Stewart].

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 75.

in that chest there -- now lie the staring and futile remains of something that four hours ago lived, and laughed, and ran, and found it good. Laughed as you could never laugh, and ran as you could never run.... And if you think, as your type of philosopher generally does, that all life is nothing but a bad jest, then you will now have the pleasure of seeing it played upon yourselves.¹¹⁰ [Milton].

Hamilton's Rupert, in the latter quotation, makes no claim either to have discerned the 'mark of Cain' in the genetic makeup of Wyndham Brandon, or, for his own sinlessness (he has himself killed). Instead, he takes Brandon's philosophy at its word and throws his 'bad jest' back in his face. This makes for a more intelligent ending than the film's banal invocation of original sin, signifying, as it does, a philistine dismissal of the effectivity of the ideological. The shift from the verb 'laugh' to the verb 'love' is symptomatic of the Hitchcock versions's elucidation and amplification of the latent homophobia present -- together with other, contradictory, elements -- in the original play.

In concluding this discussion of Rope, it remains to remark that, if Hitchcock's version of the play deserves its position as a 'classic' of Hollywood cinema, then Patrick Hamilton's original work -- resonating as it does with that culturally important crisis of masculine identity which pervades much inter-war English Literature -- deserves at least to be remembered and discussed. Nevertheless, the sense of 'shame' which he felt over this play continues to haunt any attempt to serve it up as a straightforwardly anti-fascist piece.

¹¹⁰ Hamilton, 1929, 89.

Chapter Three

The Policing of Female Vengeance

***Here is a copy of Fanny for Henny,
To read all about her won't cost him a penny.
Why should it? What renders this saving of brass right?
She's paying the bill for a share of the Gaslight.***

***Picture the impact of Fanny on Henny!
Mark the old Casanova awake in him, when he
Recaptures the knockabout faith of his youth -
An Eye for an Eye, a Tooth for a Tooth!***

Michael Sadleir, inscription on a copy of the first edition of Fanny by Gaslight, presented to Patrick Hamilton, May 1940, reproduced in Catalogue of Nineteenth Century and Modern First Editions. Presentation Copies. Autograph Letters and Literary Manuscripts, Sotheby and Co., London, December 1972, 33.

The move from Rope to Gaslight (1939) and The Governess (1946) betokens a triadic shift in the drama of Patrick Hamilton: to the mode of melodrama (within the thriller genre); to a Stalinist theodicy; and to the figure of the avuncular Inspector Rough as evil-quelling avenger. All three aspects of this shift can be read as constituting further moves in a cultural re-negotiation of masculinity -- as the law-giving 'Uncle Joe' Stalin enters stage left, the foppish, guilt-ridden Rupert Cadell exits stage right, his sword re-sheathed. The melodramatic mode -- satirized obliquely in the 'strongman' *mise-en-abyme* in Act Two of Rope, when the imbecilic Leila Arden colludes with the 'Pearl White' persona ascribed to her by Kenneth Raglan -- is wholeheartedly embraced by Hamilton in Gaslight. However, the inscription

of the latter play within the melodramatic tradition engenders new tensions in the gender politics signified by Hamilton's work, without, moreover, resolving the crisis of masculinity by which it is beset.

I shall elaborate upon these comments later: first, however, for the plot. Billed as a 'Victorian Thriller', Gaslight was first performed on 5 December 1938, at the Richmond Theatre, London, with Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Mrs Bella Manningham, Denis Arundell as Mr. Manningham, and Milton Rosmer as Inspector Rough. In the tradition of nineteenth-century melodrama, or of Italian Grand Opera, the play operates so as to position, as the cynosure of all eyes, the figure of a woman-in-torture.¹ The victim in/of Gaslight, Bella Manningham, is claustrated by her villainous husband, who is intent on driving her into a lunatic asylum by convincing her that she is an amnesiac and a kleptomaniac. His putative purpose in so doing is to ransack more easily the attic of their house in the Pimlico district of London for the 'Barlow Rubies' -- jewels which the previous owner of the house, Alice Barlow (actually Manningham's Aunt), had inherited from her husband, and which Manningham (then called Sydney Power) had failed to locate when he had murdered the old woman fifteen years previously. However, the already married 'Mr. Manningham' is trumped by Inspector Rough -- an erstwhile 'Scotland Yard' detective who had, as a young officer, visited the scene of the original crime -- and Bella is at liberty to escape to her relatives in Devonshire.

Gaslight was an enormous success; its run was 'by far the longest among stage-plays of 1939',² and it moved, with even greater success, on to the radio and into the cinema. Two film versions of the play were made in the Forties, one British and one American. The English version was made at

¹ I owe this observation to Mr. Patrick Lyons, of the English Department of the University of Glasgow.

² Kinematograph Weekly, 11 January 1940, B4.

the Elstree Studios in 1939, with Thorold Dickinson as director, Bridget Boland and A.R. Rawlinson as scriptwriters and starring Anton Walbrook, Diana Wynward, and a rotund Frank Pettingell in the three leading roles.³ The American version supplanted this jewel in the crown of British wartime cinema in 1944, with the film rights passing to MGM.⁴ The American Gaslight (called in Britain The Murder in Thornton Square) was directed by George Cukor, and featured Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman, and Joseph Cotten as the main protagonists. The award of an Oscar to the young Angela Lansbury did little to appease the wrath of the British Press, which rallied patriotically to the original version (a furore which mattered sufficiently to Patrick Hamilton for him to record it in a scrapbook of press cuttings).

The uproar notwithstanding, however, the film versions seem to have much in common. Paradoxically perhaps (but certainly fortunately for a film with a victimized woman at its centre), neither was directed by a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary. Cukor was, in Ann E. Kaplan's phrase, 'an unusually sensitive women's director',⁵ who had already directed Judy Garland in Born Yesterday and Greta Garbo in Camille; Thorold Dickinson's itinerary, meanwhile, included anti-Nazi documentary films shot in Spain in 1938. However, both films re-locate the play at a higher social level by, for example, foregrounding a charity concert as a centrepiece, and both are laden heavily with (largely spurious) 'Victoriana'. The Manchester Guardian complained of the British version that it was 'something considerably less chilling than the

³ Ibid.

⁴ News Review, 20th July, 1944. [Quotation lifted from a press cutting in a scrapbook belonging to the Estate of the Late Patrick Hamilton; there is, however, no sign of this publication at the British Library Newspaper Library].

⁵ Ann E. Kaplan, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera, Methuen, 1983.

play,'⁶ precisely because of this tendency to 'spread itself'.⁷ Both films also portray the villain as 'a bit foreign' (Sydney Power becomes first 'Louis' then 'Sergius' Bauer).

It is in the fraught area of gender politics, however, that the American filmed version of Gaslight departs most markedly from the original play, and indeed from the Dickinson film. As Jeremy Tambling points out, the Second World War, with its 'pin-ups' and also with its deployment of women in industry, 'made the female body the object of more obvious fetishized significance',⁸ especially in the United States: hence, the efflorescence of the 'woman's film' of the late Forties, of which Gaslight is one of the prime examples. The economic and cultural displacement of 'Rosie the Riveter' was thus accompanied by a film genre which sought to recuperate the domestic hearth as a valued realm for recently independent woman.

Cukor's Gaslight achieves this over the dead body of the Grand Operatic diva, Alice Alquist -- an autonomous and beautiful woman, with high social status and considerable wealth, who had organised a successful social life around Nine Thornton Square. Hamilton's doddery Alice Barlow, the victim's 'auntie', is thereby transformed into a female icon who, as Ed Gallafent points out, signifies not 'the home as nest, but as social theatre -- a suspect category within ideologies of domesticity'.⁹ Moreover, the jewels for which Alice Alquist was killed had been bestowed upon her by a royal aficionado and adorned the bust of the dress she had worn as Theodora (in Handel's oratorio of that name?)

Those jewels have a metaphorical significance also -- as Sergius Bauer, here the unrequited lover of Alice Alquist, not

⁶ Manchester Guardian, 12 June 1940, 4.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ J. Tambling, Opera, Ideology and Film, Manchester, 1987, 28.

⁹ E. Gallafent, 'Black Satin: Fantasy, Murder and the Couple in "Gaslight" and "Rebecca"', Screen, xxix, 3, Summer 1988, 86.

her predatory nephew, knows only too well. As Gallafent perceptively remarks, the jewels function as 'an emblem of a sexual connection that can have no social existence, that must be enjoyed outside the realm of the household.'¹⁰ And it is *le ménage* (which in French can also mean 'couple'), which the American version of Gaslight serves to re-affirm.

In this re-constitution of the couple, Cukor's Gaslight replaces Charles Boyer with Joseph Cotten as Ingrid Bergman's consort: 'which is to substitute North Americanness and benign science (the good detective) for Europeanness and suspect art (the bad composer).'¹¹ The contrast between the endings of the (American) film and the play are worthy of note in this respect. In a cameo scene, structurally parallel to an earlier Boyer-Bergman 'clinch', and under the watchful eye of the spinsterly Miss Thwaites (who had also beheld the earlier scene), Cotten approaches Bergman on the fog-bound London rooftop as she wistfully meditates:

"This night will be a long night."

"But it will end. It's starting to clear. In the morning when the sun rises sometimes it's hard to believe there ever was a night. You'll find that too. Let me come and see and talk to you. Perhaps I can help somehow."

"You're very kind."¹²

However, as the curtain falls on the stage version, a significantly different ending comes into view. Having 'slapped down' the hysterical Mrs. Manningham, Inspector Rough tries to mollify her with some sentimental paternalisms:

Rough. Now, my dear, come and sit down. Well, my child, there's all your

¹⁰ Ibid., 101.

¹¹ Ibid., 103.

¹² G. Cukor (director), Gaslight, 1944, London [MGM/UA Home Video], 1986, 1 hr., 47 mins and 58 secs to 1 hr., 48 mins and 17 secs.

life ahead now. It's Devonshire cream for you, and the sparkle back in your eyes. You've had a bad time. I came in from nowhere and gave you the most horrible evening of your life

Mrs Manningham. The most horrible ... Oh no ... (*with a sort of proud defiance*). The most wonderful Far and away the most wonderful.¹³

Clearly, then, unlike the American film, Hamilton's original play does not effect the same bold juxtaposition of Bella's earlier incarceration by her malevolent husband and an altogether more benign mode of domestic sequestration.

However, notwithstanding this partial departure, Gaslight snugly locates itself within the historical genre of nineteenth-century English melodrama. In a letter to his brother, written in 1939, Patrick Hamilton says this of the play: 'Without being a great work of art, I do think G.L. has a sort of genuineness in its very bogusness - it is sincere "good fun", "theatre" - a sort of dramatic pastiche of Wilkie Collins.'¹⁴ The question of why a politically radical writer like Patrick Hamilton should choose to work within such a seemingly redundant mode as triumphant melodrama, is one which I shall deal with synoptically in the conclusion to this chapter. Here, however, I shall begin with an examination of Gaslight's melodramatic hystericization of its implied audience, deploying Wilkie Collins' The Woman in White (1861) as a point of comparison. I shall then discuss, in turn, the characterization of Bella, Manningham, and Rough, with special reference to the gender politics implicated.

The core motifs of Collins' famous 'novel of sensation' can be discerned also in Hamilton's play. Like Gaslight, The Woman in White is constituted by the suspenseful elucidation of secrets concerning questions of identity -- the illegitimacy of Sir Percival Glyde, the true identity of Anne

¹³ P. Hamilton, Gaslight, London, 1939, 83.

¹⁴ P. Hamilton, letter to Bruce Hamilton, Henley, 23-27 April, 1939 [AHA].

Catherick's father, and so on. Like Gaslight, the Collins novel both exhibits and ostensibly deplures the spectacle of the claustrated woman -- Anne Catherick's mother, compelled to reside at Welmingham by Sir Percival; Madam Fosco, devotedly in thrall to the Grand Operatic Count, and his 'private rod';¹⁵ and Anne Catherick and her double, Laura Fairlie, both immured, at different times, in the same asylum.

However, unlike Gaslight, The Woman in White also valorizes completely that domestic asylum-as-refuge to which Laura safely returns as the wife of Walter Hartright, Limmeridge House. As D. A. Miller indicates: 'Laura thus follows a common itinerary of the liberal subject in nineteenth-century fiction: she takes a nightmarish detour through the carceral ghetto on her way *home*, to the domestic haven where she is always felt to belong.'¹⁶ Moreover, the 'Bedlam' in which Laura sojourns operates, for her, as a finishing-school; in their London hideaway, she behaves towards Hartright as an ideal Victorian child-wife should:

we amused her in the evenings with children's games at cards, with scrapbooks full of prints which I borrowed from the engraver who employed me But to take her mercilessly from seclusion and repose ... this, even in her own interests, we dared not do.¹⁷

At the beginning of Gaslight, Bella is also a doll's house denizen: 'Come along my dear', she says to 'her' Jack, 'you sit on one side, and I the other - like two children in the nursery'.¹⁸ By the end of the play she has, however, clambered out of the play-pen.

¹⁵ W. W. Collins, The Woman in White (1861), Oxford, 1973, 200.

¹⁶ D. A. Miller, 'La Cage aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins' The Woman in White', in Jeremy Hawthorn (ed.), The Nineteenth-Century British Novel, London, 1986, 111.

¹⁷ Collins, 1973, 401.

¹⁸ P. Hamilton, Angel Street [U.S. title of Gaslight, London, 1939], New York, 1942, 14.

There are other Collinsesque features noticeable in Gaslight -- for example, the notion of 'Justice', as an abstract ideal which is necessarily superior to 'the Law' (its temporal representative), and the violation of revelatory 'private' writing -- but I wish to focus here upon the common feature of audience 'hystericization'.

In an illuminating essay (to which I have already adverted) D.A. Miller argues that the Victorian 'novel of sensation' simultaneously interpellates its reader as a masculine subject whilst 'feminizing' that subject's responses. The 'masculine' reader is positioned as paranoid: 'From trifles and common coincidences, he suspiciously infers a complicated structure of persecution, an elaborately totalizing plot.'¹⁹ Hystericized by his reception of the novel, the reader finds that 'his ribcage, arithmetically Adam's, houses a woman's quickened respiration, and his heart beats to her skittish rhythm'.²⁰ His positioning thus conforms to the classic formulation coined by nineteenth-century sexology for the (newly conceptualized) condition of male homosexuality: *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*.

Arguably, it is this selfsame female 'soul' which trembles within the body of the 'male' spectator of Gaslight. This would imply that the spectacle of Bella's tortured visage on stage or screen entailed rather more than mere titillation for the voyeuristic 'male gaze'.²¹ Nevertheless, there is a powerfully sexist sub-text animating Manningham's seemingly trivial objurgations of his wife. In falsely accusing her of removing a picture,²² or losing a grocery bill,²³ Manningham is setting up a patriarchal discourse of

¹⁹ Miller, 1986, 104.

²⁰ Ibid., 100.

²¹ The phrase is E. Ann Kaplan's (see her book, Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera, London, 1983, 15).

²² Hamilton, 1942, 17.

²³ Ibid., 24-5.

considerable menace. This discourse bespeaks a male masochistic fantasy whose psychical premise is that the wife who is careless in her disposal of domestic valuables may very well be sexually 'careless' also. Highlighting the role of the Victorian bourgeois wife as the 'point of connection between sexual desire and the household's systems of exchange',²⁴ this fantasy constructs her as an inherently untrustworthy custodian of the treasures of the house. This lack of trust extends to her traditional role as protective mother. Although Bella, as befits a melodramatic heroine, does not actually have a child, she does possess a little dog (missing, incidentally, from the American film version), and is particularly desolated when Manningham confiscates it. She tells Inspector Rough in Act One:

We have a little dog. A few weeks ago, it was found with its paw hurt. -- He believes -- Oh, God, how can I tell you what he believes -- that I had hurt the dog. He does not let the dog near me now. He keeps it in the kitchen and I am not allowed to see it! I begin to doubt, don't you see? I begin to believe I imagine everything. Are you here? Is this a dream, too? Who are you? (*Rises.*) I am afraid they are going to lock me up.²⁵

Bella here wears the distracted air of the semi-hypnotized subject, somnambulistically intoning question after question, while, subliminally, she strives to resist Manningham's suggestions.

Placed thus -- teetering on the brink of insanity and falsely accused of a promiscuous carelessness -- Bella Manningham is stretched out on the rack for the sensational delectation of the voyeuristic spectator. Feminist film critics would therefore argue that she is the victim of the 'male gaze' -- especially so in the American film version of Gaslight. This 'male gaze' -- which is also available to women so the argument runs -- is refracted thrice: in the act

²⁴ Gallafent, 1988, 94.

²⁵ Hamilton, 1942, 38.

of filming, through the man-held camera; in the film itself, through the eyes of the male characters; and in the darkened cinema, through the identification of the viewer with the objectified image of the woman on the screen.²⁶ In the theatre, this voyeuristic gaze would, however, be less operative. Nevertheless, an element of this nearly prurient objectifying process is indubitably still latent in Patrick Hamilton's Gaslight as well as in George Cukor's. Certainly, Hamilton himself seems to have been oblivious to the sexist implications of setting up the spectacle of a woman in torture: in a 1939 letter to his brother, he insouciantly writes of the French rights, 'what a scream an emotional French actress would be as Mrs. Manningham!'²⁷

Can we then say of Gaslight (with regard now to female spectatorship) that, like others of its type, it inevitably bolsters 'the basic sense of worthlessness that already exists' among women spectators by compelling them to identify with such a 'powerless, victimized' figure?²⁸ Should we agree with the contention of Mary Ann Doane's essay, 'The "Woman's Film": Possession and Address', that, 'in the one film genre (i.e. melodrama) that, as we have seen, constructs a female spectator, the spectator is made to participate in what is essentially a masochistic fantasy'?²⁹ I think we should not, because Gaslight seems to me to incarnate countervailing values which signify not feminine submission, but rather female resistance and power. For example, there can be discerned the smouldering resistance of the imperfectly subjugated melodramatic heroine in many of the utterances of Bella Manningham. The altercation between her and her husband over the matter of the dog in Act

²⁶ Kaplan, 1983, 14-15.

²⁷ Hamilton letter, Henley-on-Thames, 23-27 April 1939 [AHA].

²⁸ Kaplan, 1983, 30.

²⁹ Summarized by Kaplan, 1983, 28.

Three is a key instance. Now apprised of Manningham's true identity, Bella stands before him, having been lured from her locked bedroom by his threat to harm the dog:

Mrs. Manningham. (*Unmoving.*) Where is the dog? Where have you got the dog?

Mr. Manningham. Dog? What dog?

Mrs. Manningham. You said you had the dog. Have you hurt it? Let me have it. Where is it? Have you hurt it again?

Mr. Manningham. Again? This is strange talk, Bella - from you - after what you did to the dog a few weeks ago. Come and sit down here.

Mrs. Manningham. I do not want to speak to you. I am not well. I thought you had the dog and were going - to hurt it. That is why I came down.³⁰

Bella's sentences are curt, their cadences pointedly emphatic, almost mechanical: 'I thought you had the dog and were going to - [pause for breath, and then deliberately ...] hurt it. That is why I came down'. The carefulness of her delivery here suggests an inward, coiled knot of tension. Earlier, by contrast, her resentment had exploded 'hysterically': accused of concealing the grocery bill, she had raged, 'This is a plot! This is a filthy plot! You're all against me! It's a plot!'³¹

However, it is at the climax of the play that Bella's revenge over her husband is fully consecrated. Against the paternal advice of Inspector Rough, she insists on confronting 'Manningham' alone, while he remains tied to a chair, helpless. Affecting to search for a razor to cut his bonds, she vengefully plays out the role of 'female hysteric' that he has sought to construct for her:

Mrs. Manningham. Razor? What razor? (*She holds it up, under his face.*) You are not suggesting that this is a razor I hold in my hand? Have you gone mad, my husband?... Or is it I who am mad? (*She throws the razor from her.*) Yes. That's it. It's I. Of course, it was a razor. Dear God -- I have lost it, haven't I? I am always losing things. And I can

³⁰ Hamilton, 1942, 90-1.

³¹ *Ibid*, 25.

never find them. I don't know where I put them.³²

Frenetically, she darts about the room which has now become, for Manningham, a carceral force-field; the tables have been turned. Bella retrieves and names each of her 'lost' objects, and turns, finally on her erstwhile captor:

Mrs. Manningham.... But how can a madwoman help her husband to escape? What a pity -- (*Getting louder and louder.*) If I were not mad, whatever you had done, I could have pitied and protected you! But because I am mad I have hated you, and because I am mad I am rejoicing in my heart -- without a shred of pity -- without a shred of regret -- watching you go with glory in my heart!

Mr. Manningham. (*Desperately.*) Bella!

Mrs. Manningam. Inspector! Inspector! (*Up to door -- pounds on door then flings it open.*) Come and take this man away! Come and take this man away!³³

As Ed Gellafent says of this scene as played by Ingrid Bergman, 'in acting the "madwoman in the attic" she rescues the category from its role simply as melodramatic fantasy, making it into a very literal vehicle for the expresion of her anger'.³⁴ In turning her oppressor's strategy around like this, Bella inscribes herself less within the discourse of Collins' simpering Laura Fairlie and more within that of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensational Lady Audley.

The villain at the sharp end of this act of revenge, Sydney Power, although in the lineage of the traditional melodramatic malefactor, is also freighted with psychical peculiarities which render him amenable to discussion in psychoanalytic terms. Indeed, as Peter Brooks has argued, psychoanalysis itself 'can be read as a systematic realization of the melodramatic aesthetic, applied to the structure and dynamics of the mind';³⁵ in turn, the 'dynamics of repression

³² Ibid., 106.

³³ Ibid., 107.

³⁴ Gellafent, 1988, 102.

and the return of the repressed figure the plot of melodrama.'³⁶ Hence, The Woman in White obsessively repeats its primal scene -- the encounter between Anne Catherick and Walter Hartright at midnight on Hampstead Heath. Consonantly, in Gaslight, Mr. Manningham returns, after five whole years of marriage, to the neighbourhood of the late Alice Barlow in order to search, obsessively, for those jewels he failed to locate on the night of the murder -- jewels which he cannot sell and does not need (in the American film, Boyer mutters distractedly: 'Those jewels which I wanted all my life. I don't know why.')³⁷

Purely rational terms are, then, inadequate to explain Manningham's bizarre behaviour. The Irish Times commented bemusedly of the British film version that it was tantamount to 'a lot of fuss about nothing'.³⁸ The Jewish Chronicle, for its part, discerned a logical explanation for Manningham's monomania: 'Paul Mallen [his name here] relentlessly pursues his devilish scheme to drive his wife mad because she has happened on a tiny clue to his secret.'³⁹ However, there is no evidence whatsoever of this discovery in the text of the stage versions of the piece, and the question of Manningham's ostensible lack of motivation insistently foregrounds itself. Why *does* he try to drive his wife insane? Why *does* he intercept letters from his wife's family? Surely it would be more convenient for him to permit her to stay with these Devonshire relatives, and sup of their blessed cream?

The Manningham enigma can only be resolved by a recourse to psychoanalytic terms which, moreover, write the 'crisis of masculinity' back into the equation. The claustration of the murdered woman's valuables and clothing within the boarded

³⁵ P. Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, New York, 1985, 201.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cukor, 1986, 1 hr., 47 mins and 2 secs.

³⁸ Irish Times, 2 September 1940, 3.

³⁹ Jewish Chronicle, 14 June 1940, 19.

up old house signifies a psychic repression which comes to dominate the mental universe of Mr. Manningham. D. A. Miller is again illuminating: 'the sequestration of the woman takes for its object not just women, who need to be put away in safe places or asylums, but men as well, who must monitor and master what is fantasized as the "woman inside" them'.⁴⁰ The hystericization of the play's spectator/voyeur thus corresponds to the frantic rummaging of Sydney Power through the drawers of his Aunt.

On one metaphoric level, therefore, the 'Barlow Rubies' are emblematic of the devouring sexuality connoted by female penetrabilia; at another, however, they signify the fetishistic mysteries of the commodity. For Jack Manningham is not just a male hysteric, he is also a quintessential bourgeois. In this he signals a departure from the genre of the Victorian melodrama, which thrived on a popular animosity against the aristocracy. Thus The Woman in White, written by the radical liberal Wilkie Collins, features as its villains the wily Count Fosco and the execrable squire *manqué*, Sir Percival Glyde.

By contrast, Manningham is depicted as a man of business. In one of the early assaults on his wife's sanity, he pointedly underscores her reluctance to exploit the servants as evidence of her 'weak-mindedness':⁴¹ 'What do you think the servants are for, Bella?' he asks before proceeding to detail the wage-labour relationship by which they are 'freely' subordinated.⁴² Eric Capon makes the point that Hamilton preoccupied himself, in Gaslight and also in The Governess, with a late Victorian upper-class milieu because he conceived of it as incubating the 'modes of conduct'⁴³ still

⁴⁰ Miller, 1986, 101.

⁴¹ Hamilton, 1942, 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³ E. Capon, 'The Strange Case of Patrick Hamilton', Theatre Today, iii, December 1946, 7.

prevalent among the bourgeoisie of the 1930s. Certainly Hamilton carefully locates the origins of Manningham's evil in one of the prime conduits of these Victorian mores, the English Public School -- at school, Manningham tells his wife, 'there were two ways of getting what you wanted. One was along an intellectual plane, the other along the physical'.⁴⁴ This figure of the former Public School bully is one which recurs throughout Hamilton's oeuvre.

The confounder of this paranoid bourgeois bully is the avuncular Inspector Rough, who, with his faith in whisky as a 'medicine ... for the purpose of the removal of dark doubts and fears',⁴⁵ is the play's wish-fulfillment figure for Patrick Hamilton. Like Rupert Cadell he is a confirmed bachelor, with a curious penchant for 'dandy' clothes.⁴⁶ However, although Rough bestrides the play, straining to quell its latent hysteria, the purview of his 'manly' dominion is limited: to Bella's strength in adversity belongs, *malgré lui*, the ultimate victory. Furthermore, it is the feminine voice of 'Justice' which is invoked by Rough in his final confrontation with Manningham: 'justice has waited too, and here she is, in my person, to exact her due'.⁴⁷ Again we have the inscription of the feminine within the masculine; again the foregrounding of gender by the archetypal rhetoric of melodrama. Nevertheless, Inspector Rough, although less interesting, undoubtedly signifies a more stable sublimation of the crisis of masculinity than does Rupert Cadell. As we have seen, however, the stability of this resolution is soon deconstructed by Gaslight's simultaneous activation and traumatization of the 'male gaze'.

The focus of the 'male gaze' in Patrick Hamilton's other Victorian melodrama, The Governess, is the 'fascinating'⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Hamilton, 1942, 95.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 102.

and 'handsome'⁴⁹ Miss Ethel Fry. The play of which the latter is the insane anti-heroine enjoyed a wartime provincial tour and was also performed at the Embassy Theatre in London in 1946.⁵⁰ Unlike Gaslight, this companion piece was never published and the original script (which would have been filed at the Lord Chamberlain's Office), appears to have been mislaid. Consequently, my discussion of The Governess is dependent on the (partially incomplete) typescript of the radio adaptation made by Hamilton and broadcast by the BBC in 1973 (accompanied by suitably operatic music 'of a grotesque and foreboding character').⁵¹

Although set twenty years earlier than Gaslight, The Governess is imbricated within the same social and discursive parameters. Again, there is the same depiction of the Victorian bourgeois home as theatre; and again there are shades of the work of Wilkie Collins (this time The Moonstone (1868) is the major influence). However, whereas Gaslight foregrounds the spectacle of a woman-in-torture, the central female protagonist of The Governess is depicted as a doomed but powerful *femme fatale*, as a desired predator who eventually incurs the kind of retribution typically meted out to the attractive female villains of the genre of film noir. However, as an unfilmed play, The Governess fails to iconize its *femme fatale* in the manner typical of that mode; thus we cannot say of Ethel Fry what is said by Janey Place of her celluloid sisters: 'It is not their inevitable demise that we remember but rather their strong, dangerous, and above all, exciting sexuality.'⁵²

⁴⁸ P. Hamilton, 'The Governess', typescript of radio play broadcast on BBC Radio Four, 3 February 1973, 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁰ Letter to the present writer from Enid Foster, Head Librarian at British Theatre Association, 26 October 1989.

⁵¹ Ibid., 23. The music was taken from incidental music to a production of The Tempest, composed by Arthur Sullivan.

As with The Moonstone, Hamilton's play re-works elements drawn from the infamous 'Road Murder' case of June 1860, which featured the horrendous killing of the four-year-old Francis Saville Kent by his stepsister, Constance, who, in a public confession made in 1865 to a Dr. John Bucknill, described herself as a creature possessed: 'She said she felt herself under the influence of the devil before she committed the murder'.⁵³ Constance had, by the time of this confession, already 'revealed her guilt in the course of auricular confession'⁵⁴ at St. Mary's hospital in Brighton, after having spent two years at a convent in France. This theme of the 'possession' of an evil, yet religious, woman, by the desire to snatch a child from its cot is one that Hamilton skilfully re-works in The Governess.

Various details of the case of Constance Kent provided additional material for both Collins and Hamilton. Inspector Whicher, the detective from the Metropolitan Police who was independently-minded enough to indict Constance Kent, despite her upper-class social status, was to be the prototype for both Sergeant Cuff in The Moonstone and (a younger) Inspector Rough in The Governess. Whicher fared rather less well than his fictional counterparts, being hounded out of employment by the Press upon the release, in late 1860, of Constance Kent.⁵⁵ Hamilton also uses the experience of the nursemaid, Elizabeth Gough, in his piece: like Ellen in The Governess, the nursemaid at the Road House awoke at five o'clock in the morning to notice the child missing, but assumed it had been taken by its mother. Similarly, the vital clue of a missing item of (intimate) female clothing is one that the real crime and the two fictional ones have in common.

⁵² In E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), Women in Film Noir, London, 1980, 36.

⁵³ In J. Rhode, The Case of Constance Kent, London, 1928, 267.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

The Governess's transmutation of the Constance Kent case constitutes a many-layered work that illumines more clearly still the implication of Hamilton's melodramatic stage thrillers in a politicized re-negotiation of the cultural meaning of masculinity in the Thirties and Forties. It revolves around the kidnapping of the baby of the household of which she is nominally the employee by Miss Ethel Fry. Her crime is exposed, and her reign over the household ended, by the enigmatic Inspector Rough, appearing in the role, first, as psychoanalyst and then as exorcist. The scene in which he functions as the former is that in which the governess' ill-used pupil, Ellen, descends into the crowded drawing-room in a somnambulistic trance. Like Rachel Verinder in The Moonstone, Ellen had witnessed the original misdeed but has since repressed the memory of it. Like the analysand under hypnosis in the 'scene' of psychoanalysis, Ellen struggles to remember and is guided in this by Rough: '(In a flat sleepwalking voice) ... Yes, Miss Fry. I remember. I remember about baby.'⁵⁶ The Inspector/analyst then allows Ellen to go on and repeat a poem from Palgrave's Golden Treasury (1861), which her governess has previously compelled her to memorize: '"I remember, I remember./ The house where I was born./ I remember, I remember.'⁵⁷ Eventually, the repetition unbinds Ellen's repressed memory from her unconscious mind and she is able to tell her story:

It's all coming back at last. I know everything, Miss Fry. I saw you, Miss Fry! I saw you! *You* took baby, Miss Fry. That's what I've been trying to remember. I saw you come in ...You bent over baby's cot, and you took baby out. Your black veil, Miss Fry -- your ugly black veil, and your ugly black hat, and your outdoor clothes! ... And underneath the veil, the mask -
- the mask we always played with.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Hamilton, 1973, 46.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 47. The poem is by T. Hood and is an evocation of the lost innocence of childhood. It is surely not insignificant that Hamilton should have known The Golden Treasury 'by heart' as an adolescent. [PAT, 116].

Ethel Fry's garb as here described recalls that of the confessant Constance Kent who appeared at her trial 'attired in black'.⁵⁹ A confession from Ethel Fry is not yet, however, forthcoming and Rough has not sufficient evidence to prove her guilt. When he is sufficiently furnished, and is able restore 'baby' to his cot, he is also in a position to relate the entire case history of Ethel Fry *née* 'Lomas': he is also morally well placed to exhort the rest of the cast and the audience to 'cultivate pity'.⁶⁰ It is on this characterization of Rough as an infallible source of wisdom and goodness and on the characterization and containment of Ethel Fry that the remaining discussion of this play here is concentrated.

First, then, for the governess herself; or rather for the roles she establishes for herself within the Drew family. Echoes of (say) Le Fanu's Madame de la Rougierre, in Uncle Silas (1864), can be discerned in the play's opening scene, in which she is giving a terrifying French lesson to Ellen:

Miss Fry: You know the right answers, but you do this on purpose to vex me.

Ellen: No, Miss Fry, I don't.

Miss Fry: Well, shall I vex you, too? Perhaps I shall vex you!

(Pause. We suddenly hear Ellen crying out as Miss Fry pinches her.)

There! I shall vex you! You see!

(Ellen cries out again.)

Ellen: Miss Fry, you are not to pinch me! You promised you'd never pinch me again!

Miss Fry: I shall pinch you as I like! If you vex me I shall pinch you as I like!⁶¹

The governess's ominous use here of the 'shall' (not 'will') of threat and promise is characteristic; we shall see it utilised again -- against Mrs Drew.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁹ Rhode, 1928, 216.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, 1973, 63.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

Threats and promises of a rather different nature animate Miss Fry's dominion over the patriarch of the house, the wealthy financier Ernest Drew, described by Hamilton as 'a massive, John Bullish sort of man with an air of supreme confidence in himself and contempt of everyone else'.⁶² Although known in the city as 'the irresistible force',⁶³ Drew refers to Ethel Fry as 'my governess',⁶⁴ and is completely infatuated with her. His wife, 'a vague, timid, ill woman',⁶⁵ is also subject to the will of the governess. For example, as she grieves for her lost child, Mrs Drew is cajoled and bullied by Miss Fry into singing:

Mrs Drew: Miss Fry! ... Ethel ... I must go back and look. I'm his mother.
Miss Fry: No, my dear. That's just what you mustn't do You must occupy yourself. What shall we do? What about a song? Yes. Let's do that. Let's play a song, shall we? I shall play and you shall sing. Come along, now.⁶⁶

The grammatical markers are clear: Ethel Fry uses the modal auxiliary 'must' rather than 'ought to' because it is *she* (the speaker) who is deciding; she employs patronising imperatives ('Let's play a song, shall we?'); and, again, she uses the 'shall' of threat and promise ('I shall play and you shall sing'). The governess thus signifies and cements her position of power in the household over its mistress *manqué*. The logic of her power-position is later made quite clear by the enraged Ethel Fry as she fulminates against Mrs Drew; 'You ugly little aging beast! Am I not beautiful? Are you not ugly? Is not the man mine? And if the man is mine, is not the baby?'⁶⁷

⁶² Ibid., 9.

⁶³ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 60.

By this point, Ethel Fry has been fully exposed as a madwoman and a criminal by Rough; exposed, but also, to an extent, exorcised. For, using Ethel's lover (and custodian of the baby) as an instrument, Rough has compelled Ethel to recite the scriptural passages by which she is possessed -- from 'The Song of Solomon'. The significance of this Biblical text lies in its celebration of fecundity and in its invocation of God's congregation (and Ethel Fry) as a lovesick woman. The verses incantated by Ethel seem pertinently chosen:

As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples for I am sick of love ... For lo, the winter is past ... the rain is over and gone.⁶⁸

The barren Ethel Fry has been deluded by the text she so cherishes into believing that her 'winter is past' now that she possesses a child; however, the selfsame scripture works its way round to condemn her, and Drew, out of her 'own' mouth:

Jealousy is as cruel as the grave many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it If a man would give up all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly condemned.⁶⁹

Recitation has been the governess's primary mode of *instruction* and has now proved to be the means of her *destruction*: the irony here specific to Miss Fry also spreads itself out into a critique of the possession of rational human thought by ritualized discourses, in general. The progressiveness of this move is, however, surely vitiated for a modern audience by the sexist caricature of radical feminism conjured up by the departing words of the ranting Miss Fry:

My dear Miss Watson! Delighted to meet you! Shall we go? I have really

⁶⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 60.

no desire to stay here. Come, let us go. How nice to meet a woman. We shall have a woman's chat about womanly things, shan't we? Do you know, I always hated men. (*Pause, vindictively*). I always hated men!⁷⁰

The conqueror of this mad virago, Gaslight's redoubtable Inspector Rough, appears mid-way through the play as the answer to Mrs Drew's earlier distraught prayer: 'I think we want a man.'⁷¹ Her ne'er-do-well son, Bob, makes it quite clear that he is certainly not the man she is looking for: 'Quiet, Mother. I'm not the only man. There's plenty of others. There's policemen - ain't there?'⁷² The necessity for the intervention of Rough is also adumbrated when Ellen alludes to the riddle of the Sphinx while trying to puzzle out the presence in her bedroom on the night of the kidnapping of Miss Fry's perfume (her feminine 'essence'). For, in Greek mythology, the riddle propounded by the lion-woman infesting Thebes was solved by none other than Oedipus -- the same Oedipus whose name is given to the psychical passage through which we all are said to pass into the Symbolic Order as gendered subjects. The riddle posed by the sphinxian Ethel Fry must needs be solved then by a securely gendered masculine subject.

Inspector Rough also emerges from a more specific cultural formation than the Oedipus Complex. His genealogical roots can also be traced to Sergeant Cuff of The Moonstone. Like The Governess, Collins' novel bespeaks the same upper-class fears of police intrusion that were so prominent in the Road Murder case. As Lady Verinder puts it:

"I am afraid my nerves are a little shaken," she said. "There is something in that police-officer from London which I recoil from - I don't know why. I have a presentiment that he is bringing trouble and misery with him into the house. Very foolish, and very unlike *me* - but so it is."⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

⁷² Ibid., 22.

Drew has similar feelings about the police, and expresses himself to Rough as follows: 'you come from the police force, sir, and I loathe the whole body of you'.⁷⁴

Cuff and Rough share the same incorrigibly enigmatic mode of expression -- and the same disguised wiliness. Gabriel Betteredge refers to Cuff's 'usual roundabout manner' of speaking, and details the detective's eccentric interest in 'the trumpery subject of rose gardens'.⁷⁵ Inspector Rough's penchant for 'Japanese wrestling'⁷⁶ is seemingly more germane to police work, but his disquisition upon the subject is as irrelevant to the story as is Cuff's on rose-gardening.

However, in contrast to Rough, Collins' policeman shares in what Anthea Trodd (in her introduction to The Moonstone) calls the generic fallibility of the 'detectives of the sensation novel'.⁷⁷ In particular, whereas Cuff and his kind were conventionally denied comprehension of bourgeois feminine psychology by virtue of their lowly social class, Hamilton's detective is valorized precisely because of his quasi-proletarian social position. Rough is deliberately set up antagonistically against the arch-bourgeois, Drew: while the latter is known in the City as the 'Irresistable Force', the former is known in the force as the 'Irremovable Object'.⁷⁸

Rough is, moreover, a proletarian whose hatred of injustice is complemented by a psychological percipience which enables him to read the psyches of both genders; indeed, as he says to Drew: 'I make it a point to know more about the women than I know about the men.'⁷⁹ Rough's mind is in no way presented as a narrowly juridic one: intuition he values

⁷³ W. W. Collins, The Moonstone (1868) Oxford, 1981, 118.

⁷⁴ Hamilton, 1973, 34.

⁷⁵ Collins, 1981, 107.

⁷⁶ Hamilton, 1973, 32.

⁷⁷ In Collins, 1981, xv.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

as least as much as hard evidence -- 'a feeling is sometimes a good deal better than evidence'.⁸⁰ The Inspector's feeling about Miss Fry and Drew himself proves accurate, but he betrays no temptation to revel sanctimoniously in the breakdown of this 'illicit' affair: instead, he condoles the errant husband and apologises for having brought him pain.⁸¹

This sympathetic proclivity Rough extends to 'poor deluded'⁸² Ethel Fry, whose motivation he tries to explain to Drew:

Malice against the wife mostly, I should say. Malicious hatred of her, malicious love of yourself. The desire to hurt and strike by stealth The desire for little children, too, perhaps. Too much love of love -- too much brooding on love.⁸³

This version of Inspector Rough functions, then, as a hierophant of Justice, endowed with an intellect untrammelled by divisions of gender, and a magnanimity of spirit which is liberally extended to his shrewish adversary. Part-psychoanalyst/part-exorcist, this latter-day working-class Solomon seems to signify a more omnipotent resolution of the crisis of masculinity than does the Inspector Rough of Gaslight.

I now wish to begin to draw this chapter to a conclusion by suggesting that discernible connections obtain between Patrick Hamilton's engagement, through the forms and symbolic content of his thriller-dramas, with the inter-war crisis of bourgeois masculinity, and the Stalinist politics he had come, by the late Thirties, to avow.

In a letter to his brother written in 1939, Hamilton evinces his quasi-religious craving for a law-giving father-figure⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁸¹ Ibid., 62.

⁸² Ibid., 63

⁸³ Ibid., 62.

by the adulation with which he writes about Stalin's speech delivered to the Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union:

I don't imagine you will have seen this, it is magnificent. Written in that lucid, dignified, semi-paternal style of his, it is the most refreshing and reassuring thing in the world. I am happy to say I have never had any doubts of this great man, and this should [?show] anyone who [?had during the Trotskyist business]. As the years go on I get more and more respect for him as having an original genius ... of being more than a mere Lenin-follower.⁸⁵

This 'magnificent' document is, in fact, boringly repetitious and illogical in content. Interestingly, however, its style is melodramatic: manichaenistically, Stalin apotheosizes the Communist Party, and imprecates his arch-enemies:

The Party could not but know that its strength lay not only in the size of its membership, but and above all, in the quality of its members.⁸⁶

In the face of these imposing achievements, the opponents of the general line of our Party, all the various "Left" and "Right" trends, all the Trotsky-Pyatakov and Bukhatin-Rykov degenerates were forced to creep into their shells, to tuck away their hackneyed "platforms", and to retreat into hiding. Lacking the manhood to submit to the will of the people, they preferred to merge with the Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries and Fascists, to become the tools of foreign espionage services, to hire

⁸⁴ Bruce Hamilton tells us of how 'Bernard's failure as a father ... left a gap in [Patrick's] life which, almost to the end, he was ever seeking to fill' [PAT, 422]. It is perhaps not inappropriate to add Freud's observation on the origin of the religious mentality: 'man's helplessness [in childhood] remains and along with it his longing for his father, and the gods'. [S. Freud, Civilization, Solciety, and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and other Works, London, 1985, 197.]

⁸⁵ Hamilton letter, Henley-on-Thames, 23-27 April, 1939 [AHA]. In the postscript to another letter of 1939, written in Norfolk, he writes: 'By the way, I have no doubt that Trotskyists of any sort, are the sods nowadays - replacing even the MacDonalds in filthy humbug and invidiousness'.

⁸⁶ J. Stalin, Report on the Work of the Central Committee to the Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), London, 1939, 40.

themselves out as spies, and to obligate themselves to help the enemies of the Soviet Union to dismember our country and to restore capitalist slavery to it.⁸⁷

Surely a 'demonization of the Other' with a (melodramatic) vengeance! Such patently absurd claims as those here made by Stalin need to be shored up with a rhetorical edifice of Absolute Good versus Absolute Evil, subtended by untrammelled coercive power, in order to 'validate' themselves. Indeed, the whole history of the Soviet Purges could be conceptualized in terms of High Melodrama. What Terry Eagleton says of Samuel Richardson's study of a woman-in-torture, Clarissa (1748), could also be transposed onto Patrick Hamilton's suspenseful stage thrillers, and onto Stalin's staging of the Show Trials: '[evident in Clarissa is] a dash of sadism, as the author exults in prolonging his readers' suspense, slyly withholding a narrative outcome, manipulating their fears and affectations'.⁸⁸

The origins of melodrama as a mode can be located in the aftermath of that other great revolution, the French. The explanation for this genesis in the shadow of the Guillotine is similar to that for the discursive formation of Stalin's theodicy. As Peter Brooks writes of the French Revolution: the 'polarization of good and evil ... [and] their conflict ... suggests the need to recognize and confront evil, to combat and expel it, to purge the social order'.⁸⁹ Thus the Revolution 'necessarily produces melodrama ... incessant struggles against enemies, without and within, branded as villains, suborners of morality, who must be confronted and expunged, over and over, to assure the triumph of virtue'.⁹⁰ Within the melodramatic discourse of Stalinism, Evil and Virtue also become fully personified in the figures of Trotsky and Stalin.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁸ T. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, London, 1982, 27.

⁸⁹ Brooks, 1985, 13.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 15.

This histrionic *weltanschauung* inevitably elides the complexities entailed by political struggle. With regard to the socialist project, in particular, it eschews the problem of necessary *self-sacrifice* -- a theme more properly the province of Tragedy. Moreover, socialism surely ought not to be conceived of as an obsession with the incessant liquidation of 'evil', but instead should be simply (sic) understood as concerning the supercession of capitalist relations of production by democratic economic planning.

Nonetheless, the attraction of melodrama, in particular, and the crime story, in general, for radical writers in the 1930s is comprehensible. For Marxist writers especially, melodrama's inherent animation of 'the mind's effort to pierce surface, to interrogate appearances',⁹¹ must have commended itself by way of analogy with Marx's project in Capital. Moreover, the audience for melodrama in England had been enormous for many decades: by the 1860s, the London theatres could seat 150,000 spectators per night;⁹² furthermore, the staple fare enjoyed by this mass audience consisted of anti-'aristocratic' pieces, in which Good usually triumphed over Evil. A desire to locate themselves in this popular tradition, coupled with a determination to unmask as 'criminal' the vices of bourgeois society, inspired many communist intellectuals to work in this genre. Hence, we have Montagu Slater's remarkable editions of Maria Marten (1927), and Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street (1928); Bertolt Brecht's The Threepenny Novel (1934); Patrick Hamilton's avowedly anti-bourgeois thrillers; and Christopher Caudwell's seven detective novels.

More generally, the period during which Hamilton wrote Rope and Gaslight was, in Ernest Mandel's phrase, 'the golden age of the detective story'.⁹³ In that context, Hamilton's

⁹¹ Ibid, 2.

⁹² J. L. Smith, Melodrama, London, 1973, 16.

eschewal of this specific form within the thriller genre is not insignificant. For the ideologically conservative nature of the classic detective novel tended to preclude its recuperation by the Left. Nostalgically invoking 'the Good Life of antebellum [Europe]'⁹⁴(with its upper-class values and milieux), the vast majority of inter-war detective novels were underwritten by an ideology of 'disorder being brought into order'.⁹⁵ Unlike the psychologically fraught portrayals of evil-doing to be found in, for example, Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, the fiction of Agatha Christie *et al.* treats its murders as reified puzzles, and its settings as social vacua, from which all class conflict has been expunged.

One can therefore appreciate why the melodramatic crime story, polarized between Good and Evil and fraught by sexual neurosis, should have proved so congenial to Patrick Hamilton -- a commercially successful socialist writer, enmeshed in the crisis of masculinity bequeathed to his social stratum and generation of English writers by the trauma of the Great War.

⁹³ E. Mandel, Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story, London, 1984, 22.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

Chapter Four: *The Duke in Darkness* and the Mobilization of History

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Illuminations (1955), trans. Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1968, London, 1973, 257.

Walter Benjamin wrote the above lines sometime during the period of his 'final disillusionment with Stalinism after the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939 and his suicide in June 1940'¹ on the border between France and Spain. One year after his death, another Marxist intellectual -- still loyal to Soviet Communism -- began to write a play analogous to the motifs of Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. In May 1941, Patrick Hamilton wrote jauntily to his brother that he was 'having the effrontery to try and write a historical melodrama -- about an imaginary imprisoned duke in France of the later sixteenth century -- Henry, Guise, Navarre period. What a nerve!'²

The product of Hamilton's new departure, The Duke in Darkness, proved to be 'one of wartime London's most memorable plays'.³ After an initial run at the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh in September, 1942, it was staged at the St. James's Theatre in London, featuring Leslie Banks as the Duke and Michael Redgrave, in 'one of the best performances

¹ A. Callinicos, Making History, Cambridge and Oxford, 1987, 179.

² Cited in in B. Hamilton, The Light Went Out, London, 1972, 98.

³ R. Findlater, Michael Redgrave, Actor, London, 1956, 59.

of his career',⁴ as the Duke's crazed servant, Gribaud. Despite such a talented cast, the play was withdrawn from the West End after only a few weeks. In his reminiscences, Redgrave commented that The Duke in Darkness flopped because it was too sombre for its time'⁵

The play is set in the tower-dungeon of the Château of the Catholic Duke of Lamorre 'at the time of the Civil Wars about 1580'.⁶ The pro-Huguenot Duke of Laterraine and his secretary are approaching the sixteenth winter of their captivity. Their 'life' together has been dominated by chess - - at which the Duke is invariably victorious -- and his seemingly mad obsession with escape. By this point, Gribaud has begun to lose his mind. For the last seven years of their imprisonment, the Duke has been feigning blindness in order to deceive and unsettle Lamorre. Into this claustrated little world issues Voulain, ostensibly the head jailor but actually the Duke's liberator. Having gained the Duke's goodwill, Voulain engineers his escape by executing a plot which involves the 'necessary murder' of the gibbering Gribaud and the deployment of his corpse as a decoy. Thus restored as the 'champion' of his people, the Duke is able to regale Gribaud/the audience from off-stage with his valedictory Tannoy message:

Ride with me, dear friend, for we are free to ride! The wind on your cheek, Gribaud, and the rain on your face. The wind on your cheek, and the rain on you face!

*[The music slowly rises again, and then reaches its final crescendo as the curtain falls.]*⁷

At the time of its original production, The Duke in Darkness seems to have been widely misunderstood. In the Theatre

⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁵ M. Redgrave, In My Mind's Eye, London, 1983, 164.

⁶ P. Hamilton, The Duke in Darkness, London, 1943, 7.

⁷ Ibid., 85.

Today article cited in the previous chapter, Eric Capon bemoaned the impercipience characteristic of its reception: 'the critic who described it as a "trip through Stanley Weyman country" echoed the general opinion',⁸ he wrote. Capon himself lauded the play highly, regarding it as a welcome watershed in Hamilton's career as a dramatist and hailing it as a significant 'attempt to write a political fable in theatrical form'.⁹ The play's historical setting he saw as of little importance, 'beyond providing an agreeable and colourful stage picture'.¹⁰ In this he accepted the knee-jerk response of those who perceived the play's historical aspect as mere costumery. The contemporary import of the Duke's dilemma in the play Capon underscored heavily: 'when the chance comes for the Duke to escape and so change his position from one of opposition to one of responsibility and freedom, he encounters a host of moral and emotional problems'.¹¹ The double context here is constituted by the Comintern's endorsement of the war against Germany, prompted by Hitler's invasion of the USSR, and by the tribulations of the first year of the Attlee government.

It is the first of these moments which Arnold Rattenbury recalls as of key importance when he argues that The Duke in Darkness was born out of a need for 'scope, perspective, vision',¹² at a time when the power of Nazi Germany was at its zenith. By the summer of 1942, almost all of the European continent was under Nazi occupation. Only with the battle of El Alamein in July and the Siege of Stalingrad during the winter months did the tide begin to turn against Fascism.

⁸ E. Capon, 'The Strange Case of Patrick Hamilton', Theatre Today iii, December, 1946, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² A. Rattenbury, 'Total Attainder and the Helots', in J. Lucas (ed.), The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy. Hassocks, 1978, 151.

Rattenbury writes that if 'you want the emergence from the Phoney War, then go to The Duke in Darkness, for it stands alone, neglected by orthodoxy left and right'.¹³ He also indicates a wider political meaning for the play in his recollection of a remark made to him by a raddled, semi-recumbent Patrick, sick in his bed at the Savoy: "the Duke's speech, at the top of the page - there - it's a paraphrase of Lenin's One Step Forward, Two Steps Back".¹⁴

Written by Lenin as a critique of the methods of revolutionary party organisation advocated by the minority in the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party that was defeated by his own faction at the 1903 Party Congress, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back was a foundation text of Bolshevism. Along with What is to be Done?, this tract testified to Lenin's determination to professionalize Russian Social Democracy under conditions of Tsarist autocracy. Only a centralized, 'top-down' party, welding together professional revolutionary intellectuals and politicized, militant workers could hope to triumph under such conditions: this was the gist of Lenin's argument.

Much of the rhetoric of the pamphlet serves to stigmatize the tropological figure of 'the unstable intellectual' by invoking that of 'the staunch proletarian'.¹⁵ Essentially, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back is a polemic against intellectual dilettantism in the workers' movement which also stresses the need to make sacrifices in order to advance. That Patrick Hamilton, in reality, corresponded more to the imprecated figure of the 'unstable intellectual' than he did to his favoured twin accounts to some extent for the lack of humour in this play and the disquiet it generates around the death of Gribaud. When the moment arrives for the Duke to

¹³ Ibid., 152.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ V.I. Lenin, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904), Peking, 1976, 262.

shed *his* 'Menshevik', there is a whiff of personal treason in the air. Patrick Hamilton's ultimate, self-parodic, adoption of 'Oblomovism' in 1960¹⁶ is especially ironic in the light of Lenin's caricature in this tract of 'those who are accustomed to the loose dressing-gown and slippers of the Oblomov-style of circle domesticity'.¹⁷

In 1942 Hamilton's tragic decline lay in the future, however, and his timely historical drama of that year ill deserves its current state of oblivion. The substance of my discussion of The Duke in Darkness in this chapter will be concerned with the characterization and metaphoricity of the piece. This is sandwiched between two tranches of analysis of various contexts against and through which the play can be read -- from the historical fiction of Patrick Hamilton's father, Bernard, to Howard Brenton's The Romans in Britain.

Like Bernard Hamilton, Stanley J. Weyman was a qualified barrister who yet eschewed the practice of legal advocacy.¹⁸ Unlike Bernard, however, Weyman's motive for premature retirement lay in an incorrigible shyness. Living with his mother on the South Coast, Weyman led a blameless life, feather-bedded with the proceeds accrued from the sales of his adventuresome yarns of 'derring-do' in early modern France -- such as A Gentleman of France (1893) and The Red Cockade (1895).¹⁹ This romantic engagement with the Dumasian tradition implicated Weyman in those codes of homosocial bonding signified by that famous *devise* of the Three Musketeers. Provided here also is one cultural context for a reading of The Duke in Darkness, although politically Hamilton and Weyman are some distance apart, as the latter's

¹⁶ B. Hamilton, 1972, 177.

¹⁷ Lenin, 1976, 250.

¹⁸ Weyman was, interestingly, 'an old favourite' of Bruce Hamilton [PAT, 265].

¹⁹ See Hugh Greene's Introduction to A Gentleman of France, (1893), London, 1974, 6-7.

description of a mob encountered by an aristocratic couple in The Red Cockade makes evident:

we were in the shadow of the wall, and it was not until we had advanced some paces that the ominous silence was broken, and the mob, with a howl of rage, sprang forward, like bloodhounds slipped from the leash. Low-browed and shock-headed, half-naked, and black with smoke and blood, they seemed more like beasts than men ... [and] the foremost were past speech²⁰

The similes used here by this late Victorian petty-bourgeois tell their own tale of class-hatred: the long-humiliated common ruck, now risen in revolt, are no more than dogs and apes, 'past speech', transported by a rage they do not understand.

Bernard Hamilton endeavoured to script a rather different role for the 'people' in his own novel about the French Revolution, published in the year of the British General Strike, The Giant. With typical modesty, Bernard prefatorially lodged his claim that in this book 'the point of view of the People is suggested ... for the first time' ever in fiction.²¹ The endorsement he makes of France's bourgeois revolution -- to the detriment of his reading both of its English predecessor and its Russian successor -- is quite emphatic: 'The so-called British Revolution of 1688 was merely a transfer of power from a Personal Monarchy to a Plutocratic Oligarchy But the Great Revolution of France -- in its prime principles -- still remains the noble example of clarified Reason.'²² His attitude to the Terror - which devoured the hero of his book, Danton -- is that, 'no sudden advance can be made in human progress without human sacrifice -- of blood -- and of love'.²³ This theme will

²⁰ S.J. Weyman, The Red Cockade, London, 1895, 141.

²¹ B. Hamilton, The Giant, London, 1926, 17.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 19.

resurface fifteen years later in his son's play about an earlier period of French history.

Despite Bernard's boast about the novelty of his focus on the people, The Giant actually foregrounds one of the Big Men of History.²⁴ In this it is of a piece with his other fiction, His Queen (about Columbus and Queen Isabella), and Coronation (about Henry V); and, with its 'top-down' perspective, consonant with the orientation of The Duke in Darkness. The climax of The Giant -- the moment of Danton's execution -- is representatively orotund:

The Giant pulled himself together briskly, squaring his great shoulders. "Come, Danton! No weakness!" The thick brows of the Statesman who had been the real ruler of all France lowered upon the executioner. There rapped out the word of command of a soldier -- a clarion note.

"Sanson!" he ordered. "You will show my head to the People. It will be worth while."²⁵

In passages such as this, Bernard attempts to monumentalize his historical hero to a degree which verges on the comic. Danton, with his 'thick eyebrows', is a moving statue whose 'command' raps itself out and gives the reader a good giggle. A similarly risible effect is induced by a 'chance' comment made by a bystanding young Corporal Buonaparte at the decapitation of Danton: "' It is Danton who really has created this new epoch. In it I shall rise. I am a man destiny drives forward.'"²⁶

These 'sticky moments' are, in part, ascribable to the

²⁴ Significantly, Bernard Hamilton sent a copy of The Giant to Mussolini [P. Hamilton, 'Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man' (version one), MS., c. January 1959, 36]. He was also a founder member of his local branch of the Middle Classes Union', [PAT, 147] a proto-Fascist organization established 'at the end of the war to protect property against the alleged socialist menace'. [R. Thurlow, Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985, Oxford, 1987, 51].

²⁵ B. Hamilton, 313.

²⁶ Ibid, 308.

problems generated for the scantily competent writer by the genre of the historical novel. As Georg Lukács expresses it, in his magisterial treatment of the subject:

What matters in the novel is fidelity in the reproduction of the material foundations of the life of a given period, its manners and the feelings and thoughts deriving from these. This means, as we have also seen, that the novel is much more closely bound to the specifically historical, individual moments of a period, than is drama.²⁷

Lukács thus valorizes those authors -- such as Maxim Gorky and Walter Scott -- in whose work he discerns 'an ability to portray accurately great historical transformations in a manner that, through its selectivity, is complete without being exhaustive'.²⁸

By choosing a theatrical form for his own historical parable, Hamilton evaded the generic problems which dogged his father's work.²⁹ He also thereby exhibited, to some extent, his neurotic tendency to repeat-with-a-difference his father's career. This provides one possible explanation for the fact that he chose to go to the religious wars of sixteenth-century France rather than '1789' for his contemporary parallels. This stands all the more in need of explanation because of Lenin's explicit linkage of the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks with the Girondins and the Jacobins in One Step Forward Two Steps Back.³⁰

Another way to contextualize The Duke in Darkness is to situate it with regard to the output of the political milieu to which Patrick was tangentially related in the Thirties and

²⁷ G. Lukács, The Historical Novel (1937), trans., H. and S. Mitchell, London, 1962, 167,

²⁸ D. Soto - Morettini, "'Acts" of Radical History: Contemporary British Political Drama and Historiographical "Genre"', D.Phil Thesis, Wadham College, Oxford, 1989, 56.

²⁹ It is interesting to note, in this respect, that, in the late 1920s, Hamilton refused Matheson Lang's suggestion that he adapt The Giant for the stage [PAT, 255].

³⁰ Lenin, 1976, 238.

Forties - the pronouncedly English literary intellectuals of the Communist Party gathered around Left Review and Our Time. Two figures from that coterie produced works of historical fiction which can illumine The Duke in Darkness -- Montagu Slater and Sylvia Townsend Warner.

A founding editor of Left Review, Montagu Slater was a committed Communist who perceived the anglicization of Marxism as a key priority. He was ill-disposed to any attempted transposition of Soviet literary categories onto the peculiarities of English culture. As Arnold Rattenbury recalls:

Montagu's attitude, always, to Russian critical writing was that they really didn't know what they were talking about because they hadn't had enough history. That we'd had our English Revolution ... and an Industrial Revolution which was also a literary revolution, and they were suddenly having these sort of things for the first time -- and so they ought to be listening to us.³¹

Finding something constructive to say to the Russians (*inter al.*) was, in part, a matter of activating elements from the history of the English people. This was a project common to several English Communist historians and writers of the Thirties -- see, for example, A. L. Morton's A People's History of England (1938), a book which belongs to what Bill Schwarz describes as 'a tradition of popular, political and non-academic history-writing, explicitly agitational and synthesizing its objectives'.³² Commensurate with this tradition were fictionalizations of episodes from English popular history -- such as Jack Lindsay's 1649, A Novel of a Year (1938), about the Levellers and Diggers and Slater's Englishmen with Swords (1949), about much the same subject.

³¹ In conversation with the present writer, 15 August 1988.

³² B. Schwarz, "'The People' in History: the Communist Party Historians Group, 1946-56', in R. Johnson *et al.* (eds.), Making Histories, London, 1982, 44-5.

We have here then an attempt to re-accenuate the traditional narratives of English history, to appropriate half-forgotten historical struggles and re-situate them in the popular memory. Slater's earlier play, Easter.1916 -- written *before* the apogee of the Popular Front politics to which this English Communist project correlates -- sonates slightly differently by depicting the revolutionary career of the Scottish revolutionary, James Connolly, in Dublin from the general lock-out of 1913-14 to the insurrection against British rule in 1916. The piece was first presented before a sympathetic audience at Islington Town Hall on 5 December 1935 by the Left Theatre and the North London Area Committee of the AEU. With a cast of thirty-eight, ostensibly drawn from the audience and presided over by a male and female Chorus, Easter.1916 is a kaleidoscopic play consisting of a succession of short, pithy scenes. Although Connolly is the chief protagonist, he is not impossibly heroized and does not swamp the other characters. The play demonstrates a more democratic and humorous character than does The Duke in Darkness, is grounded in a recent historical struggle, and speaks with assurance to its audience.

Sylvia Townsend Warner was another Communist writer who turned her idiosyncratic talent to historical subjects in order to comment on her own moment. In the late 1930s, she was preoccupied with the Spanish Civil War and wrote two historical novels which bespeak this engagement: Summer Will Show (1936), which unfolds the conversion of the aristocratic Sophia Willoughby to communism during the European Revolutions of 1848; and After the Death of Don Juan (1938), which addresses the plight of the seventeenth-century Spanish peasantry and pours savage scorn upon the parasitic aristocracy which oppressed them and provoked their occasional futile revolt.

During and immediately after the Second World War,

Warner made what she called 'an adroit and calculated retreat'³³ from the portrayal of rebellion and wrote The Corner that Held Them (1948), a novel which chronicles the apparently inconsequential fortunes of an impoverished nunnery, called Oby, in the East Anglian fens from the Black Death to the Peasants' Revolt. This double shift in geographical location and political focus foregrounds a concern with a historical Englishness. As Wendy Mulford puts it:

In The Corner that Held Them, Sylvia succeeded in distilling her love of the fourteenth century; of the progressive forces in art, music and literature which were gradually sweeping away the influence of the French, and asserting a new English confidence and vigour.³⁴

This cultivation of a profound sense of Englishness, compatible with Communism, was developed and refined, as the Cold War succeeded the war against Fascism, by the Communist Party of Great Britain's 'Historians Group', founded in 1946. The fundamental aim of this group is encapsulated by Bill Schwarz as 'the anglicization of the marxist tradition'; that is, a desire to demonstrate 'its compatibility with a native idiom of critical social theory'.³⁵ Within this, their defining intellectual concern was to conceptualize the 'national-popular culture generated in the War'.³⁶ Themselves fresh from military service, and basking in the afterglow of the 1945 Labour landslide, these young Communist historians (such as E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill, and Eric Hobsbaum) took up the project of researching and activating popular English history which Morton and the others had commenced in the Thirties.

³³ Cited in W. Mulford, This Narrow Place, London, 1988, 196.

³⁴ Ibid., 197.

³⁵ Schwarz, 1982, 54.

³⁶ Ibid., 59.

This relatively untroubled endorsement of the war effort, which, allied to its hymning of the tradition of the 'Freeborn Englishman', was characteristic of the Historians' Group, would have come less easily to the older Communists on the Home Front during the war itself -- especially since the Party had, at Stalin's behest, arraigned British Imperialism as the culpable combatant for the first two years of the conflict.³⁷ Even when Hamilton came to write The Duke in Darkness -- shortly after Nazi invasion had embroiled the Soviet Union in the war -- the possibility of writing an allegory of resistance grounded in English history would not easily have suggested itself. And with good reason; for, as Perry Anderson puts it in a judicious critique of E.P. Thompson's variety of internationalism:

Not merely did Britain escape Nazi invasion: it was also the only European power to keep its huge colonial empire virtually intact throughout the war. The national struggle with Germany consequently preserved far more traditional overtones, remaining at a lower ideal-political threshold than elsewhere The patriotism of paramountcy under threat was necessarily rather different from the nationalism of defeat and occupation.³⁸

It is then of little surprise to find that a Communist historical drama written during the war, and connecting deliverance from Catholic obscurantism with pressing struggles to liberate occupied Europe, should differ in topographical focus from the Communist historiography penned after the war was over. However, the fact that Hamilton did not produce yet another treatment of the Leveller movement does not mean that The Duke in Darkness bears no relation whatsoever to this historiographical tradition. For example, like 'nearly all the most valuable

³⁷ This was the line taken, for example, by R.Palme Dutt in Why This War, London, November 1939.

³⁸ P. Anderson, Arguments Within English Marxism, London, 1980, 143.

contributions to cultural history' in that tradition, Hamilton's play locates its object 'in pre- or proto- capitalism'.³⁹ A history of the present, or near past, was perhaps too near the bureaucratic bone for these Communist intellectuals who learned to practise their craft beyond the purview and fiat of an increasingly high-handed Central Committee.

Before proceeding to analysis of the symbolic characterization in, and the metaphors typical of, The Duke in Darkness, I shall comment briefly on the content of Hamilton's chosen 'object', late sixteenth-century France.

The economic background to the French religious war of the period was one of stagnation, as Robin Briggs comments in his recent collection of essays on cultural and social tension in early modern France: 'since the first decades of the sixteenth century the standard of living of most of the French population had been in serious decline, with wages lagging well behind prices'.⁴⁰ Yet it was not merely economic grievances, such as the burden of taxation, which impassioned the popular revolts of the end of the century. Religious divisions were of considerable import. Based in Geneva, Calvinism had been conducting, from the 1540s onwards, an ideological war against Catholicism in France reminiscent of Communism's Moscow-based war against Capitalism. From the Edict of Amboise of March 1563, 'the Huguenots would be fighting for survival'⁴¹ as an embattled sect -- rather as the CPGB had to do from its foundation on 1920. The second civil war (1567-70), covers the period of the incarceration of Hamilton's imaginary Duke. His escape would have coincided with the recent ascendancy of the Catholic League, inspired by the duc de Guise and headed (reluctantly) by Henri III. Hamilton's timing is slightly out of 'sync'; that does not matter, however, since the historical dramatist writes a kind

³⁹ Schwarz, 1982, 91.

⁴⁰ R. Briggs, Communities of Belief, Oxford, 1989, 109.

⁴¹ R. Briggs, Early Modern France: 1560-1715, Oxford, 1977, 19.

of truth different from that of the historian. For example, in making the Duke of Lateraine a Marxist *avant la lettre*, Hamilton is imposing a different, but equally valid, kind of anachronism to that which actually existed:

On close inspection even the most advanced thinkers of the sixteenth century reveal a great ambivalence; they shrouded their real originality from themselves as well as their readers by presenting their ideas in clothing borrowed from the past.⁴²

At the ideological level, then, both Montaigne and Hamilton's Duke descant anachronistically from their ontologically distinct positions within the same historical moment.

I want now to discuss, in turn, the characterization of the Duke himself, Gribaudo, Voulain, and the villains of the piece, Lamorre and his friend, the Count d'Aublaye.

Throughout the play the 'nobility' of the Duke is emphasized. When Gribaudo seeks to expound his own essential weakness and his master's equally essential strength, he has recourse to feudal ideas about rightful social place in order to explain individual human predicates. He tells the Duke: 'I have not your nobility. Your nobility of birth, nor your nobility as a man ... I am not the man you are.'⁴³ This correlation of nobility and manhood engages this piece with the foregrounding of questions of gender-identity discussed in the previous chapter. Gribaudo continues in this vein:

Your birth and training make you a ruler of men, the lord of a great province, the leader of your people, as powerful as all your peers, and more good -- God knows, more good. You were born for great triumphs, for great victories, or for great misery -- such great misery as has descended on you. You can withstand that misery because you are a man of that stamp. But I - what am I? A clerk, a writer, the son of a tailor.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 11.

⁴³ Hamilton, 1943, 14.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

This congenital 'greatness' is anointed and massaged by Voulain when he exhorts the Duke to stir himself into action. Laterraine's people eagerly await 'their champion', we are told, they yearn to behold his 'face', his 'person'.⁴⁵ The feudal religiosity of this language is important: 'person' connects with 'His Majesty's person', or the 'person' of Christ. Although consonant with the discourses of early modern Europe, this mystified representation of the Duke's subjectivity -- in which he colludes -- might seem a trifle strange, coming from a Marxist playwright. After all, why should the 'people' have *need* of an aristocratic champion?⁴⁶

Following his escape it seems that the Duke will ally with the King of Navarre against the King, Guise and the whole 'damnable Black League'.⁴⁷ This portrayal of the Duke as a Huguenot is articulated with a discourse of nationhood which has a more contemporary ring. The Duke accuses Lamorre of betraying France:

Yes, treachery, rather than see the people, and the new faith that is in them survive. You have no hatred in your heart for Philip It is the people you hate, not Spain.⁴⁸

When The Duke in Darkness was written, Spain had been under the iron heel of Franco for two years and the Vichy government in France had been hand-in-glove with Hitler for one. A key-word in the Comintern's lexicon at this time was the 'people' (rather than the 'working-class'), and it is deployed sure-footedly in this context.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 28 and 33.

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that, shortly before his death, Hamilton gave his nephew (the present Earl of Shrewsbury) 'a cricket ball, a pound note, and a copy of "The Duke in Darkness"' [PAT, 664].

⁴⁷ Hamilton, 1943, 130.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 53.

The Duke is now unveiled as a prolocutor for Marxism-Leninism. Although sympathetic to this 'new faith' to which he has adverted, he is, himself, atheistic. 'I have faith in the new faith,' he informs his persecutors, 'but that is not because of the faith it is. It is because it is the faith of the people.'⁴⁹ In a speech which is reminiscent of a reiterative idea in Marx and Lenin, the Duke is made to stress the material force which can accrue to popular ideas. Protestantism, he affirms,

is the faith of the people - the faith of the oppressed against the faith of the oppressors. Faiths, in people's minds, are odd things. They take their shape from the facts of the world. The facts of the world do not, as the priests [or the 'Young Hegelians' whom Marx ridicules in The German Ideology] would have us suppose, take their shape from the faiths in people's minds.

Strip your own faith of its clothes, and you will find it is but the naked angry means of oppressing the people. Strip the new faith of its own clothes, and you will find it is but the naked angry means of resisting that oppression.⁵⁰

The 'naked' meaning of an ideology is then always-already something else, something occluded, but materially 'real'. Now, there can be problems with this mode of thinking -- the unproblematic ascription of discrete belief-systems to different classes can, for example, obscure the often messy ways in which ideologies are antagonistically produced in the course of the struggles between classes. Laterraine's conception could be caricatured as a 'football strip' approach to the multiplicity of struggles which traverse the superstructures of class society, and are profoundly constitutive of our identities as subjects. It seems to be simply assumed that the 'people' should be kitting themselves out in the dressing-room in the colours of Rangers while their aristocratic opponents should be donning the green-and-

⁴⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 55.

white hoops of Celtic. And indeed, there is, ineluctably, a certain simplifying logic coded into the very form of historical dramas such as The Duke in Darkness, which endeavour to allegorize the complex materiality of the contemporary. However, the gist of the Duke's Marxian reading of ideology in this speech is concisely rendered, with clear but not overly repetitious parallelisms. Moreover, while the speech is being delivered, D'Aublaye, at the silent behest of Lamorre, fiendishly circles the Duke with a red-hot poker to ascertain whether or not his blindness is shammed. The Duke's stoicism in the face of this horror functions as a dramatic symbol of the necessity for revolutionism not to shrink from the adversary against which it necessarily takes shape. The scene serves as a salutary reminder of the context implicated by the rhetoric of any kind of emancipatory politics.

The Duke's mock-blindness, considered as a dramatic device, generates tremendous tension around the question of its authenticity. The revelation of his sightedness to Voulain (once trusted) is linked to the Duke's re-seeing of his historical mission. The discourse of vision is a mainstay of political rhetoric, of course, and this is especially true of the language of Marxism, which stresses its 'scientific' capacity to penetrate the apparent opacity of bourgeois society and render transparent the essence of the real. Here I wish to highlight the importance, in the work of Patrick Hamilton, of the topos of the emergence as strong of the ostensibly weak. In this respect the Duke's apparent blindness correlates, for example, with the lameness of the avenging Rupert Cadell in Rope.

The Duke in Darkness is also hallmarked by the same involvement with the codes of homosocial bonding evinced in that earlier Hamilton play. One way to read the Duke's relationship with Gribaud is as a father-son coupling. At one

point in Act One, the Duke tries to interpellate Gribaud as his son: 'my childish one', he calls him.⁵¹ However, Gribaud's envenomed response elsewhere to the older man suggests that their relationship is at least latent with a more sexual kind of male bonding.

Duke. ... Come Gribaud, keep your heart high. Look at me, my child, and tell me you will keep your heart high.

Gribaud. ... Look at you. Look at you. Perhaps I would do better not to look at you....

Duke. Gribaud ... You are ill ...

Gribaud. If I look at you perhaps I shall scream! Have I not looked at you for fifteen years?

Duke (tensely). Gribaud. I said be quiet. We are about to have company.

Gribaud. Are you so certain I fancy your face?⁵²

The scene recalls the altercation between Brandon and Granillo in the second Act of Rope, when they are discovered by Cadell in the middle of what Brandon tries to pass off as a petty domestic quarrel, a lovers' tiff. For his own part, the Duke is unabashed, at the end of the play, in his declaration of love at the bed of the now dead Gribaud, 'sick man'⁵³ though he was.

In Voulain, the Duke gains a new companion, bonded to him by feudal ties *and* by comradeship in a common struggle. Their union is cemented when Voulain places upon his own finger the engagement ring which the Duke had given to his betrothed, twenty-three years previously. Recognized as genuine, Voulain, 'in a highly emotional state, [then] ... kneels and kisses the Duke's hand'.⁵⁴ Voulain it is also who restores to the Duke his sword⁵⁵-- a weapon which is

⁵¹ Ibid., 15.

⁵² Ibid., 18.

⁵³ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 30.

reminiscent of the sword-stick of Rupert Cadell, which masquerades as a harmless crutch for most of Rope. Voulain's genuflection is re-enacted near the end of The Duke in Darkness by Grassin, Roubot and Dubois, three 'tall, good-looking young'⁵⁶ men who had earlier fallen 'sick' from Lamorre's entourage. Like the Duke of Laterraine they have feigned illness, only to emerge, Audenesquely, as 'truly strong', and three kisses seal their compact with him.

This male bonding can be read as a specifically Communist response to that crisis in relations between men obtaining in bourgeois England between the wars discussed in the previous two chapters. The now discredited camaraderie of the OTC is relocated at the level of comradeship within a revolutionary movement. This could be read as a flaw analogous to that discerned in the historiography of the CPGB's Historians group by Bill Schwarz: 'the most glaring weakness in this presentation is the supremely masculinist structuring of this tradition'.⁵⁷ Pertinent though this criticism may be, it is, it seems to me, worth insisting that the bonds of friendship forged between men engaged in a just struggle are of a significantly higher order than many other male bonds that exist across class society: why should they not be celebrated in drama, and elsewhere? That the 1940s West End audience was perhaps shy of such a positive theatrical depiction of revolutionary homosocial bonding is suggested by Bruce Hamilton's comment that the 'all-male cast' of The Duke in Darkness 'was commercially, a clear disadvantage, probably a fatal one'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁷ Schwarz, 1982, 87.

The Duke's companion, Gribaud, is as garrulous as he is 'mad'. He is endowed with an eloquence which, in its metonymic and metaphoric excess, bespeaks a writerly mode. For example, his simile for the plight of himself and his master swims along, meandering associatively:

Like two little beetles caught in a box We rush around, seeking every way out All these little schemes and stratagems are like the little hopeless scamperings of the little beetles in the dark We are caught in the box - the duke's box ... And he took us while we were swimming Duke takes duke, when you swim at night ... Queen takes bishop ... Duke takes duke ... Duke takes duke for king You see? Chess and high politics.⁵⁹

Gribaud's discourse is repetitious. He is a compulsive spinner of phrases and can, in this, be read as representative of the chattering intellectual imprecated by Lenin in One Step Forward. Two Steps Back.

Gribaud also corresponds more specifically to the type of the masturbatory writer, typical, for Hamilton, of bourgeois society in its 'moribund' phase.⁶⁰ Act Three opens with the stark juxtaposition of Gribaud's pointless torrential *écrits* with the invigorating purgative rain cascading down outside the dungeon. The condemned man has been up all night, 'writing feverishly, determinedly, endlessly, and with fantastic mad flourishes and sideways looks'.⁶¹ Outside, the *sturm und drang* of real political struggle: inside, the

⁵⁸ B.Hamilton, 1972, 99.

⁵⁹ Hamilton, 1943, 17.

⁶⁰ See P. Hamilton, Impromptu in Moribundia, London, 1939, 250-3, and his article, 'Nothing to Write About', Our Time, vol. i, no. 4, June 1941, 6-8.

⁶¹ Hamilton, 1943, 64.

involuted outpourings of the insane scribbler. Immediately following Gribaud's death, the Duke dolorously surveys the scene of the dissemination of his erstwhile secretary's papers and laments: 'Oh, what a lot you wrote, Gribaud. What a busy man you were.'⁶² Busy, as are all professional writers, and inconsequent, as most are -- this is the implication.

Hamilton could perhaps have made more of Gribaud's literacy. For this was a period in French history in which even the son of a tailor could have his horizons widened by the print revolution. As Robin Briggs writes:

by the last decades of the century a vital threshold had been passed, in the sense that systems of censorship and control, by state or church, had been swamped by a flood of print. Political activity had become public in a new sense, subject to discussion and attack under the eyes of an ever-growing number of literate citizens.⁶³

Yet Gribaud's ability not only to read but to write is only utilized in The Duke in Darkness as a metaphor for the apolitical onanism -- on Hamilton's reading -- of much twentieth-century literature.

If Gribaud can be perceived, in one sense, as a modern harbinger of the 'Coming of the Book', he is, at the same time, the incarnation of European peasant rituals of misrule. The first intimation of his 'perverse' compulsion to disarrange the place-system endemic to feudal society appears in the first Act when he forcibly displaces the Duke's Queen from her threatening position on the chess-board. Having then hurled the piece across the room, Gribaud settles down to square up to the opponent who has been routinely trouncing him at this

⁶² Ibid., 73.

⁶³ Briggs, 1977, 11.

war game for fifteen years. Calling the Duke 'Gribaud', he says:

Oh no. All is changed now. The Duke comes to visit us. Now all is different. I am the Duke and you are Gribaud. Address me properly, if you please. I am a little sensitive in regard to rank. I always was. And now Gribaud, it is my desire to play chess.⁶⁴

Shortly after this attempted inversion, a strong sense of the mad futility of Gribaud's bid to name himself out of his 'place' is conveyed by his hollow and vindictive repetition of the Duke's 'new' name. Gribaud continues as the 'Duke' throughout the second Act, and by the third he has, Christ-like, re-named Laterraine as 'Pierre' and has crowned himself 'King'. In this capacity he 'despatches' prolific decrees and letters. Before death takes him beyond all live social identities, he thinks himself as a table and begs for mercy from the Duke. Like all -- essentially licensed -- carnivals this one too has its death.

Gribaud's increasingly deranged behaviour can then be read as emblematic of the European traditions of carnival famously discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin in Rabelais and His World(1965). Moreover, as Bakhtin makes clear, it is through the interanimation of the kind of discourses embodied, in Hamilton's play, in Gribaud -- of the increasingly vernacular print culture and the peasant carnivalesque -- that the literature of Rabelais, in sixteenth-century France, was produced. As Tony Bennett writes:

Bakhtin views Rabelais' work as exemplifying a new form of writing -- without parallel in medieval literature. Occupying a point mid-way between the folk-humour of popular culture and official medieval ideology, this new form of writing ... established some degree of connection between two cultural spheres which had hitherto been kept hermetically separate from each other.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Hamilton, 1943, 36-7.

⁶⁵ T. Bennett, Formalism and Marxism, London, 1979, 89-90.

The confluence of these two discourses in Gribaud enhances his appearance as an archetype of the post-Renaissance fiction-writer. Gribaud also encapsulates those popular anarchistic tendencies which must be subdued to the iron will of the revolutionary party if ultimate liberation is to be attained: this grim message, distilled from an orthodox Communist interpretation of the Spanish Civil War, is foregrounded by The Duke in Darkness.

The avatar of the politics signified by this excessively 'Leninist' nostrum is the figure of Voulain. He it is who coldly impresses on the Duke the necessity of killing Gribaud:

Voulain. (Putting on his coat and beginning [matter of factly] to button it up. He speaks in jerks.) I understand but one thing, sir. I understand that I, and the three men below, are here to take you back to your people With that object we run extreme risks to those risks we cannot add, for the sake of a person. The people are greater than a person, sir.⁶⁶

Voulain's pragmatic argument devalorizes the earlier connotation of the word 'person', used to implore the Duke to abandon his dissimulation of blindness and assume his role as 'champion' of his people. Voulain thus emerges as an opportunistic rhetorician who manipulates the Duke as he pleases. Once Gribaud has been poisoned, Voulain disposes of the corpse out of the window with an insouciance that betrays the convenience of the successful execution of this his most favoured plan and is indifferent to the 'horror and sickness'⁶⁷ shown by the grieving Laterraine.

The coldness here exhibited by Voulain could be construed as a critique of Stalinist asceticism. Our initial, unfavourable impression of Voulain's character as 'reserved, nasty and suspicious'⁶⁸ never quite wears off. And when he

⁶⁶ Hamilton, 1943, 62.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 75.

closes the chest on the concealed Duke in Act Three, while creeping round the dungeon, the suspicion that Voulain is exactly what he originally seemed to be flares up in the spectator's imagination. However, Voulain -- whose name connotes the determined verb *vouloir*, 'to will' -- is endowed with a stage-presence which is, on the physical level, attractive. In Act Two, he strips off to reveal a thin rope coiled around his muscular 'bust'⁶⁹ [sic]: a rope that we know will play some role in the unfettering of the Duke (but not Gribaud), but which also recalls the 'killing-rope' used by Hamilton's homosexual couple, Brandon and Granillo. Voulain's appearance on stage at this point is iconic: his naked torso symbolizes a manly liberty which calls to mind those posters of semi-naked, muscular Stakhanovite male workers which adorned the public buildings of the USSR in the Thirties and Forties.⁷⁰ For most modern spectators, indelibly aware of the incubus of Stalinism but engrossed by the eroticized male body on stage, Voulain would remain an ineluctably ambiguous figure, at once feared and admired. By the time the contemporary Marxist playwright Trevor Griffiths came to write his 1972 play about the Torinese factory revolt of 1920, Occupations, the unclothing of the naked, muscular Stalinist torso (this time of Kabak, the battle-scarred Comintern agent) had become, in Brechtian terms, a 'quotable gesture', with sinister connotations.

The positively depicted homosocial bonds which lash together the Duke and his vassals are counterpointed in the text to that bond which entwines Lamorre and his lover, the

⁶⁸ Ibid, 62.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁰ Eric Hobsbawm informs us that, 'Propaganda photographs of such men do not become common ... before the first Five Year Plan.' (The first being entitled, 'Socialist man and his enthusiasm are the motor of construction' (1932)). See, E. Hobsbawm, 'Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography', History Workshop, no. 6, Autumn 1978, 129 and 138.

Count D'Aublaye. The 'bad Duke' of the piece is described as a 'fat, sensuous, vindictive, gross yet powerfully built man'.⁷¹ This Bacchanalian bully is shown forever pawing his effete companion, D'Aublaye, who is contemptuously reviled by the Duke:

Now, will you and your woman friend go away and leave me in peace.

Lamorre. My woman friend?

Duke. Yes, D'Aublaye. He talks like a woman, and his perfume is something stronger than a woman's. I wonder you can stand it.⁷²

This use of femininity as a sign with which to belittle a man is one redolent of misogyny and homophobia. It is the bitter sting in the tail of a speech which affirms, Hegelianly, a meta-narrative of ultimate human liberation: 'the people will be all the world, and the world all the people - and the world will be its fair self, not the wild arena of slaughter, devilry, and misery it is now', declares the Duke.⁷³

The conjunction made by The Duke in Darkness of a depraved, aristocratic homosexuality with Roman Catholicism re-enacts the constellation figured by Granillo in Rope. Hamilton's more thoroughgoing imprecation of Catholicism in The Duke in Darkness is consonant with the peculiar anti-Romanism characteristic of Communist historiography in the Thirties and Forties.⁷⁴ The CPGB Historians group ranked the 'Pope as the champion of reaction in the 19th century and 20th century' as their 'fourth most pressing' intellectual problem.⁷⁵ This was congenial to their English 'national-

⁷¹ Hamilton, 1943, 44.

⁷² Ibid., 56.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interestingly, Bruce Hamilton informs us that his brother was named 'with a look-back at Patrick Hamilton, the Scottish Protestant martyr' [PAT, 1-2], who was burned at the stake at St. Andrew's on 29 February 1528, aged twenty-four. [For an account of the life of the latter, see P. Lorimer, Patrick Hamilton, the First Preacher and Martyr of the Scottish Reformation Edinburgh, 1856].

popular' proclivities: 'by the 1940s Communists could turn the tables [on Catholic intellectuals like Evelyn Waugh] and proclaim support for the national culture while castigating those subservient to the foreign power of Rome'.⁷⁶

Hamilton's relative valorization of Calvinism, and his demonization of Catholicism, are of a piece with his assimilation, in the representation of Gribaud, of the carnivalesque to the Age of Reason's discourses on madness. Just as Gribaud's 'insanity' condemns him to a sacrificial death, so sixteenth-century French peasant Catholicism must yield to a more 'progressive', Protestant religion subtended by the notion of a stable individuated bourgeois subject. Yet, there is potentially much of boisterous value to be gleaned from late medieval peasant 'Catholicism'; much that was indeed impervious to Calvinism. For, as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie writes:

The strict innovations of Calvin, an enemy of lewd dancing and 'pagan' folk-tales, were further away from the peasant mentality than was this curious mixture of Christian dogmas and agrarian superstitions, usually known as 'Catholicism', that constituted the spontaneous background of religion in the countryside around 1550.⁷⁷

Moreover, the effect of the widespread modernisation of Church practices in this period, across Europe, was 'to diminish the sense of the church as a community, to restrict the notion of charity, and to limit the more social aspects of the sacraments'.⁷⁸ Whilst Hamilton depicts his Duke as essentially agnostic, his treatment of matters religious in this play is, then, indicative of a certain blindness to the paradoxical potentialities of popular culture.

⁷⁵ Schwarz, 1982, 75.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ E.L.R. Ladurie, The French Peasantry, 1450-1660, Aldershot, 1977, 236.

⁷⁸ Briggs, 1989, 389.

I wish now to focus attention on the metaphoricity of The Duke in Darkness. Arnold Rattenbury makes the point that, in general,

Patrick always worked in metaphor. Murder, Saloon Bar, Sleepwalking, Drink, Motorcars, Boarding House, Seafront, Balloon Speech, Hotel Lounge, Crossword Puzzles, Speech Cliche, Schizophrenia, Privileged Detention, Blindness, Feigned Blindness, Pet Ownership -- all are metaphors, deliberately chosen, for the areas of bourgeois life he might at any one moment be seeking to anatomise.⁷⁹

One of the central metaphor-clusters in the play is associated with chess, a game replete with a range of metaphorical possibilities. Gribaud's correlation of chess with 'high politics', that is, the politics of the Court and Church, has already been cited. These constitute what Gribaud describes as a 'hero's game'⁸⁰ from success in which he is debarred by his lowly social station. This is, however, a game which the Duke has played as if to the manner born and this expertise is expressed by his skill at chess. The language typical of chess, and of Machiavellian/Bolshevik politicking, he treasures as his own: 'I have planned. I have plotted. I have schemed',⁸¹ he proudly affirms to Voulain. The latter, attuned as he is to the language register required by any particular situation, has cajoled the suspicious Duke with the argument that the 'long game has been played, and the time has come'⁸² to lay aside the chess pieces and pick up the real knights and pawns: the mimesis of chess must give way to the reality of warfare.

The actual chess matches which have taken place in Lamorre's dungeon over a period of fifteen years constitute a telling metaphor for the unequal social relationship between

⁷⁹ Letter to the present writer, 31 May 1989, 1.

⁸⁰ Hamilton, 1943, 15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

the Duke and Gribaud. At the end of the play the Duke reminisces: 'Look here we played chess. I won always. But sometimes I let him win'.⁸³ He then lifts some pieces as mementoes of his perennially pulverised dead opponent: hell is indeed other people! All this imparts a rather poignant significance to Gribaud's earlier action of casting the Duke's most powerful piece, his Queen, across the room. Like the pieces in a chess set, the subjects of the Absolutist monarchies of late feudal Europe had their 'rightful' place, and his incessant defeats serve to keep Gribaud in his. Patrick Hamilton was himself well aware of the humiliation involved in losing at chess. In a letter to Bruce he writes: 'in chess there are no alibis When you are beaten your logic has been proved inferior to your opponents -- you are intellectually insulted and disgraced.'⁸⁴ The depth of annoyance induced by defeat at chess, Patrick further illustrates in this letter by recounting Gorki's story concerning Lenin's passion for the game (reputedly his 'only vice!') and the childish despondency which losing generated in him. What chance poor Gribaud when even Lenin, with his vice-like mind, was maddened by defeat at chess?⁸⁵

Gribaud's mis-playing of the game (his cheating) also functions as a metaphor for his own madness. In a sane interlude he acknowledges his act of tampering with the chess pieces as 'the act of a maniac'⁸⁶ -- a not exaggerated description, given the colossal significance that chess has come to assume in their lives. The mis-playing of chess in a claustrophobic situation is also metaphorically invoked in a text written three years prior to The Duke in Darkness by the wartime Resistance fighter, Samuel Beckett. More micro-

⁸³ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁴ Cited in, B.Hamilton, 1972, 141.

⁸⁵ Hamilton once described chess as 'a nasty, spiteful little boy's game' to his brother, in a letter written in September 1961 [PAT, 652-3].

⁸⁶ Hamilton, 1943, 15.

political than the Hamilton play, Murphy surreptitiously valorizes anarchistic modes of resistance to plutocratic capitalism. The novel's eponymous anti-hero, Murphy, discerns in the denizens of the lunatic asylum in which he finds 'work', the avatars of his favoured modality of subversion. His favourite among the higher schizoids is Mr. Endon, and together they play 'chess'.

The games which Murphy plays with Endon stand in stark contrast to those played by the Duke and *his* 'mad' opponent. Due to the 'Fabian methods'⁸⁷ employed by both players (who each make their moves separately), their 'combats' invariably end inconclusively. However, their final (nocturnal) game -- dubbed by the narrator an 'Endon's Affence' -- witnesses the 'defeat' of Murphy. The game is a masterpiece of (seemingly?) pointless, straight-jacketted disengagement from social rules. The method in Endon's madness is that, while using the rules governing the moves of individual pieces, he is playing his *own* game -- a kind of solitaire, the object of which is to finish the game with all the pieces restored to their original positions. Endon's objective begins to dawn on the reader on move eight. With Kt- Qkt1 Mr Endon (as Black, for he always, paradoxically, played second) has replaced all of his pieces: the narrator comments sardonically -- 'An ingenious and beautiful debut, sometimes called the Pipe-opener.'⁸⁸ On move twenty-seven Endon forsakes the opportunity to capture White's Queen in order to replace the only one of his displaced back rank pieces. Murphy's desperate endeavours to lose a piece or get his King into 'check' are of no avail. Faced with non-engagement as implacable as this, White has little alternative but to resign. Endon has yet to complete his solitaire by replacing his King but even this is 'of no consequence'⁸⁹ to him.

⁸⁷ S.Beckett, Murphy (1938), London, 1973, 106.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

Only someone in fundamental sympathy with Endon would permit him to play his own game. By contrast, Hamilton's Duke almost ceaselessly vanquishes his companion through fifteen years of chess-playing captivity. Beckett's use of the mis-playing of chess (as a figuration of 'perverse' anti-belligerence) is at once more amusing and more egalitarian than Hamilton's -- although it is difficult to envisage Murphy as the leader of a revolt.

The language of disease also generates a significant metaphor constellation in The Duke in Darkness. The import of the Duke's feigned blindness and his forswearing of it at Voulain's injunction has already been noted. The forces of Reaction are also, in this play troubled by ocular pestilence. The Duke of Lamorre is evidently plagued by a kind of glaucoma which also figures the incipience of aristocratic decline and popular revolt. After Laterraine has flown the coop, Lamorre turns to Voulain and says:

It is no good. I am accursed. This means I am accursed. You do not understand.

Voulain. Understand what, sir? Don't you think -

Lamorre. No. I have seen it. You do not understand. I saw the red ring around the moon. I saw it two months ago.

Voulain. The Red ring around the moon?

Lamorre. It was red, red, red. My grandfather saw it. My father saw it.⁹⁰

Of course, the irony is that Voulain understands only too well: a fact to which Lamorre is, significantly, 'blind'.

Lamorre's remarks echo a comment he makes earlier in the play in an altercation with Laterraine: 'the people are certainly a cancer in my eyes'.⁹¹ The Duke is made to seize on this jibe and intelligently invert it. The Duke's linguistic

⁸⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁹⁰ Hamilton, 1943, 80.

⁹¹ Ibid., 55.

strategy is to countervalue Lamorre's metaphorical derogation of the people as a canker.

Yes. A cancer. Perhaps also in my eyes too. A cancer in the body of our world, a cancer deeply rooted, lodged hard, in the midst of the madness and the tyranny of you and all who are like you. A small growth - but a growth, growing. That is the people. You can cut at it, torment it, torture it, slash it, imprison it - but it grows. If it ceases to grow in one place, it grows in another. It is life. The people are alive and living. You are death and dying.⁹²

This is an accomplished dialectical image, which encapsulates one of the central ideas of Hamilton's philosophy, Marxism: that the potential liquidators of class society are germinated within its very pores. Interestingly, it is in this well-wrought speech that the Duke uncharacteristically implicates himself unusually, to some extent in the *ancien regime*. Of course, like all biological metaphors -- prevalent across the entire corpus of Marxian discourse -- this one runs the risk of suggesting the inevitability of victory over oppression. Nevertheless, in its local context, and with its subversive manipulation of the enemy's own trope it is a striking metaphor which proudly proclaims to the ruling order: "Yes, we are the 'enemy within'." The fact that Trotsky used disease metaphors, in general, and cancer metaphors, in particular, 'with the greatest profusion'⁹³ to name 'Stalinism' would also have recommended counter-valorization such as is evinced in the above excerpt to the fiercely anti-Trotskyist Hamilton.

The pertinacity of this brand of disease metaphor within British Marxist dramaturgy is worthy of note at this point. In Trevor Griffiths' 1973 play, The Party, one of the participants in the discussion which comprises the piece, Sloman, invokes a biological determinism similar to that of Hamilton's Duke:

⁹² Ibid., 56.

⁹³ S. Sontag, Illness as Metaphor, New York, 1977, 82.

There'll be a revolution, and another, and another Because the germ's there, the virus is there, and however many generations of workers are pumped full of antibodies or the pale pink placebos of late capitalism, it will persist, the virus under the skin, waiting.⁹⁴

The colossal failure of the Russian revolution and the stabilization and expansion of global capitalism since the Second World War have inflected Panglossian metaphorizing such as this with an unconvincing accent. A socialist dramatist today can, then, resort less easily than Hamilton did to a language which turns on metaphors which imply the ineluctability of victory and obfuscate the harsh realities of a painfully difficult struggle.

I began my discussion of The Duke in Darkness by establishing some contextual frames through which the play can be read: the romantic historical fiction exemplified by the work of Stanley Weyman and Patrick's father, Bernard: the work of Hamilton's fellow travellers from Left Review and Our Time, Montagu Slater and Sylvia Townsend Warner; and the historiography of the CPGB's Historians Group. I now want to proceed towards a conclusion by continuing to place The Duke in Darkness, politically and aesthetically, in relation to other texts which issue from the matrix of Marxism and drama: Brecht's The Visions of Simone Machard (1957), Howard Brenton's The Romans in Britain (1980), and Georg Lukacs' The Historical Novel (1937).

The sacrifice of Gribaud corresponds to what Raymond Williams defines as a 'persistent Brechtian theme: the choice between sympathy, accepting a local reality, and revolt, contradicting both the local reality and immediate human need and convenience'.⁹⁵ Although Brecht's play, The Visions

⁹⁴ Cited in, J.Bull, New British Political Dramatists, London, 1984, 127.

⁹⁵ R.Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, (1968), repr., London, 1987, 281.

of Simone Machard, foregrounds the inconvenience caused by the uncompromised revolt of an adolescent French girl for the adult capitulators around her, it is a less troubled piece than some of his more famous plays. It is nevertheless relevant to the purposes of my argument here.

During the October of the year in which The Duke in Darkness received its first performance, Brecht commenced work on The Visions of Simone Machard together with Lion Feuchtwanger, also in exile in the United States. The play reworks elements culled from the Joan of Arc story into the historical fabric of the Fall of France in June 1940. The role of the Maid of Orleans falls to the artlessly patriotic Simone Machar, who is employed in a hostelry in a little town in central France. The 'real life' narrative is punctuated with the dreams which visit Simone, and its quotidian language and demonstration of the hypocrisy of the opportunistic hostelry owners serves to debunk the po-faced, high-falutin' nationalism borne by the Joan legend. Although John Willett seems correct to argue, in his introduction, that, since Brecht and Feuchtwanger had 'Hollywood's demands in mind,' the play is 'quite Aristotelian in its observation of the unities', The Visions of Simone Machard remains less illusionistic than Hamilton's play. The actors, garbed in their makeshift medieval attire for the dream sequences, are party to a more factitious performance which brazenly wears its pertinence to current political events on its sleeve.

The vision beheld by 'Joan' in the first dream is rendered in an apocalyptic register which violently yokes together the discourses of the medieval rhapsodist and the contemporary political satirist. Beating on her invisible drum (the soil of France) Simone/Joan exhorts the workers to rise up:

Follow me, metal workers of Saint-Denis! You carpenters of Lyon, wake up! the enemy is coming!

Mayor: What are you looking at Joan?

Simone: They are coming! Don't flinch! At their head is the drummer with a voice like a wolf and a drum stretched with a Jew's skin [Adolf Hitler]; clinging to his shoulders, a vulture with the look of the banker Fauche from Lyons. Just behind him comes Field-Marshal Fireraiser [Hermann Goering]. He is on foot, a fat clown wearing seven uniforms not one of which makes him look human But now there will be an end of them, for here stands King Charles and the Maid of God, that's me [in case we did not know!].⁹⁶

The shafts of humour evident here 'ground' this vision and make the enemy comical, thinkable and defeatable. This impacting of different levels of discourse enlivens the play by imparting to it a scraggy heterogeneity which underscores its immediate 'worldliness'.

In his own notes on the play, Brecht suggested that the 'dream in which Simone relives the St. Joan legend can be made intelligible to audiences unaware of the legend by the large-scale projection of individual pages from the book, possibly including woodcut illustrations'.⁹⁷ This technique would mix into the play's semiotic palette another factitious element. In his play, Occupations, Griffiths deploys a similar strategy in the form of the projection of disparate political images onto the back of the stage as appropriate. A similar device could be usefully incorporated into a production of The Duke in Darkness. For example, contiguous or coextensive with the Duke's long speech about ultimate popular victory in the second act could be shown images of medieval lower-class risings (the Jacquerie, the Anabaptists of Thomas Munzer's City of God, and so on). This would cut against Hamilton's proclivity for theatrical verisimilitude, but it would also serve to orient the play more effectively.

The English Communist historical drama and historiography of the Thirties and Forties adumbrate the political drama of a galaxy of contemporary playwrights who have been producing

⁹⁶ B. Brecht, The Visions of Simone Machard (1957), trans. J. Willett, 1976, London, 1985, 20-1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

work from the late 1960s onwards. As Donna Soto-Morretini puts it: 'beyond sharing a vision informed by Marxism, the most common theme in the works of Brenton, Edgar and Griffiths is the use of history as a potential material source for their oppositional drama'.⁹⁸ I have already touched on the work of Trevor Griffiths, who tends to focus, in John Bull's words, 'on an historical process as it is represented through charismatic individuals at decisive moments'.⁹⁹ By contrast, in plays such as Destiny (1976), David Edgar employs a general paradigm which 'is a variant of the epic, with frequent changes of location, and a series of jumps through history before eventually concentrating on a brief period in contemporary England'.¹⁰⁰ The intention here is to demonstrate how current political reality is the product of multiple determinations, both short-term and long-term. A similar strategy can be discerned in Howard Brenton's controversial play, The Romans in Britain, to which I shall now turn.

Like The Duke in Darkness and The Visions of Simone Machard, Brenton's piece is addressed from a Marxist position and raids the historical cupboard in order to thematize Occupation -- in this case, the British occupation of the Six Counties. Brenton uses a battery of devices to secure his connections which recall Brecht rather than Hamilton. For example, in Part Two of the play -- 'Arthur's Grave' -- scenes which deal with the Celtic Britons facing Saxon invasion are interspliced with scenes from a bizarre fictional episode of 'the Troubles'.

In Part One -- 'Caesar's Tooth' -- the parallels between the Romans-in-Britain and the British-in-Ireland are suggested by a variety of means. The language immediately spewed out

⁹⁸ Soto-Moretini, 1989, 6.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Bull, 1982, 170.

by the first Roman soldiers on stage is not unfamiliar. 'Three wogs' is their designation for the Celtic brothers, Brac, Viridio, and Marbon.¹⁰¹ If this reminds us of the racist vocabulary nurtured by British imperialism, then the language of a runaway slave-woman at the end of Part One is reminiscent of the insurgency of West Belfast or the West Bank:

We were clever with stones. All the children. Wherever I am it's not left me. When they kept me in a pit. When they fucked me in the forest The men from the ship burnt my home. Now home is where I have a stone in my hand.¹⁰²

This bitter speech is the cue for the advent of Roman soldiers in British Army uniforms and the shooting dead of the woman from whose mouth it issued.

More liberal censorship laws ceded Brenton more leeway to depict the cultural meaning of invasion and captivity than had been available to Hamilton. Marbon, the neophyte Druid, experiences this meaning in terms of forced sodomy and fellatio. Brenton's portrayal of the profound difficulty felt by the Britons in naming the invader is also intelligent:

First Envoy: ... But the Romans are different. They are - (He gestures, trying to find the word. He fails. He tries again.) A nation. Nation. What? A great family? No. A people? No. They are one, huge thing.

First Village Woman. He's shit scared.¹⁰³

This riposte to the terrified envoy from the neighbouring tribe is typical of the functioning of language in the play as a whole: it serves to dispell the unfamiliar rhythm and tone of the previous utterance whilst -- in its sheer alterity -- not entirely obliterating its recollection. Similarly, in the

¹⁰¹ H. Brenton, The Romans in Britain, London, 1980, 37.

¹⁰² Ibid., 63-4.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 27.

following interchange, language more familiar to the modern spectator is shot into a discourse which is governed by a syntax simple and broken and has an incantatory rhythm.

First Envoy. Fifty farms, under your clientship, Mother. The young men and women, the foster brothers of those families - they must come today.

Now.

Ride round the farms.

Manhood. Womanhood. War. Fury, battle fury. Raise it now.

The MOTHER spits at the ENVOYS.

Mother. For whom? ... You won't say his name.

All night, drinking, singing, arguing did you.

Even now, you have not got the balls to say the name.

Of the man who sent you.

Not in my house. Not on my fields. Not to my face.¹⁰⁴

This double-rendering of language respects the irreducible difference of the culture of another epoch in 'our' history, while making the language talk to us. In contrast, The Duke in Darkness is rendered linguistically in a formal, 'Standard' English mode. Hamilton may have been anxious to avoid the silly archaisms which bedevil, for example, his father's novel about Henry V, Coronation. However, his assumption that his own linguistic register would suffice for an historical drama situated in sixteenth-century France perhaps remains open to criticism.

A more judicious method of assessing The Duke in Darkness might well be to use Georg Lukács' *aperçus* into historical fiction in The Historical Novel as a benchmark. This procedure suggests itself all the more readily because of the similarities which obtain between Lukács and Hamilton. For although the latter's superior in terms of theoretical and political culture, Lukács wrote, like the Englishman, as a Marxist committed to the official Communist movement, and

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 24.

shared the same teleological tropology and disapprobation of modernism that Hamilton evinced.

Lukács articulates historical drama with 'real life' (understood holistically) by highlighting those 'facts of life' which 'great' examples of that genre (are said to) typically foreground. The central problems of both *Life* and *Drama*, in the tragic mode, Lukács cites as follows: the problem of the 'parting of the ways'; the 'settling of accounts'; the grasping of the correct 'link in the chain'; and the (selective) representation of the 'world historical individual'.¹⁰⁵ On each of these counts, *The Duke in Darkness* scores well on the Lukácsian critical scale.

In a move similar to that made by Hamilton, Lukács grounds his rendition of the problem of the 'parting of the ways' in the writings of Lenin:

When Lenin, after the July rising of 1917, proposes to the social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks the formation of a government responsible to the Soviets, he writes: "Now and only now, perhaps only during a few days or for only one or two weeks would it be possible to form and consolidate such a government in perfect peace."¹⁰⁶

In fact the decisive break with the other nominally socialist parties was not made until much later, but the point, for Lukács, remains: a great tragedian must needs exemplify painful, but necessary, partings if his art is to live up to the grandeur of *Life*. In despatching Gribaud, the Duke in Hamilton's play both fulfils this criterion and 'settles accounts' with his past (the second Lukácsian precept): to validate the long captivity which his social and political position exposed him to, and the views which it generated, the Duke needs to break out of his incarcerated oppositionalism and raise his standard in the political tumult

¹⁰⁵ Lukács, 1962, 100-4, passim.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

raging beyond the castle walls.

The corpse of Gribaud can be read as the Duke's 'link in the chain', tied to his people. Out of the window in Act III go both the dead Gribaud and the rope which the Duke has made during the years of his captivity, and which he had earlier brandished before Voulain as evidence that he had 'kept faith' with his supporters.¹⁰⁷ Together they constitute the decoy necessary to the Duke's escape, and contribute to the concretization of Lukács' metaphor.

Hamilton's Duke may well have won the approbation of the patrician Lukács, whose tendency is to laud those charismatic individuals who rise to the 'top' of History as 'world historical' figures endowed with a 'dramatic character'.¹⁰⁸ Of Laterraine/Lenin he would no doubt have said: 'He is destined by life itself to be a hero, to be a central figure in drama.'¹⁰⁹

A rather different dramaturgical approach to history is implied by that other great German-speaking Marxist, Walter Benjamin, in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', cited at the beginning of this chapter. The keystone of this approach lies in the third of the three elements which Benjamin perceived as essential to a materialist conception of history: 'the tradition of the oppressed'.¹¹⁰ This tradition is 'nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors'¹¹¹ and essential to its activation is a revolutionary nostalgia of 'remembrance', which, for Benjamin, is analagous to the messianism of the Jewish religion. The Duke in Darkness can arrogate at most a partial incarnation of this tradition -- for example, in the Duke's oratory concerning the age-old oppression of the 'people' and in their faithful remembrance

¹⁰⁷ Hamilton, 1943, 32.

¹⁰⁸ Lukács, 1962, 104.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Cited in Callinicos, 1987, 180.

¹¹¹ Benjamin, 1973, 262.

of their 'dead' Duke.

Yet the actual history of the oppressed in sixteenth-century France affords striking possibilities to image the plight and revolt of 'enslaved ancestors'. Real wages had 'reached their lowest point in European history at the end of this period.'¹¹² Under the Absolutist regimes of the Bourbon monarchies, the agents of the crown were intervening at village level to extort taxes as never before, and the Church and State were conducting an unprecedented campaign of moral repression: 'sexual licence, rituals of inversion, popular festivals and local saints were among the most prominent targets for this offensive'.¹¹³ Modern, radical dramatists would be more likely to focus their attention on such revolts 'from below' as the 1580 Carnival of the Romans than on religious disputation among noblemen and lawyers.

A modern dramatist would also be more likely than a Hamilton to observe Brecht's injunction that, 'complex seeing must be practised Thinking *above* the flow of the play is more important than thinking from *within* the play.'¹¹⁴ S/he would then attempt to write a self-reflexive piece which would code its themes factitiously. For one problem with illusionistic works of drama, embedded as they are in 'a form that encloses the characters, in fixed places and at fixed times,'¹¹⁵ is that their covert meanings can so easily remain occluded. That Michael Redgrave himself could gloss over The Duke in Darkness as 'a costume melodrama with a bravura part for Leslie Banks as the Duke and for me as his tailor [sic]'¹¹⁶

¹¹² Briggs, 1989, 410.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 381.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Williams, 1987, 281.

¹¹⁵ Williams, *ibid.*, 288.

¹¹⁶ Redgrave, 1983, 164. Perhaps ironically, Hamilton once described Redgrave as 'the most intelligent actor I have ever met' [letter to B. Hamilton, Sheringham, Norfolk, 5 August 1959, 6 (AHA)].

illustrates the point.

The foregoing criticisms should not, however, detract from the achievement of The Duke in Darkness. After its first performance in Edinburgh, The Scotsman's theatre critic showed that the play's ulterior meanings were discernible enough when he designated it as 'a spiritual or mystical conflict, in which the people are striving to free themselves, and we see the imprisoned noble as their champion and his jailer as the general and symbolic oppressor'.¹¹⁷ Moreover, the liberated prisoners-of-war from 'Oflag 79' who sought the BBC's permission to perform excerpts from The Duke in Darkness obviously found a symbolic value in the piece which spoke to their celebration of their own emancipation.¹¹⁸ A twenty-five minute recording of their performance was broadcast on the Overseas Service on VJ Day. From it came the suggestion that the march from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* be incorporated into the play's (otherwise ropey) ending, a device which 'electrified' the definitive radio version of the play, according to Felix Fenton.¹¹⁹ Seven radio broadcasts of the play were transmitted and two television versions made between 1945 and 1965. This 'presence' among a mass audience must have sweetened the bitter pill of theatrical failure for Hamilton. More importantly, it signifies an attitude to the potential radicality of the broadcast media which contrasts favourably with the unduly pessimistic attitudes of Benjamin's friends, Horkheimer and Adorno in their contemporary essay, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' (in which they describe the radio of liberal capitalist America as 'the universal mouthpiece of the Fuhrer'.)¹²⁰ The progressive potential of

¹¹⁷ Findlater, 1956, 59.

¹¹⁸ Letter of 28 August 1945, at BBC Written Archives Centre, in Patrick Hamilton, 'Copyright' file.

¹¹⁹ F.Fenton, The Radio Play, London, 1949, 119.

¹²⁰ T. Adorno and M.Horkheimer, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, 1944,

radio and television Hamilton sought to exploit by writing plays specifically oriented to the broadcast media: these form the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Instruments of Torture, Dialectics of Revenge

something like a preoccupation with retributive punishment does come out in most of Patrick's plays, less often in his novels The theme is to be found in Rope, in Gaslight, The Man Upstairs, to a lesser degree in The Governess; and very strongly in the wireless plays. Perhaps it was a puritannical moral sense that found a discharge there.

Bruce Hamilton, The Light Went Out, London, 1972, 114.

Hamilton's involvement with the BBC dates from January 1932 when his own adaptation of Rope was broadcast on the National Service to an anxiously expectant audience. This wireless version of the play had been hyped by its producer, Val Gielgud, and by the Radio Times as a new breakthrough into the macabre for the Corporation, and warning was issued that Rope was 'strong meat',¹ unsuitable for those of a nervous disposition. This advance publicity provoked the outraged letter from the British Empire Union cited in Chapter Two and the actual transmission induced the Coroner for West Middlesex to lament that it was 'a pity to broadcast such things'.² A more judicious view was expressed by the 'noted churchman' quoted by the ultra-reactionary Morning Post, Dr Percy Dearmer, who contended that the play translated rather badly to radio because its 'cleverly contrived'³ stage effects were lost and further argued that 'broadcast drama must have a special technique of its own ... not yet ... discovered'.⁴

¹ Morning Post, 16 January 1932, 12. [Like most newspaper and magazine quotations in this chapter, this was culled from the Hamilton archive at the BBC Written Archives Centre (hereafter, BBC WAC), but was page-referenced at the Newspaper Library at Colindale, London].

² The Daily Mail, 19 January 1932, 9.

³ Morning Post, 19 January 1932, 12.

From the time of this famous broadcast of Rope onwards, Val Gielgud sought to interest Hamilton in 'the possibilities of the broadcasting medium'.⁵ The first result of this badgering was a twenty-minute piece in the Corporation's 'Conversation in the Train' series, which was entitled "On the Subject of Servants" and was broadcast on 2 June 1936 on the Regional Service.⁶ In the following year, Hamilton's first substantial radio play, Money with Menaces was produced. This was to be the first of five plays written specifically for the broadcast media, the others being To the Public Danger (1939), This is Impossible (1941), Caller Anonymous (1952), and the television play The Man Upstairs (1954).

From his correspondence with fellow Saville Club member, Val Gielgud, it would seem that Hamilton enjoyed a cordial, if not trouble-free, relationship with the BBC. On the one hand, the Corporation broadcast much of his work -- including excerpts from, and adaptations of, Craven House and The Slaves of Solitude, as well as transmissions of the stage plays (Gaslight was the most frequently produced piece: nine radio broadcasts and five television transmissions were made between 1932 and 1986, excluding the war years).⁷ On the other hand, the BBC were prone to make cuts which were sometimes political in nature and which, in any case, infuriated Patrick. For example, he wrote angrily, but politely, to Gielgud in 1940 to complain of unauthorized excisions made in a broadcast of To the Public Danger, cuts which, in his view, 'completely spoiled the play, depriving it of its whole point and savour'.⁸ Experiences such as this one perhaps motivated Hamilton's later determination to attend rehearsals

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ V. Gielgud in P. Hamilton, Money with Menaces and To the Public Danger, London, 1939, v.

⁶ There is no trace of the text of this play at the BBC WAC.

⁷ Information from BBC WAC.

⁸ P. Hamilton, letter to V. Gielgud, Henley, 4 November 1940 [BBC WAC].

of Caller Anonymous, as expressed in another letter to Gielgud:

I was most interested to hear that there are certain production problems about which you are a little uneasy. However, I am sure that all these can be surmounted -- if necessary by the author removing or altering them as they arise.⁹

He may also have been so motivated by the sense of involvement in a collective project that even freelance work for the BBC could generate. As Louis MacNeice put it:

radio craftsmanship, like stage craftsmanship, is something less private every transmission of a play or feature ... should have -- and usually has -- the feeling of a first Night; it is something *being made* by a *team* of people.¹⁰

The attraction of this aspect of broadcast writing could well have held a special appeal for Patrick as a former actor himself. And certainly he seems to have cherished a letter received from the producer of Caller Anonymous, E. J. King Bull, in response to his 'first night' telegram -- using it as a marker for his own copy of his last play, The Man Upstairs.

In his letter, Bull referred to Caller Anonymous as one of Hamilton's 'radio classics'.¹¹ This designation would have met with the approval of both Gielgud and Bruce Hamilton, among others. In his foreword to the published version of Money with Menaces and To the Public Danger, Gielgud maintains that the author had 'realised that the problems of the microphone and the dramatic control panel call for a special approach'.¹² Almost twenty years later, he struck a similar chord by recording that Patrick's

⁹ P. Hamilton, letter to V. Gielgud, North Pangbourne, 23 October 1951 [BBC WAC].

¹⁰ L. MacNeice, The Dark Tower, London, 1947, 15-17.

¹¹ Letter dated 2 October, 1952 [BBC WAC].

¹² In Hamilton, 1939, v.

success in turning a vigorous tract condemning the drunken motorist into a sensationally effective radio play ... was such as to cause one critic to comment -- not without good sense -- that if only two or three pieces of equivalent calibre could be found and broadcast every year the medium would be more than justified.¹³

Of Money with Menaces, Alan Dent, the critic for The Listener, wrote that it was a 'brilliant and purely radiogenic little alarmer'.¹⁴ And Bruce Hamilton's comment on the 'radiogenicity' of his brother's wireless plays is similar in kind:

While others have had to fight their way by trial and error, Patrick instinctively understood what had to be avoided in the medium and the particular opportunities offered for the discreet exploitation of effects peculiar to it.¹⁵

This present discussion of Hamilton's broadcast work will remain mindful throughout of the peculiarities of the semiology of radio and television drama. The foregoing consensus concerning Hamilton's radio drama will be re-accentuated through the development of a set of arguments which turn on the suitability of the theme of individual persecution and retribution to the genre of the radio (and early television) play. I shall examine each of these plays in chronological order (with the exception of This is Impossible). The verbal characterization of the *dramatis personae* and the thematization of the dialectic of torture and revenge will constitute the poles between which my analysis will oscillate. First, however, I shall sketch in the historical parameters of the broadcasting equation of which Hamilton's work in this field is a variable.

By 1930 the drama department of the BBC had been

¹³ V. Gielgud, British Radio Drama: 1922-56, London, 1957, 67.

¹⁴ A. Dent, The Listener, vol. XXIX, no. 745, 22 April 1943, 492.

¹⁵ B. Hamilton, The Light Went Out, London, 1972, 91.

transmitting for six years, and what John Drakakis calls a 'basic grammar of radio production',¹⁶ receptive to the themes of modernism, had developed: 'forms such as "stream of consciousness" found their way from psychology -- through expressionist drama, the prose of writers such as James Joyce, and the poetry of T. S. Eliot -- into radio's rapidly expanding lexicon of terms and structural concepts'.¹⁷ The BBC mandarin most intrigued by experimentation was Lance Sieveking, whose book, The Stuff of Radio (1934), reads effusively in its special pleading for the potentialities of radio drama. Consequently, he took exception to the strictures on the writing of broadcast drama laid down by the more conservative Gielgud -- that, for example, the ideal radio play should have a 'simple plot, involving few characters'.¹⁸ By way of rejoinder, Sieveking contended that the 'perfect length' of a radio play, could vary between 'about fifteen minutes and one hour and fifteen minutes',¹⁹ and that any number of characters could be drawn in it. Generally, The Stuff of Radio strongly conveys its author's 'operatic' conception of the radio play as a total communicative action orchestrated by the 'player' of the Dramatic Control Panel. Music, sound effects, and human voices -- emanating from many different studios -- are all, on this view, integral elements of the radio art-work as a totality.

It was, however, Val Gielgud's conception of BBC radio drama as a 'national *theatre* of the air'²⁰ (my emphasis) which typified production in the 1930s -- although the Corporation had come along way from the early days when actors broadcast in costume!²¹ In the years between 1931

¹⁶ J. Drakakis(ed.), British Radio Drama, Cambridge, 1981, 7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ V. Gielgud in How to Write Broadcast Plays, cited in L. Sieveking, The Stuff of Radio, London, 1934, 57.

¹⁹ Ibid., 92.

²⁰ In Drakakis, 1981, 7.

and 1941, the production of plays written especially for radio (but largely shaped by the theatre) increased sevenfold.²² The potential audience for this output was immense: by the end of the decade 'nine out of ten homes in Britain had a radio set'.²³ From 1936 onwards, this audience was subjected to intensive market research in order to establish sociologically-based 'parameters of taste that could be used as definitive guidelines with regard both to the formal construction and to the content of plays'.²⁴ The 'Home Service', which was established in 1939 by fusing the National and Regional Services, was conceived of as transmitting from a mid-point between these 'parameters of taste'. The BBC stated this explicitly after the inauguration of the Third Programme in 1946: the Home Service 'sets out to be not an exclusive but an inclusive programme',²⁵ they said, mapping out a middle-class and middle-brow social space into which the lower orders could be admitted. In this it was of a piece with that consensual and corporatist world of Bevan and Beveridge, Cripps and Keynes which the election of the Attlee government seemed to promise.

The preceding years of the war increased pressures towards a variety of radio drama less ostentatious than that envisaged by Sieveking in the early Thirties. The need for streamlined production techniques entailed the elimination of the multi-studio approach advocated by the maestro of the Dramatic Control Panel in The Stuff of Radio. Gielgud saw radio drama as a means of compensating a theatre-going public which had been 'confined to barracks' by the difficulties of wartime travel. According to MacNeice, the nature of the conditions of

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Ibid., 7.

²³ M. Coulton, Louis MacNeice at the BBC, London, 1980, 41.

²⁴ H. P. Priessnitz, 'Problems and Characteristics of British Radio Drama', in P. Lewis (ed.), Radio Literature Conference, Durham, 1977, 56.

²⁵ 'New Home Programmes', BBC Yearbook, 1946, 54, cited in *ibid.*, 58.

possibility of the genre in those years was such as to preclude 'an esoteric content or manner, an obviously high-brow approach, or anything which puts too great a strain on a simple man sitting by his fireside'.²⁶ He went on to convert the exigencies of writing for this audience into a normative rubric of aesthetic principles: radio drama, he wrote:

presupposes a wider and deeper pattern beginning with a careful and intuitive selection of material and culminating in a large architectonic Characters and situations must be clearly established and the line of development be strong and simple.²⁷

These are precepts with which Patrick Hamilton's radio drama well accords. Although requested by Gielgud as early as 20 September 1946 to write an original play for the Third Programme, Hamilton remained fixed within the parameters of the Home Service, writing plays for the little man 'sitting by his fireside', which articulate his fears of invasion and persecution and vicariously enact his fantasies of revenge.

Hamilton's first full-length radio play, Money with Menaces (produced by Sieveking), relates the persecution endured by a newspaper magnate, Andrew Carruthers, at the hands of a telephone blackmailer who calls himself 'Mr Poland'²⁸ and who seems to belong to a sinisterly unnamed, faceless 'organisation'.²⁹ Carruthers is informed that his eleven-year-old daughter has been kidnapped and is compelled to enact a laborious peregrination before 'Poland' reveals his charade to have been a hoax. It transpires that the latter is one Stevens who was mercilessly bullied as a boy by Carruthers at 'Harringham' Public School. In the middle of a

²⁶ L. MacNeice, Christopher Columbus, London, 1944, 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁸ In the wartime version (stored at the BBC Sound Archive) produced by Lance Sieveking and broadcast on 12 June 1941, Poland's *nom de guerre* became 'Cuba'.

²⁹ Hamilton, 1939, 21.

'ghastly' heatwave, Carruthers has then been coerced into visiting his favourite, bourgeois, haunts -- his 'private bank',³⁰ and his 'small and exclusive club for rich and complacent gentlemen ... slangily known as the "Mutton Chop"'³¹ -- where, for once, he has been made to feel uncomfortable. He has also been forced to descend into an Amusement Park (*not* one of his haunts) and procure a child's cricket bat -- which will serve as a memento of his afternoon of humiliation and of the many schoolday 'thwackings' for which it is punishment.

Hamilton was delighted by the enthusiastic response which the play generated. To his brother, he wrote:

My wireless play was a smash hit -- the greater part of the press saying it would be a model for all future wireless plays, and making a most unexpected fuss about it ... and a terrific amount of letters from unknowns everywhere.³²

The piece certainly proved to be a model for 'future wireless plays' by Patrick Hamilton. Its emplotment of the invasion of a private space, and its treatment of persecution and revenge as motifs were to become paradigmatic. It is also typical of Hamilton's broadcast oeuvre in its highlighting of the use of particular words to convey the social significance of character.

The general importance of linguistic hallmarking in radio drama cannot be overstressed. Idiosyncrasies of vocabulary and accent assume a special significance in a medium where - - to adapt the title of a Martin Esslin essay -- one only has 'the mind as stage'. The genre of the radio play conduces to

³⁰ Ibid., 27.

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² Cited in B. Hamilton, The Light went Out, London, 1972, 90. Hamilton also informed his brother that he had been [appropriately enough] 'in telephonic communication with Mr. Hitchcock' about the possibility of filming Money with Menaces [a 1937 letter from Norfolk, in AHA]. Nothing came of this proposal.

close attention to the detail of speech. This can be illustrated with reference to Mrs Rooney's signposting of her own discourse in Beckett's radio play, All that Fall (1957): to Christy, she says:

Do you find anything ... bizarre about my way of speaking? (Pause.) No, I do not mean the voice. (Pause.) No, I mean the words. (Pause. More to herself.) I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very ... bizarre.³³

The pauses and ellipses bespeak what Mr Rooney later terms her struggle 'with a dead language'.³⁴ The signifiers which characterize Mrs Rooney's discourse are not 'simple' but are, rather, dialect words. It is almost as if Beckett were using this construct called 'Mrs Rooney' to infiltrate a farrago of French and Hiberno-English words (such as 'cretonne' and 'ramdam', and 'hinny' and 'weasand') into the airwaves commanded by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Just as Beckett does the radiogenic thing with All that Fall, by larding his play with examples of the variety of spoken English which he first encountered as a child in Ireland, so Hamilton animates his radio plays with the verbal register with which he was most familiar: that of an English Public School. In Money with Menaces, the word 'funk' foregrounds itself, jarring on the ears of those (like me) to whom it is (in this sense) virtually a foreign word:

Young Stevens was a dirty little funk, wasn't he, Carruthers - and he had to have his funk beaten out of him. And he was always drawing or reading or something equally indecent, and that had to be beaten out of him too. But funk was the great thing. Can you remember any of the beatings you gave me for funking, Carruthers? Well, it's you who are in a funk now, and you have good reason to be, believe me.³⁵

³³ S. Beckett, All that Fall, London, 1957, 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵ Hamilton, 1939, 40.

This polyvalent little word stretches and squirms, exemplifying a spread of meanings ('funk' as a person or quality; 'funking' as a hideous verbal noun) which betoken a discredited code of upper-class masculinity. Its etymology, in informal ruling-class parlance, has deep roots: the Oxford English Dictionary mentions its occurrence as 'Oxford slang' in 1743 and exemplifies it with a quotation from Hughes' Tom Brown at Oxford (1861): 'There is no sign of anything like funk amongst our fellows'. The sign of 'funk' on Stevens' brow had sealed his exclusion from the (hence) 'funkless' ranks of the fellows at Harringham. His uncritical wielding of this word as a weapon against Carruthers, in his turn, signifies an internal reversal of the value-system betokened by it, rather than an outright rejection of its terms (we later learn that Stevens is 'as rich and as powerful'³⁶ as his victim.)

Stevens articulates a justification for his prolonged act of revenge which tries to confer on it a significance wider than that of a merely individual act of retribution. As he tells Carruthers:

I have not only revenged myself personally upon you, for making me suffer cruelties and indignities which it is not seemly, in the name of humanity, that one human being should suffer at another's hands: I have also, just for once, symbolically taken revenge for all the little boys, in all the schools, who have ever lain awake in terror, or cried themselves to sleep in the dark of dormitories ... all right, Carruthers, that will be all, as you used to say to me.³⁷

The rhetorical assertion of the symbolic import of this act of retribution will not suffice to validate it. Michel Foucault postulates a criterion for the evaluation of an act of popular justice which may be of relevance here: such an act, he contends, 'cannot achieve its full significance unless it is

³⁶ Ibid., 42.

³⁷ Ibid.

clarified politically, under the supervision of the masses themselves'.³⁸ Now, Money with Menaces has been broadcast to millions of people -- has been enacted under the 'supervision of the masses'. So what are the specific effects of its interpellation of its audience? Are they such as to shore up an endorsement of Stevens' revenge?

When 'Poland', on the telephone, says to Carruthers, 'I leave to your imagination what I mean by that',³⁹ (meaning the 'consequences' of non-cooperation for the little girl), he is also addressing the listener. For the listener is placed, with Carruthers, as the recipient of Poland's calls.⁴⁰ Like the press magnate, the listener cannot locate the blackmailer. The audience can, however visualize the location of his victim. We travel with Carruthers down from his high-rise office (the tallness of the building can be inferred from the fact that the traffic is quiet whilst the windows are said to be open), into the teeming, sweltering streets of London, down further into the Underground (an aural emblem of urban stress), to his various stops, and eventually home to his study (the site of Stevens' final, triumphant irruption). Our sympathies are with the sobbing, humiliated victim and the justice of Stevens' revenge is vitiated.

Money with Menaces can plausibly be read as an emplotment of the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of the *lex talionis*: an 'eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'. More specifically, the play can be related to that Byzantine inflection of this nostrum (entailing the blinding of the wrong-doer), caustically described by Marx and Engels in The Holy Family:

Cutting man off from the perceptile outer world, throwing him back into

³⁸ M. Foucault, 'On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists', in Colin Gordon (trans. and ed.), Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77, London, 1978, 31.

³⁹ Hamilton, 1939, 20.

⁴⁰ In the Lance Sieveking production mentioned above the voice of 'Mr. Cuba' sounds sinisterly mechanical, almost 'Dalek-like'.

his abstract inner nature in order to correct him -- blinding -- is a necessary consequence of the Christian doctrine according to which the consummation of this cutting off, the pure isolation of man in his spiritualistic "ego" is good in itself.⁴¹

'Blinded' to the location of his self-appointed prosecutor and figuratively blindfolded throughout his ordeal, Carruthers is claustrated within his own nightmare world, literally entunnelled when sweating anxiously in the Underground on the way to the bank.⁴² The text implies that his experience has ennobled him: whereas he is bad-tempered on the telephone to his sister before the nightmare begins, he is giggly and tearful in conversation with a persistent 'wrong number' afterwards.⁴³ It is then ironic that, although written by an avowed Marxist, Money with Menaces should valorize a ritual of retribution analogous to one deliberately excoriated by Marx and Engels themselves. It is as if a more deep-seated hankering for a primitive natural justice were usurping the more nuanced, formally acknowledged, jurisprudential ideology.

Hamilton's second play written especially for radio, To the Public Danger (produced by Val Gielgud), is an admonitory piece which enacts a punishment aimed at the evils of drinking and driving.⁴⁴ The scene opens on a grandiose but virtually empty pub by the side of 'a big arterial road somewhere on the border-regions of Buckingham and Oxford'.⁴⁵ Following the musical introduction, the first sound that the listener hears is that of an American pinball machine being played by the villain

⁴¹ Cited in M. Cain and A. Hunt, Marx and Engels on Law, London, 1979, 152.

⁴² Interestingly, Hamilton was himself claustrophobic and avoided travelling by tube -- see PAT, 454.

⁴³ Hamilton, 1939, 14 and 44.

⁴⁴ A subject close to Patrick's heart ever since his near fatal accident in Earl's Court in January 1932.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

of the piece, Bruce Cole, whose voice 'has the smooth, precise, off-hand, yet arrogant tones of a slightly second rate ex-officer and public schoolboy'.⁴⁶ His seemingly blind-drunk companion, Reggie, has 'been bred in roughly the same tradition'⁴⁷ and spends most of the play singing old Mess ditties. Also in the pub is a young, working-class, couple -- Fred, a bicycle mechanic, and his raucously seductive girlfriend, Nan, who, with her 'awful film Americanisms',⁴⁸ is a prototype for Hamilton's fascistic bitches, Netta Longdon, of Hangover Square, and Vicki Kugelmann, of The Slaves of Solitude. At Cole's behest, all four protagonists play the "Corinthian Bagatelle" machine before embarking on a drunken joyride in Cole's car. Inevitably, they have an accident, crashing into what they imagine to be a man on a bicycle, and Fred pleads for them to go back and lend help.⁴⁹ Each of the others rounds viciously on him before he is able to escape and telephone the police. To the ominous *presto agitato* cadences of the Third Movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata (on the car radio), Cole crashes the car and the three remaining occupants are killed outright. The 'dignified voice'⁵⁰ of a coroner then closes the piece with the moral that if the case's publicity 'can serve to call still more and more attention to the danger ... which is caused today ... by people entering that instrument of death, the motor car ... under any influence, of drink',⁵¹ then the deaths of Cole, Reggie and Nan will not have been in vain. 'A waste of public money' was the outraged verdict of the magazine Motor;⁵² an illustration of the 'anti-

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁹ A similar episode features in Hamilton's 1933 novel The Plains of Cement (see P.Hamilton, Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky (1935), repr., London, 1987, 293-8).

⁵⁰ Hamilton, 1939, 88.

⁵¹ Ibid., 91.

motoring bias' of the patrician BBC was the complaint of one correspondent in Autocar.⁵³

That Hamilton intended To the Public Danger to be a modern fable, freighted with a cautionary twist in the tale, is obvious and, in this respect, the music he chose for the piece yields itself up to interpretation as signifying practice rather than as just incidental embellishment. The dramatic and memorable opening theme of Grieg's Piano Concerto in A Minor (opus 16, first movement) sets in train a latter-day folk tale and its recapitulation after the *dénouement* sets the musical seal on the coroner's verdict. The incorporation of excerpts from this composition -- inspired by traditional Norwegian folk music -- was of sufficient import to Hamilton for him to write to Gielgud to insist on its inclusion in the original production of the play.⁵⁴

The value of the piece as propaganda was much appreciated by the BBC. For example, an internal memo of 9 February 1940 was circulated among the staff of the Drama Department, suggesting that the play be broadcast, with a blackout theme, as part of a wartime Road Safety Campaign to be organized by the Ministry of Transport.⁵⁵ In general, the strategic deployment of broadcast drama for propaganda purposes was a staple feature of BBC operations during the war years. For example, after the Soviet Union became 'our gallant ally', the Foreign Office suggested that 'a large-scale feature might be appropriate to celebrate the heroism of Russia',⁵⁶ and an old associate of Hamilton's, Dallas Bower, was chosen to be the producer.⁵⁷ The writer called up for the job was MacNeice,

⁵² Motor, 19 December 1945, 376.

⁵³ Autocar, 21 December 1945, 957.

⁵⁴ Letter of 1 December 1939, from Henley, BBC WAC.

⁵⁵ The Sieveking production referred to above was to be the version which - with explicit endorsement by the Ministry -- was to play this role.

⁵⁶ Coulton, 1980, 56.

and Alexander Nevsky, based on Eisenstein's film, was the result. The Corporation endeavoured to continue this propagandistic role for its scriptwriters into peace-time, under the statist Attlee administration. And so, in January 1948, Gielgud wrote to Hamilton informing him of the suggestion made by the Head of the Home Service, Lindsey Wellington (who had been 'deeply impressed by the immense propaganda value of "To the Public Danger"'),⁵⁸ that he write a play lambasting the evils of the black market. On this occasion, however, Hamilton declined.

The (limited) democratization of British social life by the effects of the 'total war' which enveloped it from 1939 until 1945 estranged, perforce, the ideological elements of To the Public Danger: that is, in the context of the post-war period it sounded like a period piece. Walter Allen, writing in the Birmingham Evening Despatch of the last radio transmission of the play ever broadcast (on 10 December 1945), commented:

Seven years ago, it seems, we believed that if a man were a captain in the Army he was automatically a drunkard and a debauchee. That at any rate appears to be the assumption basic to "To the Public Danger". No wonder it has dated.⁵⁹

Generally, the world of Patrick Hamilton is limited to that of southern English middle-class society between the two world wars. This does not, however, gainsay the importance of his depiction of characters like Captain Bruce Cole, whose swaggering viciousness represents a significant and deeply sinister response to the crisis of hegemony which the British ruling order strove to overcome in the inter-war period and which finds easy embodiment within 'our' culture, even today.

⁵⁷ A fellow Savile Club member, Bower produced the first television broadcast of Rope for the BBC on 13 March 1939. (Thanks are due to Nigel Jones for this information).

⁵⁸ Letter from Gielgud to Hamilton of 19 January, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁵⁹ W. Allen, Birmingham Evening Despatch, 17 December 1945, 3.

An important element of that, fascistic, response was the re-accentuation of a bourgeois code of masculinity which had informed the officer corps of the British Armed Forces during the Great War but which had been as ruptured as many of the men themselves had been traumatised by the conflict. But, whereas the 'manliness' cultivated in Edwardian Public schools yoked together diametrically opposed values -- 'success, aggression, and ruthlessness, yet victory within the rules, courtesy in triumph, compassion for the defeated'⁶⁰ -- Captain Cole's outlook is rather less dialectical. When Fred starts sobbing, after having failed, yet again, to persuade Cole to return to the aid of the (imaginedly) injured man, the Captain gives him short shrift: 'Oh my God! Now we've got to wait while he has a good cry. Can't you be a man. Can't you be a gentleman. Can't you try to imitate a gentleman?'⁶¹ As Cole slides from 'man' to 'gentleman' to 'imitate a gentleman', class comes into view as well as gender. Earlier, Cole had explicitly articulated these two regions together when parroting, in a 'falsetto voice',⁶² Fred's grammar: "'I ain't not never dared you." Must we have *all* those negatives at one time?'⁶³ Here are conjoined the socially normative interdiction on multiple negatives, so beloved of pedantic and superficial Standard English 'grammarians', and a machismo which implies that 'Cockney' men are not 'real' men. Cole's militantly middle-class and ultra-masculine language also carries an undertow of sexual sadism: 'Master Fred mustn't throw bottles or Daddy spank',⁶⁴ he salaciously warns, at one point.

⁶⁰ J. A. Morgan, Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public Schools: the Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology, Cambridge, 1981, 135.

⁶¹ Hamilton, 1939, 76.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

In order to inveigle Fred into dropping his insistence on going back, however, Cole must needs employ a discourse of consent to dulcify his bullying language of coercion. This persuasive mode, with its strategy of incorporation, works very well with Nan, who is sexually attracted by Cole's social status and lets him know it: 'I bet you do some speeding in this, big boy',⁶⁵ she teasingly remarks of Cole's phallic car. Having berated Fred for losing his 'wretched little plebeian nerve',⁶⁶ directly after the accident, Cole blandishes Nan with a calculated appeal to her snobbery which turns on our old word, 'funk':

Cole. You're not going to be a little funk, are you, Nancy? You're one better than that, aren't you?

Nan. Don't know about funk. I ain't a funk, but it seems to me we ought to go back. We might get into worse trouble. Come on - let's -

Cole. Now then, Nancy. Show you've got some breeding. You're not going to disappoint me, are you?⁶⁷

Eventually, although to begin with she does 'not know about funk' and its general web of signification, Nan is convinced: flattery and the promise of coercion secure her consent.

The hegemonic tack works less well with Fred. In his case Cole has recourse to that old discursive mainstay of Britain's maritime Empire, navalese: 'Come on.... We're your friends and, we're all in the same boat, so why not take our advice'.⁶⁸ At this juncture Cole is recovering his temper -- lost when Fred had had the gall to address him as 'mate' and 'pal'.⁶⁹ Like most fascistic types, Cole is not much good at the consensus game. Splenetically, he rails at Fred: "I am *not* your pal! You little outsider!"⁷⁰ This latter word had a specific cultural

⁶⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 75.

meaning when vocalized by a man like Cole in inter-war England. The QED helpfully registers its germination in that seed-bed of Edwardian Public Schoolboy parlance, the Magnet: "You rotten outsider!" said Bulstrode, in tears of concentrated rage. "You're not fit to be at a decent school."⁷¹

Evidently, a hegemonic project such as Cole's is doomed to fail, since its compulsion to stigmatize as 'other' those whom it seeks to incorporate scuppers any prospect of conciliation and compromise. His companion, Reggie, who seems linguistically fit only to drone out his incessant ditties, throws into stark relief the ideological limits of their class stratum when he momentarily emerges from his drunken stupor to impugn Fred for the working-class cut of his dress: 'Look heah, you Don't like your face ... Don't like your clothes ... don't fit [as Fred does not 'fit'] ... don't like your tie ... don't like your collar ... hate your collar'.⁷² The seemingly arbitrary isolation of Fred's collar as *the* badge of his 'outsiderness' indicates the persistence of Victorian upper-class prejudices among the snob class of inter-war England. As Lord Dunraven had pronounced, fifty years earlier: 'The gentility of most men is contained in their shirt collars If you want to destroy an aristocracy, cut off their collars, not their heads'.⁷³

The destruction of the three occupants of Cole's 'instrument of death' presents itself as a self-inflicted punishment. To the Public Danger can be read as as an instantiation of the ideology of punishment developed against the punitive ukases of Absolutism by reforming bourgeois intellectuals such as Kant and Hegel. On their conception, criminality is always-already encoded with its own punishment. This is Hegel:

⁷⁰ Ibid. This Public School word was concessively changed to 'twerp' in the Sieveking production.

⁷¹ Magnet, i, 1, 1908, 71.

⁷² Hamilton, 1939, 79.

⁷³ In Nineteenth Century, November 1881, 691 (QED citation).

Punishment is the right of the criminal. It is an act of his own will. The violation of right had been proclaimed by the criminal as his own right. Punishment is the negation of this negation, and consequently an affirmation of right, solicited and forced upon the criminal by himself.⁷⁴

This abstraction of criminality from the concrete determinations which abut against the lives of flesh-and-blood criminals is not one that obviously commends itself to a radical political project. However odious Cole, Reggie, and Nancy may be, they would not -- if real people -- deserve to be done to death for a killing they suspected they may have been responsible for, in the name of some providential vengeance.

It is, moreover, evident that Hamilton did, in fact, conceive of the play in terms reminiscent of classical revenge tragedy. When forwarding the play to Gielgud, he wrote that, 'GHOST OF A CYCLIST might be a better title'.⁷⁵ In the same communication he emphasized that 'the pith of the thing lies in the Coroner's speech at the end, which should be effective if spoken by a good elderly actor'.⁷⁶ The said speech serves to unify the play, soberly unscrambling its true line of narrative. The Coroner's voice is sonorous, his discourse powerfully articulate:

You have heard how, after driving some time in a reckless, ridiculous, inconsiderate, and noisy way, they at last collided with ... [what] all four believed, without a shadow of a doubt in their minds, to have been a man on a bicycle how ... deliberately, callously, cruelly, [they] drove on, leaving what they believed to be a wounded or dead man to lie in the road.⁷⁷

The surfeit of adjectives ('reckless, ridiculous, inconsiderate and noisy') and adverbs ('deliberately, callously, cruelly')

⁷⁴ Cited in Cain and Hunt, 1979, 194-5.

⁷⁵ Letter from Henley, 6 September 1938, [BBC WAC].

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Hamilton, 1939, 89.

bespeak the assured linguistic control of the judicial voice. The Coroner's authoritative discourse then validates the picture of Fred's otherwise unmanly tearfulness:

in that picture we see one individual holding out, holding out manfully, persistently, tirelessly, against the stress, the threats, and more dangerous still, the persuasions and sophistications of three others -- holding out for a principle -- for a humane idea.⁷⁸

There then follows the final judicial summation, which reveals the grimly comic truth of the 'man on the bicycle'.

To the Public Danger's valorization of the dignified voice of Authority is consonant with the thematization of official legal discipline operative in Hamilton's final radio play, Caller Anonymous, and his first and only television drama, The Man Upstairs.

Like Gaslight, Caller Anonymous enacts a representation of the figure of a woman-in-torture. Hamilton's victim this time is Miss Laura Jamieson, 'a cultured woman, timid, possibly approaching her forties' (and reminiscent of the spinsterly Miss Roach in The Slaves of Solitude). The play is structured around three obscene telephone calls which Laura receives late at night, when reading in bed, from a man called 'Margrave' who turns out to be a former Mosleyite. Laura's gallivanting girlfriend, Joan, proves to be useless but, fortunately, a kindly Irish policeman from the local 'nick', Sergeant Crewe, comes to her aid and, during the third call, Margrave is arrested and unmasked. Miss Jamieson then, in the manner of Bella Manningham, revenges herself on her tormentor while he is restrained by the strong arm of the Law.

The two female characters in the play are constructed as a pair of opposites. Hamilton often elaborates his fictional women in terms antipodal: Jenny, the ne'er-do-well prostitute and Ella, the barmaid in Twenty Thousand Streets constitute

⁷⁸ Ibid.

an example of one such pair, and Vicki Kugelmann and Miss Roach make up another. In Caller Anonymous, Laura Jamieson images herself as 'a lonely spinster'⁷⁹ when in telephone conversation with Joan Cardew, raving it up at a night club. Joan's attitude to the obscene caller is a light-minded one: 'intriguing' and 'thrilling' are the adjectives which characterize her response.⁸⁰ She believes Laura to be 'making a mountain out of a molehill',⁸¹ and damns herself with this cliché. The implication seems to be that there are *some* women who secretly desire this kind of sexual penetration.

Laura is able to act out this male fantasy, simulating the adoption of the same position as her friend, in order to spring a trap for Margrave:

Well - I don't see why I should've rung off just because you began talking about my attractions - as you call them Perhaps I've got an inferiority complex. But I must say I wouldn't mind being told that it is a complex. So would you go on?⁸²

Laura's capacity to play the mignon is one element by which the play constructs a prurient position for the listener. Both this and the quality of her revenge will be assayed along with other aspects of this play's thematization of torture and revenge following an examination of the depiction of the two male characters.

The German aristocratic title 'Margrave' was originally bestowed on the governors of the border provinces of the Holy Roman Empire. In terms of rank it signifies the German equivalent of the English title of Marquis. After the Second World War, Hamilton cultivated a hatred for the German people

⁷⁹ P. Hamilton, Caller Anonymous, typescript of broadcast on the Home Service of the BBC, 12 November 1962, BBC WAC, 2.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 11 and 19.

⁸¹ Ibid., 11.

⁸² Ibid., 29.

as a 'race' which is described as 'almost pathological'⁸³ in his brother's memoir of him. In a letter to Bruce, Patrick wrote

an enormous amount of Germans are bad - racially bad - incurably bad. Now the Americans - are not racially bad. Compare Mr. Eisenhower with Dr. Adenauer. There is nothing evil in Mr. E - there is every sort of evil in Dr. A.⁸⁴

These extraordinary remarks were penned in the late Fifties, the decade of Hamilton's 'Gorse books', in which he obsessively sought to anatomize 'evil'. Caller Anonymous belongs to the moment of the first of these novels, The West Pier (1951), in which the malevolent Ernest Ralph Gorse, with his 'unpleasantly nasal voice', makes his woman-swindling début.⁸⁵ Margrave's voice too is also described, in the transcript of the play, as 'nasal', and his accent is stigmatized as 'very nearly "public school", but not quite so. Every now and then it breaks down into the voice, almost, of a low, ingratiating shopkeeper'.⁸⁶ As ever, the upper-class Marxist Patrick Hamilton reserves his bitterest venom for the petty bourgeois. He was also especially insistent that Margrave's voice ought to resemble that of William Joyce, a.k.a. "Lord Haw-Haw", and wrote to that effect to Gielgud.⁸⁷ He evidently hoped that Margrave's "Gairmany Calling" voice would serve to connect the character with Nazism among a popular audience.

An attempt is also made to associate Margrave with the Anglo-American patriotism signified by the Festival of Britain. In general, this period of celebration aroused the

⁸³ B. Hamilton, 1972, 177.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ P. Hamilton, The West Pier, (1951), London, 1986, 49.

⁸⁶ Hamilton, 1962, 3. Like Margrave, Gorse is figured as a 'predatory' late-night telephone caller of women -- see Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse (1953), London, 1987, 100.

⁸⁷ Letter from Witchurch, 23 October 1951, BBC WAC.

indignation of English Communism, as is evinced by the following excerpt from Sam Aaranovitch's contribution to that infamously anti-American issue of Arena (the journal which succeeded Our Time):

We are unreservedly in favour of celebrating the achievements of the British people and we support that element in the Festival of Britain which does this. Let us not deceive ourselves, however, that this is the aim of the Government. It is being organised to turn us into a shop window for earning American dollars. It is meant, with its glitter and glamour, to hide from the British people the fact that Britain, with all its achievements, is being sold piece by piece.⁸⁸

Margrave settles on this heinous Festival of Britain as the first topic of conversation with Laura as soon as she appears to have become more obliging. The word 'exhibition' then insinuates itself into his discourse, sliding inexorably towards exhibitionism, but the Festival itself would still remain in the listener's consciousness as Margrave's neutral conversation piece.

Sergeant Crew is reminiscent, in his avuncularity, of Inspector Rough in Gaslight and The Governess. However, whereas Rough is portrayed as an improved version of Wilkie Collins' Sergeant Cuff, Crew represents another tradition within the force-field of the Victorian novel, in which the police and the criminal class belong to the same underworld. D.A. Miller exemplifies this point when he writes about the 'common idiom' of police and thieves in Trollope's The Eustace Diamonds (1873).⁸⁹ In Caller Anonymous, Crew's credibility is shaken on several occasions when he uses exactly the same phraseology as Margrave. Since the latter had posed as a

⁸⁸ S. Aaranovitch, 'The American Threat to British Culture', Arena, ii, 8, 1951, 16.

⁸⁹ See D.A. Millar, The Novel and the Police, California, 1987, 13. (The Eustace Diamonds was, according to Bruce Hamilton, a great favourite of Patrick's -- see PAT, 429.)

policeman during the second call, Laura is naturally suspicious of Crew, and so too is the listener. With regard to the cleverness of Margrave's impersonation of a Scotland Yard officer, and of his instruction to keep 'Margrave' talking when he next called, Crew says: 'it was a wonderful ruse, if only you had fallen for it, to make you listen to him, to let him pour out his awful filth for pretty well as long as he liked. You see?'⁹⁰ Yet, a couple of minutes later, Crew urges Laura to do exactly the same thing and does so using sexually suggestive language: 'Just enough to keep him going I'm afraid I'm quoting "Dr. Margrave" again'.⁹¹ Strenuous efforts were earlier made to reassure the listener of the genuineness of Sergeant Crew, but he remains tarred by Margrave's linguistic brush all the same. For what the play endeavours to promote is the value of a private social space constituted by the exclusion not just of crime, but of criminology too.

Laura Jamieson is a middle-class citizen, with a private (Irish) servant to complement her public (Irish) servant. She is also a woman alone and it is her femininity which the play exploits as a metaphor for its treatment of the disturbance of privacy. Margrave threatens invasion of the most intimate kind when he makes his nocturnal calls. Moreover, his second call interrupts Laura in the act of novel-reading, that activity which virtually defines the bourgeois private space. Prior to the call, music of a 'soft, slow and menacing character',⁹² is counterpointed with the 'much enlarged sound of pages being turned':⁹³ the listener is situated as eavesdropper before Laura lifts the telephone.

The listener's position is one which oscillates from torturer to torturee. While the two main characters speak and then listen, the audience is always listening. However, we are not

⁹⁰ Hamilton, 1962, 25.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

simply eavesdropping on a series of telephone conversations, but are instead implicated as the very audience for whose pleasure these obscene calls have been set up. A guilty consciousness of this is made possible at those moments of the piece when it is clear that the conversation is being fictively prolonged. An example of this occurs during the first call when, having listened to Margrave's description of her clothes and figure, Laura says:

Now look here, Dr. -- or Mr. Margrave, or whoever you are. What on earth are you getting at? What do you want with me? Won't you be frank and tell me? Why are you so mystifying? Now. Come. Will you tell me, honestly and straight -- or am I to ring off?⁹⁴

This absurd naivety simply serves to facilitate the prolongation of the encounter between Laura and the caller/listener. This implication of the listener as someone whose desire is to *hear more* is foregrounded again during the second call. Margrave here pretends to be a policeman equipped with the foreknowledge of the imminence of another obscene call. The ridiculousness of this is compounded by three intimations of the 'original "Margrave" voice',⁹⁵ designed to clue in the listener *before* the penny is allowed to drop for the woman on the rack.

The anxiety to hear more, stimulated by the play, is also frustrated by it. When the listener discovers that, off-microphone, Laura has been subjected to a 'stream of obscenity'⁹⁶ s/he feels cheated. The listener's prurience is further tantalized when Laura informs a fascinated Joan that Margrave's 'compliments' are unrepeatable: 'There are some things -- and words -- you just can't mention -- anywhere. Not even to one's oldest friend. And least of all over the

⁹⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 10.

telephone.'⁹⁷ The irony of course is that Margrave has exploited the intimacy of the telephonic scene to do just that. Laura's rejoinder to Joan's expression of amazement that she should have gone on listening enunciates the audience's predicament also: 'Somehow, each time I tried to ring off he kept holding on. You sort of had to listen.'⁹⁸

If the listener is compelled, along with Laura, to listen (albeit with more disinterested fascination than she) to Margrave's sexually suggestive outpourings, s/he is also positioned to partake in his fantasies. For a good many male listeners especially, Margrave articulates a sadistic fantasy of female complaisance:

would you like, one day, to come to an exhibition with me -- exhibit yourself with me, as it were?

Laura. Why. Yes. Of course I would. I'd like to.

Margrave. (After pause.) You're very compliant, aren't you, Laura? Very obedient and willing Because you're terrified of me, aren't you, Laura?

Laura. Am I?

Margrave. Yes (Passionately.) Scared stiff ... And fascinated, too. And because of that, this time you're going to listen to me -- not ring off.⁹⁹

Before long, however, Margrave is interrupted by the voice of Detective Sergeant Crewe, who, like the audience, has been 'listening, too'.¹⁰⁰

It seems, however, to be legitimate within the terms of the play, for the agent of the Law to listen in. The movement of Caller Anonymous is one which re-establishes the broken trust of Laura Jamieson in the functionaries of the bourgeois state. Margrave disturbs her reflex compliance with the voice of authority by impersonating first an NHS doctor and then a police officer. The play has to work hard to undo this damage.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 30-1,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Sergeant Crewe is heralded by the almost comical question posed by Mrs. Rattigan, Laura's 'Little Woman': 'Why are people so afraid of the cops? It always beats me.'¹⁰¹ (The propagandistic flavour of this plaintive remark should remind us of an important function of wartime radio drama.) With his 'cosy, genuine, reassuring voice',¹⁰² Crewe gradually wins back Laura's confidence by way of an appeal to a notion of a shared sense of neighbourhood. 'I've seen you heaps of times,' says Miss Jamieson, 'going in and out of the police station just around the corner.'¹⁰³ We are here in the ideological territory -- or, indeed, 'beat' -- of Dixon of Dock Green; whether this space could be said to be commensurate with that of Hamilton's professed philosophical system is a moot one.¹⁰⁴

This valorization of the London 'Bobby' is one which looks rather naive four decades on. This is especially true in view of the actual legal response to the problem dealt with in Caller Anonymous. Despite the fact that an estimated ten per cent of women in Britain have had their lives blighted by 'nuisance calls', this crime remains a 'Level Three' offence and carries a maximum penalty of a £400 fine. Although victims often describe their experiences as 'mental rape', the police tend to regard the problem as an inevitable annoyance at best and a joke at worst. There are virtually no convictions for this offence and very few resources are directed into combatting it.¹⁰⁵

This is not to endorse a 'castrate rapists' position. Rehabilitation of offenders rather than vengeful punishment ought always to be the watchword of a radical penology. In

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Although the creator of P.C. Dixon was former Young Communist League Secretary, Ted Willis.

¹⁰⁵ Information culled from the Channel Four programme Dispatches, 19 April 1989.

this light, Laura Jamieson's perhaps cathartic revenge speech, delivered to the fettered Margrave, seems grossly excessive:

You are lewd, filthy, cruel, vicious, and evil -- evil through and through -- and beyond human pity. There are very many of you dirty little telephone men, I gather, and not all of you are trapped like the rats that you all are. ... I want to tell you that, though normally I have pity for suffering, I shall be relishing every moment of yours. Do you hear? Answer me! Respectfully please.¹⁰⁶

Perversely, these histrionics permit the recuperation of Laura's revenge for a masochistic sexual discourse: Margrave's meek, 'Yes, Miss Jamieson',¹⁰⁷ is still the stuff of which pornography can be made.

The good intentions of Caller Anonymous were also thwarted by censorship. The BBC official who edited the script for transmission excised a number of political passages from the play. For example, the following attempt by Crewe to analyze Margrave's 'type' was suppressed:

Some people love sheer cruelty, for its own sake, to the end of their days. I don't expect you've completely forgotten the Hitler regime, and Belsen and Buchenwald, and all that -- have you, Miss Jamieson?¹⁰⁸

Highlighted here is Hamilton's obsession with the social psychology of evil, explicated in the contemporaneous 'Gorse' novels. (The blue pencil was also taken to a description of Margrave as 'an ex-lawyer's clerk, and and ex-fascist'.)¹⁰⁹

The fear that his next play, The Man Upstairs would also fall prey to similar, politically-motivated cuts, may have led Hamilton to insert a note in the published text, warning against the deletion of a set-piece speech which lambasts war-mongering.¹¹⁰ The nature of the politics which he

¹⁰⁶ Hamilton, 1962, 34.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 32.

considered might prove vulnerable to censorship will be commented on in due course.

The Man Upstairs was the first and last play which Hamilton wrote specifically for television. As early as June 1939, Patrick had written to Gielgud declaring that he was 'most interested to hear of [his] adventures in television'.¹¹¹ Before the play was broadcast (on May 18th, 1954), television versions of Rope, Gaslight, The Duke in Darkness, and Craven House had been transmitted. However, The Man Upstairs was perceived to be special. Hamilton's comrades at the Daily Worker hailed the piece in the following terms: 'This is the first time that a well-known author has allowed a play to be televised before it is produced on the stage'.¹¹² As fate would have it, the play never reached the West End, but it was televised once more on 4 January 1958 and the possibility of an American film version, by Orson Welles, was mooted.¹¹³ Nevertheless, it remains a piece of armchair theatre rather than televisual drama. With its continuity of action, it lent itself well to early television. It was, however, deemed unsuitable for radio and was rejected by Noel Hiff of the Drama Department in a letter to Constable of July 1954.¹¹⁴

The play relates one eventful evening in the life of George Longford, a 'quiet, modest, yet dignified man', who lives in a flat in the Mayfair house of his friend, Sir Charles Waterbury. Longford is a devotee of the Oxford English Dictionary and an electronics buff. His private space is invaded by the

¹¹⁰ That his fears were perhaps justified is borne out by Morven Cameron's assertion in his BBC Radio Script Reader's Report on this play that 'the "peace"-planting is rather too heavily moral': 18 June 1954, [BBC WAC].

¹¹¹ Letter from Henley of 23 June 1939, [BBC WAC].

¹¹² Daily Worker, 17 May 1954, 2.

¹¹³ With regard to The Man Upstairs, Welles wrote to Hamilton, from Bel Air, Los Angeles, on 1 August 1956, 'I have been an admirer of this play since it was first published, and, indeed, of everything you have ever written.' [AHA].

¹¹⁴ There is a copy of this letter in the Hamilton archive at the BBC WAC.

Armstrong family, a gang of confidence tricksters who try to cajole him into giving them money in order that they can despatch one of their number -- a would-be lunatic -- to Australia, out of harm's way (the 'madman', Cyrus, is supposedly obsessed with the desire to disfigure Longford because of his putative deflowering of his sister, Brenda). Unknown to the gang, presided over by the melodramatic Mrs. Armstrong, Longford has a radio-communication device in the flat, connecting him with Sir Charles, who records the evening's conversations, and arranges to have the 'Moon Gang' arrested. Before they are allowed to evacuate Longford's flat, however, the gang are subjected to an extended ritual of revenge. Longford is then left to peruse his beloved Dictionary in 'peace'.

In his Prefatory note to the play, Hamilton lays great stress on the 'diffidence and apparent weakness'¹¹⁵ of Longford. Like Rupert Cadell and the Duke of Laterraine, Longford is one of Hamilton's ostensibly feeble male avengers. He appears, in the first Act, to be an extremely nervous character whose room is his castle. A metaphor for this is the paranoid anxiety induced in him by the operation of an electronic device over which this radio ham has no control -- the doorbell. The first time that this rings, Longford paces the room 'in a state of tension'¹¹⁶ whilst his servant, Mrs. Perrin, fends off the unwelcome caller. The second, more successful, disturber of Longford's peace is Cyrus Armstrong, and, after a near-hysterical whispered interchange between Longford and Mrs. Perrin, he is permitted entry.

Longford later describes himself as 'not what they call a ladies' man'.¹¹⁷ Instead, his sexual drives appear to have been sublimated into a fetishization of (of all things!) the QED.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ P.Hamilton, The Man Upstairs. London, 1954.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

His house-mate, Sir Charles, complains that Longford is 'in love with the thing',¹¹⁹ and the latter readily concedes that he does indeed 'look at it a great deal'.¹²⁰ Illustrated here is a linguistic epistemophilia, an objectification of the English language, which suggests a neurotic craving to fix meaning. Unlike the door-bell, but like his radio apparatus, Longford can handle and manipulate the QED -- he cannot, however, control the vagaries of *parole*.

His friend, Sir Charles, is an aristocratic gadabout who functions, nevertheless, as the embodiment of a friendly patrician authority. We are introduced to his voice via the radio device when, in the sonorous tones of 'Hibbert of the BBC',¹²¹ he recites a mock version of the weather forecast. The voice of the Corporation is hence established as a watchful patrician friend: a benevolent 'man upstairs'.

The stage directions describe the strong-armed Cyrus Armstrong as a 'tall and enormous man', resembling an 'ex-Army Officer' (if not a 'Roman Emperor') but 'slightly feminine' in manner.¹²² It is this effeminacy which Longford triumphantly seizes on later when lording it over Armstrong unmasked. Disregarding the insistence of the latter (masquerading as Cyrus' sane brother, 'Harry') that he not call him 'Cyrus' (an effete name, of Persian origin), Longford cat-calls, 'Cyrus ... Cyrus ... Cyrus the Commando ... The Commando who wasn't one'.¹²³ Throughout the piece runs the implication that the persona of Cyrus is sexually perverse. He is presented as morbidly concerned with the protection of the honour of his 'virginal' sister.¹²⁴ (Hamilton regarded the brotherly

¹¹⁸ I have been informed by Timothy Boulton that Hamilton himself owned a set of the first edition of the QED.

¹¹⁹ Hamilton, 1954, 5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 99.

preservation of the sister's hymen as a particularly degenerate bourgeois prejudice and satirized it as such in Impromptu in Moribundia.) That Cyrus is possibly homosexual and is threatening Longford with sexual assault is suggested by such things as his promise to do something 'to' him rather than 'for' him, and in the vindictiveness with which he pinches Longford while calling him 'a remarkably good-looking little man'.¹²⁵ Significantly, Cyrus is depicted as obsessed with the Emperor Nero and the moon.¹²⁶ It is implied that, like the incestuous and polymorphously perverse son of Agrippina, Cyrus is an imperious inversionist (even his Australian provenance and his quixotic advocacy of playing cricket under the moon are meant to testify to his topsy-turviness). As his mother later relates, Cyrus's life narrative has been cyclical, punctuated with seven-yearly outrages (including one implied episode of bestiality). In a very real sense, he is a lunatic.

His relationship with his mother is couched in terms of absolute obedience. When she arrives, he becomes meek and tractable and suffers himself to be ordered home to repeat his exercises six times over, undress, and repeat 'the Lord's prayer'¹²⁷ six times also. If he enacts this obsessive-compulsive ritual, we learn, he will be rewarded with a maternal bedside visitation and 'forgiven'.¹²⁸

The woman who emits these faintly incestuous signals is depicted by Hamilton as a melodramatic ham. The stage directions inform us that 'there is something a little false about her',¹²⁹ from her first appearance. Her actressy discourse bespeaks fraudulence clearly enough. 'Do you believe in the MOON!' she barnstorms at the end of the first Act.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 22 and 37.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 28.

And of course neither Longford nor the audience ever really does believe in her family. She hails from a 'family of soldiers',¹³¹ she avers while fulsomely apologising for breaking down into tears. 'Hysteria of the kind [we] have just seen was simply not indulged in'.¹³² She is thus linked with that caste of English society whose families had serviced an empire gone rotten. The irony is that she *has* indulged in that kind of 'hysteria', just as those servants of British imperialism decomposed in the midnight of our century, amid their faded photographs and their nostalgic trophies. Even her narration of her son's outbursts of madness has an imperial smack to it. Beseated in a Mayfair flat, and addressing a one-man audience, she unfolds her tale -- of Cyrus at eight, at fifteen, at twenty-two, and at twenty-nine. Now, he is thirty-six and 'has begun to talk of the moon again'.¹³³ One can almost discern the hand of Terry Jones and Michael Palin in this.

However, the real point about Mrs. Armstrong's 'Ripping Yarn' is that it is completely bogus. She wears her falsity so obviously on her sleeve that one suspects Hamilton to be critiquing acting *as such*, implicitly valorizing the utopia of an honest and transparent discourse of plain-speaking. Taking her leave of Longford, Mrs. Armstrong hams it up egregiously:

You have been cruelly and unjustly treated, Mr. Longford -- horribly and hideously terrified and upset -- but you have behaved gallantly -- gallantly, chivalrously, and generously -- to a bitterly distressed woman, from the moment she came in here until the moment she left. And now she is going ... going from your life forever. Goodbye, Mr. Longford I can't trust myself to speak any more.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹³¹ Ibid., 36.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 41.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 89.

The excess of modifiers and the histrionic self-objectification ('a bitterly distressed woman') effectively name what is to be condemned -- the language of a specious actorliness. We cannot trust Mrs. Armstrong to speak, either.

That which is condemned must also be punished, and the 'Moon Gang' are no more to be let off the hook than are Carruthers, Cole, and Margrave. It will be useful to recap and amplify what the Armstrongs are to be punished *for* before we assess the nature of Longford's revenge. First on the charge sheet is the invasion of Longford's private space. There is something rather Pinteresque about such outbursts from Longford as 'Oh lord! Why can't they leave me alone!'¹³⁵ And certainly, Cyrus, as the uninvited guest who comes mysteriously from outside and imposes himself, is reminiscent of a Pinter character. The second element of the persecution of George Longford is the threat of castration¹³⁶ figured by this Cyrus, who, with his strong but feminine good looks, is an object both of fear and desire.

And thirdly, we have the theme of dissimulation. In this regard, the transmutation of Cyrus into 'Harry' seems to have fascinated Hamilton the most, as the stage directions testify:

Detecting and observing this facial resemblance of one imaginary "Non-identical" twin to another should be extremely fascinating to an audience now practically in the know; and an actor should be able to find many ways of ... making ... an extraordinary baffling and intriguing mixture between remarkable similarity and remarkable dissimilarity.¹³⁷

Evinced here is a *mélange* of horror and wonder at the possibility of one person appearing like another. This question seems to have exercised a deep fascination over Hamilton -- *vide* the schizophrenia of George Harvey Bone in Hangover

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

Square. This is perhaps ascribable to his own changed appearance after his accident in 1932, or to the personality changes which alcohol seems to have induced in him. There is also, however, a more profound sense in which acting, and by extension everyday role-playing (and cliché-mongering) both magnetized and repelled him. It is as if he were compelled to set up games of dissimulation in order to break them up: to enact and destroy the ignoble fantasies by which he was possessed.

The Times columnist who lamented the blowing of the 'gaff of the plot'¹³⁸ of the play rather missed its basic point. For what the The Man Upstairs plays out is the dialectic of persecution and revenge, and the prolongation of both these elements is its *raison d'être*. The, by now familiar punishment of intrusion, threatened sexual violence, and impersonation, is at its most extended in this, Hamilton's last, broadcast play. With the police on their way, Longford menaces Mrs. Armstrong with his trusty pocket-knife, and declares his intention to scar what he cuttingly calls her 'maturing facial charms'.¹³⁹

Now, Mrs. Armstrong... Do you know that you are a commercial traveller in hell? You and your two fellow commercial travellers in the same commodity. ... And what is the answer to commercial travellers in hell, Mrs Armstrong? Do you buy their wares?... You sling them back at them -- back in their *faces*.¹⁴⁰

He then proceeds to torture this 'sales rep.' by pretending to scar her face, using an ice-cube (her eyes are closed; like Carruthers in Money with Menaces, she is 'blinded').¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ The Times, 19 May 1954, 2.

¹³⁹ Hamilton, 1954, 100.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁴¹ It is of disturbing interest to adduce at this point Bruce Hamilton's opinion that his brother 'might, given the opportunity, have become a persecutor; and I am not sure that it was not possible to trace the tendency in the lines of his beautifully shaped mouth, and perhaps in his eyes'. [PAT,

Eavesdropping on all this chicanery, Longford's patrician friend Sir Charles becomes 'rather subdued',¹⁴² permitting, but not condoning his friend's act of retribution. His role has been an enabling one: his mobilization of his highly-placed friends in the police fixes the official parameters within which Longford can exact his own justice. It is significant that Sir Charles secures a quite specific kind of police deployment. Expunged from The Man Upstairs is Hamilton's figure of the reassuring proletarian copper. Instead, the police exercise their function *outside* Longford's redoubt. Enacted in this play is a move which D. A. Millar reads as crucial to that tradition of the English Victorian novel to which Hamilton is such a self-conscious heir:

In the same move whereby the police are contained in a marginal pocket of representation, the work of the police is superseded by the operations of another, informal, and extralegal principle of organisation of control.¹⁴³

It is this principle which Hamilton's sanctification of the privacy of the atomized room endorses.

This defence of privacy is linked, ironically, with a discourse of 'peace' imbricated in the politics of the defence of the Soviet Union in the Cold War period. In retort to Mrs. Armstrong's assertion of the inevitability of another (this time nuclear) war, Longford elaborates a taxonomy of human 'types' who fall into the camp of 'evil'. First, there is the 'sheer and naked evil type ... the fascist type',¹⁴⁴ represented in Hamilton's *oeuvre* by, among others, Jock Nixon from Craven House and Peter from Hangover Square. Then there is the 'imbecile specimen', incapable of thought and 'immune to memory'.¹⁴⁵ These are the petty bourgeois 'Little Men' whom

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¹⁴² Hamilton, 1954, 103.

¹⁴³ Millar, 1987, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Hamilton, 1954, 75.

Hamilton flenses in Impromptu in Moribundia. And then there is the "'average" man - or woman', who is 'neither wicked nor idiotic',¹⁴⁶ but whose careless talk can cost lives.

Now, the existence of the incorrigibly evil people denoted by the first of these categories is lent credence by the autotelism of much historically-recorded maleficence. However, not all agents of evil conceive of their acts as ends-in-themselves, but rather as means-to-an-end. Ironically, this was especially true of the Stalinist ruling caste in the Soviet Union whose interests this discourse of peace was set up to serve in the Fifties. Radicals today would do well to be wary of taxonomizing the world into binary 'camps' -- of 'Good' and 'Evil', of 'anti-imperialism' and 'imperialism', of peaceniks and war-mongers. All actually existing social formations generate injustice and exploitation and the key to the creation of something better lies in the struggles of working people to control their economic and political lives. The incessant wreaking of vengeance on putatively irreformable evil-doers does not deserve a central place in such a project, it seems to me.

Let us now return to that question broached near the beginning of this chapter -- that of the extent to which Hamilton's broadcast drama could be said to be radiogenic (or indeed telegenic). How far do these plays exploit the possibilities inherent in the broadcasting media? As we saw earlier, Val Gielgud, Bruce Hamilton and the Listener critic, Alan Dent, all agreed that Patrick Hamilton was a consummate radio dramatist. To what extent can this view be endorsed? Here, it will be instructive to consider what Hamilton's radio drama *qua* radio drama lacks in comparison with the work of other contemporary writers in the medium.

Although Louis MacNeice was cited earlier as someone who

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 76.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

advocated a relatively simple aesthetic of radio drama, he also exulted in the innovative possibilities opened up by the genre. In the Introduction to Christopher Columbus, he wrote that, with radio, 'you can take many more liberties with time and space; you are free of the dead hand of the Three Act tradition ... you can ... introduce allegorical speakers and choruses',¹⁴⁷ and so on. Hamilton's radio drama does few of these things. In terms of 'time and place', they remain circumscribed, and Impromptu in Moribundia remains his sole foray into allegory in any genre. Nor was MacNeice's avowal of experimentation a dead letter so far as dramaturgical practice went. Even one of his more naturalist radio pieces, The Administrator (1961), intelligently exploits the medium by intersplicing reality with multiple dream-sequences, in order to contextualize fully the dilemma faced by the main character (namely, whether to accept the directorship of a nuclear power station).

In Our Time, in 1945, Peggy McIver descanted upon the soliloquizing possibilities with which she held radio drama to be replete: radio, she wrote, 'offers itself as the best and most natural medium for the drama of the mind, the mental conflicts behind action that can never be so fully and happily presented as on the stage'.¹⁴⁸ Twenty-five years later, Martin Esslin observed, in a similar vein, that 'the internal monologue [was the] ideal form'¹⁴⁹ for radio drama. Although (probably) soliloquy rather than interior monologue, Mrs. Rooney's speech in All that Fall in which she fights for a radiophonic existence while ignored by the other characters is a famous realization of the opportunities highlighted by McIver and Esslin:

Do not flatter yourselves for one moment, because I hold aloof, that my

¹⁴⁷ MacNeice, 1944, 12.

¹⁴⁸ P. McIver, Our Time, September 1945, 31.

¹⁴⁹ M. Esslin, 'The Mind as Stage', Theatre Quarterly, i, 3, July-September, 1971, 8.

sufferings have ceased. No. The entire scene, the hills, the plain, the racecourse with its miles and miles of white rails and three red stands, the pretty little wayside station, even you yourselves, yes, I mean it, and over all the clouding blue, I see it all, I stand here and see it all with my eyes ... (*the voice breaks*).¹⁵⁰

That we cannot see what Mrs. Rooney can see is an inducement to dwell on the ineluctability of the gap between character and listener in radio drama as a metaphor for gappiness in human communication at large. Katharine Worth has it that, in all of Beckett's radio drama, 'the characters are touched by some awareness of their dependence on the medium'.¹⁵¹ Structural features of the genre are foregrounded in such a way as to pose questions concerning character status, the facticity of radio drama, and the position of the listener.

Hamilton's radio drama does not really highlight issues of this nature: his characters are evidently meant to appear to be real people. Interestingly though, Patrick's enthusiasm for utilizing the technique of interior monologue was fired by a suggestion from Val Gielgud that he render Hangover Square in that manner. In March 1956, he wrote to Gielgud that he was 'fascinated ... by the idea of this dramatisation'.¹⁵² Sadly though, by June of the same year, Hamilton was writing again and sounding a different note:

I have been getting down to Hangover Square seriously, and have found that, after all my enthusiasm, it simply doesn't lend itself to radio in any way I still think that my idea of a 50% monologue play is an admirable one, and perhaps later I'll be able to give you something quite fresh along these lines.¹⁵³

Alas, he never did, and contrary to his strange judgement, an adaptation of Hangover Square was broadcast on BBC Radio on

¹⁵⁰ Beckett, 1957, 23.

¹⁵¹ K. Worth, 'Beckett and the Radio Medium', in Drakakis (ed.), 1981, 195.

¹⁵² Letter from Blakeney, Norfolk, 22 March 1956, [BBC WAC].

¹⁵³ Ibid.

2 February 1965.

There are, however, two senses in which Hamilton's broadcast drama was apposite to its chosen media. The first of these resides in the foregrounding of the technology of telecommunications in the plays, and the second lies in the proposition that there is something intrinsic to the relationship between radio (and early television) drama and the solitary listener (or viewer) which conduces to the thematization of persecution and revenge.

In two of the plays -- Money with Menaces and Caller Anonymous -- an instrument which originates in the same technological revolution as the radio acts as a structuring agent. The telephone begins to saturate society in the epoch of Modernism. Its capacity to yoke together individual, disembodied voices effects effects a profound modification of the texture of modern social life. Its ringing promises both intimacy and danger. We have seen how adeptly Hamilton utilizes the possibilities of telephonic communication. How strange it is then to read John Drakakis' citation of Jonathan Raban's Will You Accept This Call? (1977) as original in the way it naturalizes 'the theme [of blindness] by placing the listener in the position of receiving a telephone call from a deranged phone-in fanatic'.¹⁵⁴

The Man Upstairs also wears its telecommunications technology on its sleeve. Longford's radio communication device, which Morven Cameron found so 'very contrived',¹⁵⁵ educes and highlights the important subculture of amateur and experimental radio. Raymond Williams writes of how the invention of radio 'was developed, within existing forms and possibilities, into two quite alternative systematic technologies: radio telephony and broadcasting'.¹⁵⁶ A

¹⁵⁴ J. Drakakis, in J. Drakakis (ed.), British Radio Drama, Cambridge, 1981, 21.

¹⁵⁵ Cameron, 1954, 1, [BBC WAC].

¹⁵⁶ R. Williams, The Politics of Modernism, London, 1989, 121.

massively democratic plethora of unrealized potentialities remains inherent within radio and television technology. In highlighting a liberational use of radio telephony, The Man Upstairs makes a useful corrective to a radical common wisdom which conceives of communications technology as invariably sinister.

That this play should turn on the relationship between surveillance and power renders it particularly suitable for apprehension by a television audience. 'I have seen you, but you have not seen me',¹⁵⁷ is how Cyrus articulates his menacing gaze to Longford. In his turn, Cyrus is held in thrall by the unidirectional gaze of his mother. As he departs from the house down the street, she requests that the lights be turned off that she might behold her son without him seeing her.¹⁵⁸ Ironically, it is Sir Charles' surveillance from the flat above which transfixes the Moon Gang in the eyes of the audience. The final *coup de grâce* is his play-back of that evening's conversations. The villains remain rooted to the spot, their disembodied voices captured before they are: let the revenging commence!

Now to the second sense in which Hamilton's broadcast drama could be said to be peculiarly suitable to its media. In the Introduction to the posthumous collection of MacNeice's radio plays, Persons from Porlock (1969), W.H. Auden makes the point that, 'in a radio play each remark is heard as addressed directly to the listener'.¹⁵⁹ Intimately implicated by this address, the mind of the listener becomes the very ground of the action of a radio play. In his essay, 'The Mind as Stage', Esslin makes the further point that, despite an ostensive analogy, 'concentrated listening to a radio play is ...

¹⁵⁷ Hamilton, 1954, 12.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁵⁹ W.H. Auden, Foreword to L. MacNeice, Persons from Porlock, London, 1969, 7.

more akin to the experience one undergoes when *dreaming* than that of the reader of a novel';¹⁶⁰ better still, to having a nightmare, as Hamilton's plays should testify (the unwanted (nocturnal) telephone caller in Money with Menaces and Caller Anonymous, Fred's desperate, tripping, flight into darkness and away from Cole's car in To the Public Danger, and so on).

This grounding of radio drama in the psyche of the listener is one which, perforce, animates reception. Val Gielgud thought this through in terms of audience participation of a compensatory kind: the genre of the radio play compels the listener to fill in the missing elements, 'to "set" scenic backgrounds; visualize the physical characteristics of the persons of the drama; design their costumes'.¹⁶¹ Rudigor Imhof accenuates this line of thought more radically by writing that, theoretically, 'there are as many different imaginative realisations of one particular radio play as there are listeners'.¹⁶²

This intensity of relationship is one which at least facilitates the depiction of persecution and the cathartic enactment of revenge. The (lone) listener can be almost somatically engrossed in some menacing situation and then be vicariously released, his or her paranoia sated. Certainly, this double move is intrinsic to the strategy of Hamilton's drama. It is also to be found, for example, in Harold Pinter's radio play, A Night Out(1960). This piece depicts the gathering resentment of a sullen clerk, Albert Stokes, against his possessive, garrulous mother, in particular, and people who talk too much in general. To a whithering prostitute to whose flat he goes after his disastrous 'night out' he snarls:

Who do you think you are? You talk too much, you know that. You never

¹⁶⁰ Esslin, 1971, 7.

¹⁶¹ Gielgud, 1957, 182.

¹⁶² R. Imhof, in P.Lewis(ed.), Radio Literature Conference, Durham, 1977, 204.

stop talking. Just because you're a woman you think you can get away with it. (Bending over her.) You've made a mistake this time. You've picked the wrong man. ... You're all the same ... It's the same as this business about the light in Grandma's room. Always something.¹⁶³

Albert is repeating an earlier scene in which he seemed to murder his mother. However, both the prostitute and the mother escape unscathed and Albert's brooding frustration remains unsatisfied. This blockage of revenge is not one which typifies Hamilton's radio drama of course, but enough of a similar atmosphere is generated to make one wonder to what extent Pinter's early work was 'Hamiltonian' in cast.

Contemporary television theory tends to conceptualize spectatorship in a manner relevant to such reflections on radio drama's interpellation of its audience. John Fiske, in Television Culture (1987), contends that, because of its heterogeneity and domestic emplacement, the postmodern television audience is a necessarily 'active' one which pluralizes the seemingly monologic utterances of popular transnational television. Polemicizing against the pessimism of 'screen orthodoxy', he writes:

Television is normally viewed within the domestic familiarity of the living room, which contrasts significantly with the public, impersonal place of the cinema. In going out to the cinema we tend to submit to its terms, to become subject to its discourse, but television comes to us, enters our cultural space, and becomes subject to our discourses.¹⁶⁴

This rather quixotic and rosy conception of the home as the quotidian viewing space contrasts quite starkly with an older Marxist position which underscores the reactionary implications of the 'roomification' of the television audience. This is exemplified by the following question put to Raymond Williams by the New Left Review Editorial Board in Politics and Letters (1979):

¹⁶³ H. Pinter, A Slight Ache and Other Plays, London, 82-3.

¹⁶⁴ J. Fiske, Television Culture, London, 1987, 74.

However much you use camera mobility or differential location and time, even the most advanced techniques of television are still received and absorbed by spectators cut off from each other in innumerable private rooms, literally receiving alongside or just after your development of realist plays other programmes which arrive unexplained, as the messages of a dominant and determining world which comes from outside to them through this opening in the wall.¹⁶⁵

Significantly, Williams' riposte is to indicate the technology which could take television 'out of the room'.¹⁶⁶ My own intuition is that an adequate theorization of the set of relationships between television and radio and their audiences lies between these two conceptions, and it is, arguably, through that space that the radio drama of the Marxian Patrick Hamilton can be read as having emerged -- at once articulating and confounding persecution coming from outside 'the room'.

As we have seen, Hamilton's broadcast drama emplots the punishment of dissimulation, of acting. This feature is modulated more gently in a short radio piece called This is Impossible, first broadcast on 27 December 1941. The play foregrounds the facticity of dramatic production in order to satirize the falsity of the Stage. At the rehearsal of a West End production we have a small group of theatrical workers, two of whom are the main protagonists -- Miss Watson, a middle-aged actress, and Mr. MacIntosh, the producer. The piece demonstrates a Hamiltonian interest in the impacting of theatrical discourse on the speech of 'real life'. Miss Watson, quite stupidly, cannot properly pronounce the line, "This is impossible", which is, in turn 'impossible'. The stage manager suggests to the furious MacIntosh that Miss Watson need only mutter to herself and then say "impossible", but this promising compromise flounders when she says the actual words, 'mutter, mutter, mutter'.¹⁶⁷ Eventually, in a fit of pique, she

¹⁶⁵ In R. Williams, Politics and Letters, London, 1979, 226.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

says the line correctly in a 'real' argument with the producer and the latter triumphantly closes the rehearsal (after which she repeats her line to herself -- wrongly). This kind of satire on the absurdities of run-of-the-mill English theatre between the wars was first explored by Patrick Hamilton in his novels, Monday Morning (1925), and Twopence Coloured (1928). These two works, together with Craven House (1926), form the subject matter of the next chapter.

167 P. Hamilton, This is Impossible, London, 1941, 12.

Chapter Six

Final Curtains

Phenomenologically, the novel form includes the interruptions that fracture the process of reading it What the form really secures is a close imbrication of individual and social, domestic and institutional, private and public, leisure and work. A drill in the rhythms of bourgeois industrial culture, the novel generates a nostalgic desire to get home (where the novel can be resumed) in the same degree as it inures its readers to the necessity of periodically renouncing home (for the world where the novel finds its justification and its truth). In reading the novel, one is made to rehearse how to live a problematic -- always surrendered, but then again always recovered -- privacy.

D. A. Millar, The Novel and the Police, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988, 83.

The early prose fiction of Patrick Hamilton is magnetized and enlivened by theatricality but subtended by a movement towards narrative closure that signifies a drawing of curtains in the little theatre of 'home'. Each of the three novels of Hamilton's 'first period' is end-stopped by marriage, and in this respect, as in so many others, these works are reminiscent of the Victorian realist novel. These endings are, however, textually problematized and, together with the narratives which they terminate, display affinities with other 1920s fiction by writers of a similar age and social background to Hamilton -- such as Christopher Isherwood and Evelyn Waugh.

My main procedure in this chapter will be to examine, in turn, Monday Morning (1925), Craven House (1926), and

Twopence Coloured (1928). Gender representation and narrative closure will provide the foci of a discussion which will also foreground the highly autobiographical nature of these novels. I shall begin, however, with a treatment of an early short story, 'The Quiet Room', written sometime between 1922 and 1925, when Hamilton was aged between seventeen and nineteen.¹

In its depiction of marriage as an attractive escape route from an unsatisfactory social situation, this short story is proleptic of Hamilton's first three novels. It relates the circumstances of one evening which culminate in the flight of Mary Grote, together with her fiancé, from the house of her tyrannical drunk of a father.² As with the novels, this piece is heavily autobiographical. It is squarely based on an anecdote recounted to Patrick by his brother, Bruce, and represents a partial settling of accounts with their father, Bernard, known to them both as the 'Old Devil', or simply the 'O.D.'³

One night in the late summer of 1922, Bernard came back drunk to the Hamilton household in Chiswick, where Bruce was alone in his bedroom. Realizing that the 'O.D.' was hell-bent on a quarrel, Bruce bolted the door and pretended to be asleep. This only enraged Bernard who resolved to quell his son's mutiny:

"Open the door! OP-EN THE DOOR!" he bawled. "Or I'll break it with my cavalry sword!" And he began to do so, now with the hilt, now the point, now the edge of his treasured regimental sword.⁴

¹ 'The Quiet Room' has recently been published in The Printer's Devil, no. 1, South East Arts, 1990, 87-95, with a biographical introduction by Nigel Jones, and it is to that text that reference shall be made.

² It is interesting that Mary Grote should be the only main Hamilton character who has a living biological father. Moreover, the fact that the story was not published in the author's lifetime suggests even more that father-depiction was a taboo area for Hamilton.

³ PAT, 146.

Eventually, Bruce relented and his father gained entry to his bedroom. He then kissed his son on both cheeks and, 'with astonishing speed for a man of his age, weight, and condition,' delivered 'on the same two cheeks two blows, open and back-handed, with all the force of his right arm'.⁵ Sobering up suddenly in the face of Bruce's 'crying jag',⁶ Bernard became conciliatory, assuaging his son but also warning him not to inform his mother since she did not 'understand men'.⁷

All the elements of this episode are rendered anew in 'The Quiet Room'. Bernard's militaristic parental bullying is vulgarized and sent up with a vengeance. The cavalry sword becomes a poker and the Old Devil's discourse is inflected with a Cockney accent. On his way home after closing-time, Mr. Grote mutters to himself: "'This, I think ... is where we 'old audience with our daughter.... We will 'ave a little conversation, methinks.'"⁸ The use of the singular 'we' and the silly archaism 'methinks' is reminiscent of Bernard, who held audience wherever he went and whose historical novels are awash with fustian language.

The O.D.'s military pretensions are debunked by way of the kind of language used to describe Grote's entry to the house:

...one great click, silence, steps, the front door slammed, and Mr. Grote was in tremendous possession of his house.

Mr. Grote kept an impressive silence after Victory. Then there was a lot of scuffling and lurching interspersed with strangely quiet pregnant moments. Mr. Grote must have hoped to have taken the stairs by

⁴ Ibid., 155.

⁵ Ibid., 156.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ P. Hamilton, 'The Quiet Room', The Printer's Devil, no.1, Kent, 1990, 92.

surprise. He rushed at them, took six reverberating steps up them, and then fell noisily, and blasphemed. At last he came to the top landing and breathed a little outside Mary's door, listening. "I'll see to you now, Mary. You'll just come into my room, if you please."⁹

The incongruity of the collocation in the phrase 'tremendous possession of his house' enhances the humour of this snippet of filial satire, but does not attenuate the menace of Grote's implied threat of patriarchal rape. The military metaphorizing is extended to the end of the tale, which twists with a wry irony. Just as Mary's room is linguistically constituted as an object of conquest, so it becomes a subject in its own right, and has the last laugh on the invading father: 'Mary's room did not go to sleep. It was in a state of billowy, undignified laughter at Mr. Grote, who had been storming for quite an hour at a perfectly empty room.'¹⁰ And so we see this 'quiet room', this sanctuary of female space, mocking the impercipient, egoistic father that was Bernard Hamilton.

The feminism of this short story is a reiterative feature of Hamilton's early novels, although the sexist elements which will crystallize into that She-Devil, Netta Longdon, are latent there also. Nevertheless, the young Patrick Hamilton's depiction of his women characters is of a piece with the following excerpt from a 1927 letter, sent to Bruce from the same house in Chiswick stormed by the 'Old Devil' five years previously:

women cannot earn a decent living Their position, in fact, if one takes the trouble to examine it, and think hard about it, is HIDEOUS They are utterly dependent on their sexual attractions for their salvation. There was never such a need for a huge feminist movement as there is now.¹¹

⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰ Ibid., 95.

¹¹ P. Hamilton, letter to Bruce Hamilton from Chiswick, 1927 [AHA].

Relations between the sexes among the youth of Southern bourgeois England after the Great War form what little substance there is of Hamilton's first novel, Monday Morning,¹² which relates the story of one Anthony Charteris Forster, a parentless upper-middle-class boy who resides at a London hotel (while, initially, attending a 'crammer'), dabbles in the theatre, and falls in love with a girl staying at the same hotel called Diane, to whom he eventually becomes engaged. The 'Fauconberg' hotel (which will be recycled within the ecology of Hamilton's fiction as the hotel in which George Harvey Bone lives in Hangover Square) can be related to Lottie Crump's private hotel for genteel refugees in Evelyn Waugh's Vile Bodies. As with the 'Fauconberg', it is possible to 'go to Sheppard's parched with modernity, any day, if Lottie likes one's face, and still draw up, cool and uncontaminated, great healing draughts of Edwardian security'.¹³ Both these hotels function metaphorically as signs of a certain post-war deracination among a stratum of moneyed people, bereft of their erstwhile servants and households -- wealthy widows, orphaned young men with bequests, and so on.

Monday Morning is heavily autobiographical. The model for Diane was the sister of Patrick's Scots-Peruvian friend, Carlos MacKehenie y de la Fuente, Maruja, whom he met, together with the rest of her family, at the Whitehouse Hotel in Earl's Court in the early 1920s.¹⁴ Upon Anthony Charteris Forster, Patrick bestows some of his own history, pretensions, and tastes -- for example, he gives him Charles Reade's The Cloister and the Hearth, which Bruce described as the Hamilton brothers' 'novel of novels'.¹⁵ The verdict of the

¹² The title refers to the hero's procrastinating tendency to resolve always to 'begin' his life properly on 'Monday Morning'.

¹³ E. Waugh, Vile Bodies (1930), London, 1938, 36.

¹⁴ PAT, 189-92.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

Times Literary Supplement on this piece of juvenilia was indulgent but dismissive: 'charmingly ridiculous', wrote the reviewer, adding the barb, 'it will excite no thought'.¹⁶

The passage from Thackeray's Henry Esmond which Monday Morning takes as its epigraph suggests that Patrick had ambitions for the novel unrecognized by the TLS reviewer:

'Tis an error, surely, to talk of the simplicity of youth. I think no persons are more hypocritical, and have a more affected behaviour to one another, than the young. They deceive themselves and each other with artifices that do not impose upon men of the world.¹⁷

Announced here is that fascination with everyday dissimulation and its unmasking that we saw in action throughout Hamilton's drama. The special object of satire in Monday Morning is the author himself, several years younger (still). Forster is shown to indulge in some of Patrick's own discursive habits, for example, the game of 'turning upside down, or reading backwards'.¹⁸ This puerile practice, of which there is abundant evidence in Patrick's letters to Bruce, is later employed as a technique involved in the construction of the land of Moribundia as a satirical mirror-image of the Home Counties in the 1930s. Thus Hamilton, once he has become a Marxist, will come to utilize a private language game from his formative years as emblematic of a society in dire need of critique.¹⁹

The satire in the earlier novel is, however, modulated more gently. While the ethics of 'mental Cricket',²⁰ and the gentlemanly 'Code' instilled into Anthony at Westminster are flayed in Impromptu in Moribundia as deeply hypocritical,

¹⁶ Times Literary Supplement, 6 August 1925, 520.

¹⁷ Title page of P. Hamilton, Monday Morning, London, 1925.

¹⁸ Hamilton, 1925, 86.

¹⁹ There is an obvious parallel here with the 'Mortmere' language-games of Edward Upward and Christopher Isherwood.

²⁰ Hamilton, 1925, 21.

they are gently ribbed in Monday Morning as having had 'very little effect' on our hero. The breathless narration of Anthony's fantasies of impressing Diane by being a heroic soldier in a glorious new war against America, and quelling Bolshevik riots in Earl's Court is campily parodic sure enough, but it also makes disconcerting reading for anyone mindful of the horrors of the Great War. At this point in the novel, Anthony is on tour with a theatrical company and his imagined uniform is obviously a costume:

It was a blue-grey uniform of the finest material -- foreignified, with slack trousers finely creased, gold braid about the shoulders, a high collar, a fine wide, brown belt, and a neat sword.²¹

Similarly, the modifiers used to describe Anthony's optative military career are decidedly arch:

In the war with America he became absolutely the salt of the earth. By an act of scarcely imaginable bravery, and endurance, and courage he ended the whole war. He was *literally* carried through the streets on his return.²²

The vacuity of the reiterated cliché, 'salt of the earth', the excess of 'heroic' abstract nouns, and the actorly emphasis on the first syllable of 'literally' all constitute this passage as a send-up, but its light-minded insouciance betrays, even so, what Bruce Hamilton described as his younger brother's lack of 'access to any understanding of what the war had involved',²³ in the immediate post-war period.

Just as the gentility of the satire in Monday Morning imparts to it a lightness of tone, so the piece is parcelled up with that stock convention of romantic fiction, the happy (marital) ending. At odds with this bubble-headedness,

²¹ Ibid., 266-7.

²² Ibid., 267.

²³ PAT, 170.

though, is the proleptic nature of those elements which problematize the security of the ending. Andrew Cramp points out that Forster's final words to Diane (with regard to two drunks) foreshadow Hamilton's obsession with alcoholism: "You wait till we're married, Diane, I'll come back miles worse than that."²⁴ Moreover, in the character of Diane herself we already discern an early adumbration of Netta Longdon. A flirtatious, affected girl with a headful of clichés culled from magazines with titles like like The Smart Set, Diane is depicted as capricious and faithless. Hamilton's portrayal of this young *femme fatale* both implicates his own fascination for her and erects a voyeuristic and masochistic reading-position for the male reader which will recur throughout his fiction. At one point the readerly gaze is directed up Diane's skirt:

Her thick, bobbed hair was a little disordered; her skirt fell just above her knees, so that you could just see where the silk of the stockings ended and the coarser stuff commenced. Just beneath where the coarse stuff commenced there was a pink smudge of a little ladder.²⁵

No asexual icon this! Forster's elsewhere expressed tears of desire seal a compact between author, character, and (implied) male reader, and mix with those of George Harvey Bone: "Diane, Diane, do have a little mercy!"²⁶ In this early novel, then, we can see germinating those complex relations of sadism and masochism, pain and pleasure, which are murderously played out in Hangover Square. The roseate ending, imposed by the dictates of romantic fiction, fails to cohere and control all the elements of the novel: the 'high heels' which, in Monday Morning, tread 'hard and relentless, on

²⁴ P. Hamilton, 1925, 310. For Cramp's remarks, see A. Cramp, 'Prose Fiction in the 1930s: Elizabeth Bowen, Rex Warner, and Patrick Hamilton', Loughborough University Ph.D, 1984, 310.

²⁵ Hamilton, 1925, 207-8.

²⁶ Ibid., 244.

Anthony's heart',²⁷ go on treading through Hamilton's subsequent fiction.

The high heels of Miss Cotterell in Craven House are a minor, but important detail, in the canvas of that novel. Published in the year of the General Strike, Craven House demonstrates a weightier political maturity than does Monday Morning -- engaged, as it is, with the malaise afflicting bourgeois England in the Twenties, associated with the late Victorian and Edwardian generations held to be responsible for the war. Again, however, the Times Literary Supplement failed to register the wider import of Hamilton's work:

It is the garrulous, communicative, knowingly-facetious-all-comes-right-in-the-end type in which Dickens sometimes indulged and in which William de Morgan scored his chief success It is all a chronicle of small beer, but Mr. Hamilton knows how to give his beverage a head.²⁸

The unwitting irony of this last sentence is not altogether inapposite in a review of a book which, like its predecessor, is highly autobiographical.²⁹ To the novel's young male hero, 'Master Wildman', Hamilton gives the surname of his father's maternal great-uncle, Colonel Thomas Wildman -- a hero at Waterloo and an Old Harrovian friend of Byron. Furthermore, in a struggle over Scottishness with the pseudo-Scots fascist, Jock Nixon, Master Wildman arrogates the burial rights at St. Cuthbert's in Prince's Street enjoyed by Bernard's paternal lineage.³⁰ On the other hand, Jock's

²⁷ Ibid., 199.

²⁸ Times Literary Supplement, 6 November 1926, 766.

²⁹ One telling example of the autobiographical nature of Craven House is its transmutation of Patrick's experience of working as a shorthand typist for the City office of Wales Estates (Demerara Sugar). This was the *only* experience of workaday wage-labour that Hamilton had in his entire life and it is squeezed dry in his second novel: cf. PAT, 203 and Hamilton, 1943, 124-8.

³⁰ See P. Hamilton, Craven House (second, revised, edition), London, 1943, 217, and PAT, 217.

fascism links him with Hamilton's father. A founding member of the crypto-Fascist Middle-Classes Union, Bernard considered Mussolini, whom he had actually seen orating from the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, to be the only living person worthy of his unstinting admiration.³¹ It is as if Patrick were parcelling out his patrimony in Craven House, disseminating and defusing bite-size elements of his father throughout the text.

Like Monday Morning, its immediate successor is set in a private hotel in London (in Chiswick this time) -- 'Craven House'. This ostensibly genteel establishment is persuasively read by Peter Widdowson as 'a microcosm of middle-class England -- a sort of symbolic reverse of what Forster's house, *Howards End* represent'.³² Hamilton's Craven House spans the years from the apogee of sunny Edwardian somnolence to the brasher world of the Twenties. Its narrative is primarily concerned with the developing relationship, through childhood and early adulthood, between the two youngest denizens of the house, Master Wildman (who never sloughs off his puerile appellation, 'Master') and Elsie Nixon. The marital engagement of these two sets the seal on the novel but, once again, does not do so unproblematically. Craven House remains a troubled text.

Hamilton's excoriation, in this book, of the suffocating nature of petty-bourgeois life (as symbolized by 'Craven House') takes off from the repression of Elsie by her Calvinistic mother. My argument here, however, is that Elsie's eventual emancipation is vitiated by the novel's inexorable movement towards a traditional mode of narrative closure.

Elsie is first presented to the reader as a child-victim of 'Bringing Up' -- a phrase which denotes that which is done

³¹ PAT, 255-6.

³² P.J. Widdowson, 'The Saloon Bar Society: Patrick Hamilton's Fiction in the 1930s', in J. Lucas (ed.), The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy, Hassocks, 1978, 121.

to, and not *for*, her as a child. Her body is subjected to a rigorously disciplinarian régime: we are told that when she 'reaches her room she begins to undress in a style so extraordinarily disciplined and methodical that one might well imagine she is still under the level eyes of her mother'.³³ Here we have a virtually Foucauldian subject, always already fixed by the surveillance of the parental gaze. Implicated by this positioning is a religious violence: chastely clad in a 'white nightdress reaching below her feet', Elsie 'purses her mouth like a little girl about to receive a blow, clasps her hands and prays'.³⁴

The sadistic Calvinist upbringing to which the bodies of Mrs. Nixon's children are subject has undertones of a sexual nature. The small Scottish boarding-school to which Jock Nixon is sent is described as 'a hardy, open air establishment, where the boys run to bathe at half-past five in the morning, eat salted porridge, *and are flogged mercilessly (one has heard) in their football shorts. Such touches appealing strongly to Mrs. Nixon.*'³⁵ In the 'Bringing Up' of her daughter, Mrs. Nixon combines such sadistic practices with a range of sparingly dispensed 'Treats'. The ultimate sanction of her power over Elsie remains, however, 'The Stick' -- a personified device liberally alluded to in phrases such as, "'We shall see what The Stick thinks about it in a moment, Miss.'"³⁶

The climactic moment when Elsie breaks this stick 'in both her Amazon's hands'³⁷ marks a watershed in her protracted liberation from her mother. Dredging up all the 'dark memories' of her childhood, and recollecting her

³³ Hamilton, 1943, 21.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ P. Hamilton, *Craven House*, London, 1926, 29. The italicized portion of this excerpt was omitted from the second edition published in 1943.

³⁶ Hamilton, 1943, 20.

³⁷ Ibid., 189.

mother's 'base hypocrisy and cruelty', Elsie, broken Stick in hand, confronts her life-long oppressor and says: "'I'm tall now Taller than you. And I'm young. I'm young. And you're not going to make me old anymore. I'm sorry if I was rude, but I am not going to be made old anymore.'"³⁸ In its high melodrama, this scene is reminiscent of that moment in Nicholas Nickleby when Wackford Squeers is humiliated by Nicholas and beaten with his own whip; here is the preamble to Squeers' come-uppance:

"I have a long series of insults to avenge," said Nicholas, flushed with passion; "and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this foul den. Have a care; for if you do raise the devil within me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!"³⁹

We can see here the stylistic elements taken over by Hamilton: the revenge on the child-tormentor through the confiscation of his/her weapon; the enabling rhetoric invoking maddening memories; the warning to the oppressor, and the determined self-composure of the avenging agent. However, the Craven House episode styles the *victim* as avenger and evinces a sexually-loaded dimension absent from the Dickens scene.

The altercation between Mrs. Nixon and her uprisen daughter is occasioned by the obdurate refusal of the former to permit the latter to accompany Master Wildman to a dance in the West End. When she comes to investigate her wardrobe for her party frock, Elsie gets an unpleasant surprise:

for it is no longer a little green dress when it comes out nearer the light. For it is slit down and down, with a knife into long, fine shreds; and attached to it is a little note in her mother's hand: --

"For the dance."⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., 190.

³⁹ C. Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby (1839), Oxford, 1950, 155.

One must catch the sexual menace in the flat present-tense narration here. At one level, there is the reassuring assonance of 'down and down' and 'long', and the semantic innocence of the second clause of the second sentence when decontextualized ('a little note in her mother's hand' -- what could be sweeter?). But, at another level, there is the violence of the verb 'slit', and the stock psychoanalytic meanings of 'slit' (as a noun), and 'knife'. Against this sexualized parental violence Elsie triumphs. For, as Peter Widdowson writes, for Patrick Hamilton in the 1920s, it seems to be the case that, 'the middle-class malaise can still be thwarted by youth and hope'.⁴¹

That Hamilton should ground his critique of the repression of bourgeois youth in the Twenties in the oppression and self-liberation of a young woman testifies both to his early feminism and, more importantly, to the extent to which young middle-class women were conceived of as symptomatically troublesome by their elders in those years. 'Bringing up' young women now coming into the franchise won for them by the Suffragettes was bad enough, but relations between young bourgeois boys and girls were becoming intolerably informal. In a parenthetical passage in All the Conspirators (1928), Christopher Isherwood comments on the healthy impact he considered the war to have made in this respect, vaunting 'the jolly out-door sort of friendship of a pair of boys' as the ideal template for contemporary relationships between young bourgeois men and women. It is this kind of relationship that Craven House too strives to valorize.

The male half of this relationship is depicted as intermittently strong, but essentially immature, egocentric,

⁴⁰ Hamilton, 1943, 179.

⁴¹ Widdowson, 1978, 122.

and sentimental. Master Wildman (in due course the unfortunate Elsie's matrimonial 'master') never really grows out of the little Chiswickian world of 'Craven House'. His childhood experience of it is snug and secure in comparison with that of Elsie. He inhabits a 'little room within a room'⁴² with his kindly old father (who, as a widower, is not a rival for the love of the boy's mother). From his bed Master Wildman is able to spy on his father by arranging 'a little aperture'⁴³ in his curtains. His father's habitual 'secret kiss'⁴⁴ bonds their love and seals Master Wildman's curtained security: no Stick for him! His adolescent sexual fantasies are of 'a world in which a blonde lady, at large in silk tights, governs the domestic hearth'.⁴⁵ This yearning for a dominant and exciting woman who is also *une femme de foyer* is not one which Elsie is depicted as capable of satisfying: instead, the novel gestures towards another kind of woman, whose significance is to unsettle its ending.

Miss Cotterell hails from a social position somewhat higher in the pecking order than that of the inmates of 'Craven House'. More importantly, she cuts a more sexually exotic figure than does Elsie Nixon:

Her mouth is a mouth red with minor dooms for Master Wildman; and she is all the colours that Master Wildman could ever blend in sleep, and she is all the tunes that Master Wildman has ever yearned towards; and she is young to the last sweet point of youth, and she is as old as Asia. For she is a witch and she is an alchemist ... the feathers in her hat have flamed in the crowd at Babylon, the little lip-stick in the bag has painted a courtesan at Cnossos, the little whip has scourged the dusty backs of the builders of the Pyramids.⁴⁶

The balanced phrase 'mouth red with minor dooms' captions

⁴² Hamilton, 1943, 24.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 26.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 132.

this portrait of Miss Cotterell in a manner reminiscent of those near-pornographic paintings of Biblical or mythological temptresses which continue to bedeck the walls of municipal art galleries. The Old Testament cadence of this passage stress the ancientness of this latter-day Jezebel's allure -- 'as old as Asia'. The repetition of 'Master Wildman' underscores the poor boy's vulnerable innocence when enraptured by this creature, whose accessories -- feathers, lipstick, and little whip -- signify (respectively), coquettishness, seductiveness, and sadism. Like Netta Longdon, Miss Cotterell invokes the oldest profession in the world without actually belonging to that order. She also shares Netta's delight in the spectacle of male brutality: where the latter thrills to the machismo of Fascism, Miss Cotterell gets 'a curiously exalted and half triumphant sensation' from the 'muck and muscle' of Rugby Football.⁴⁷ If Elsie Nixon is an avatar of the young Patrick Hamilton's feminist tendencies, then Miss Cotterell evinces his horrified fascination at the figure of the *femme fatale*. It is fitting then that Elsie should pinpoint Master Wildman's entrancement by her 'bad' sister as that which might foredoom their marriage. This she does in the closing scene of the novel which Wildman endeavours to narrate, in a maudlin mode, as a happy ending. However, his attempt to frame their relationship, in the forlorn and empty house of their childhood, as a 'story' culminating in a 'Love Scene'⁴⁸ rebounds and rings hollow, leaving the modern reader wincing and cold.

The end of Craven House is not, however, the end of 'Craven House', for that occurs earlier in the novel. The stormburst which destroys this fetid pool of Edwardian

⁴⁷ Ibid., 141. For Netta Longdon's attraction to the machismo of Fascism, see P. Hamilton, Hangover Square (1941), London, 1974, 129.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 244.

England is a piece of tragi-comic slapstick. Following the heated exchange between Master Wildman and Jock Nixon referred to earlier, the proprietress of the hotel, Miss Hatt, finally snaps and unleashes a torrent of pent-up fury against her guests (including her lifelong, lovelessly married, friends, the comical Spicers). Moreover, her abuse is not only verbal:

"*Mud* --!" says Miss Hatt, taking the leg of mutton in her right hand, and arranging herself like a discus thrower. "Pie!" screams Miss Hatt, and hurls the leg of mutton at Mrs. Nixon.⁴⁹

Bruce Hamilton read this climactic row as a 'broad riotous farce out of key with the precision of visual and auditory observation that gave body to the rest of the comedy'.⁵⁰ Although accurate, this comment misses the significance of the inclusion of such an anomalous artistic element in the text of Craven House. It seems to me that the very outlandishness of this scene is symptomatic of an aporia in Hamilton's thought in the Twenties. For he is not yet sure of how 'Craven House' (read metaphorically) could be broken up. Certainly not, at this stage, by the servant class who are caricatured with a heavy Dickensian sentimentality in this novel (their discourse rendered indirectly or interrupted by the linguistically superior voice of the author, their subculture kitschified, and so on).⁵¹

Although ostensibly rather a different novel, Evelyn Waugh's Vile Bodies betrays a similar aporia in the absurdly apocalyptic ending visited upon the little world of the 'Bright Young Things'. As Richard Aldington expressed it at the time of the publication of this novel: 'the kind of impatient futility

⁴⁹ Ibid., 219.

⁵⁰ B. Hamilton, 1972, .

⁵¹ See especially the chapter of Craven House entitled 'Audrey Answers Back' (just as Oliver asked for 'More'), 1943 edition, 145-161.

described by Waugh would be more likely to end in internal collapse'.⁵² Of course, Craven House does collapse 'internally', but it does not do so convincingly, in a manner consonant with its realization.

Just as the end of 'Craven House' can be articulated with the apocalyptic ending of Vile Bodies, so the narrative structure of Twopence Coloured⁵³ can be correlated with that of Waugh's first novel, Decline and Fall: for each book relates the adventures of an *ingenué(e)* at large who undergoes a series of picaresque adventures and then returns, disillusioned, to a life offering tranquillity. Moreover, when Waugh says of his hero, Paul Pennyfeather, that 'the only interest about him arises from the unusual series of events of which his shadow was witness',⁵⁴ one is reminded of the vapid heroine of Twopence Coloured, Jackie Mortimer. It is as if these two clever young novelists felt compelled, in the late Twenties, to demonstrate a weary suspicion about fictive heroism by casting their principal characters as ciphers.

Twopence Coloured takes its heroine from petty bourgeois Brighton -- where, aged nineteen, she conceives an aspiration to become an actress -- through the gamut of English theatrical life to a small Sussex village and the promise of domestic bliss with the local squire, Charles Gissing (the brother of her dead lover, and fellow Thespian, Richard). Hamilton thought rather highly of this novel's critique of the banalities of the English theatre in the 1920s, describing the book in a letter to Bruce as, 'Better than C.H. More amorphous and powerful. And more propagandist. But just as funny.'⁵⁵ The seriousness of intent here expressed

⁵² R. Aldington, The Sunday Referee, 9 February 1930, 6, cited in M. Stannard, Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage, London, 1984, 104.

⁵³ The title derives from the twopenny coloured prints of characters for toy theatres popular in the Victorian era and bespeaks also a transferred sense of 'excessively theatrical; cheap and gaudy' -- OED.

⁵⁴ E. Waugh, Decline and Fall (1928), London, 1937, 122-3.

was undercut, to some extent, by the way the novel was packaged, marketed, and reviewed. The original title, The Player's Scourge, was rejected as being 'too portentous for its content',⁵⁶ and the TLS dismissed it as an 'amusing, garrulous and unambitious tale'.⁵⁷

Like its forbears, Twopence Coloured relies heavily on Patrick's personal experience. His (very beautiful) sister, 'Lalla', provided him with a model for Jackie. Under the stage-name, 'Diana Hamilton', Lalla was initiated into the theatre in the late summer of 1918 and, like Jackie, took up with an unhappily married actor-playwright (Vane Sutton Vane, the author of Outward Bound). In the autumn of 1921 Patrick followed in her footsteps by joining Vane's Company as an Assistant Stage Manager and bit-part player in a production of Vane's 'A Case of Diamonds'.⁵⁸ Patrick went on to appear in such things as Andrew Melville's production of the melodrama, 'The White Man',⁵⁹ but drew his brief but formative acting career to a close during his second tour with 'A Case of Diamonds' when he was 'queer bashed' by a drunken actor who had mistaken him for someone else.⁶⁰

Perhaps because her experiences are a composite of those of Patrick and his sister, Jackie is an ambiguously drawn figure who does not fit into either of the lineages of Patrick's fictional women -- for she is neither wholesomely good, nor sexually wicked. For much of the novel she functions as the effect, or rather victim, of the discourses of romantic fiction. Her mentor and lover, Richard, is virtually

⁵⁵ P.Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, June 1927, [AHA].

⁵⁶ B. Hamilton, The Light Went Out, London, 1972, 48.

⁵⁷ Times Literary Supplement, 10 May 1928, 360.

⁵⁸ B. Hamilton, PAT, 204. Since Lalla was also in the cast, Patrick assumed the stage-name of 'Henderson' to avoid justified accusations of nepotism (hence one of Patrick's 'campier' soubriquets, 'Henny').

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

required by the conventions which govern their ill-starred affair, to die -- and this he duly does, in dismal lodgings in Sheffield. His deadness affords Jackie some heart-rending little vignettes of the 'Show Must Go On' variety:

He would come in the dark and be close to her. And, "That's all right, Richard," she would say. "There's nothing to fret about. It was quite wonderful while it lasted, wasn't it? And we got the best out of it. If only we'd known we had such a little time, we might have wasted it less, but it was perfect while it lasted And it's quite all right, isn't it, Richard?"

And he would say, "Yes. That's right, Jackie. There's nothing really to regret. It's only over. Good-bye, darling.

Then, she thought, he could go back, and she could go on. It would be a mere aching tragedy -- no worse.⁶¹

Hamilton almost makes up for this kind of straightly-rendered mawkish sentimentality by scripting scenes for his heroine which generate a more bearable sympathy. For example, his defamiliarizing account of the rehearsals of the Chorus Line for Jackie's first show, "Little Girl", skilfully satirizes the sexist objectification of the female body entailed by that most tawdry of vaudeville traditions. Caught in a nightmare of rehearsal before an 'inhuman ... wilderness of dumb seats',⁶² Jackie finds herself,

supported on each side, as though being carried away after an accident, by two long rows of scented, exceptionally solid, insouciant [a favourite 'huffy' Hamilton word this], rather surly and rhythmically shuffling feminine flesh.

And after every five steps or so to the right, Jackie, along with her rows of supporters, gave a large kick ... out at the solid wilderness in front; and after every five steps to the left, she did the same in that direction.⁶³

By breaking the performance down into individual actions,

⁶¹ P. Hamilton, Twopence Coloured, London, 1928, 293.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

then comparing Jackie with a partially incapacitated accident victim, and speaking of the mechanical 'shuffling' of the women in the Line, Hamilton conveys well the dehumanizing nature of this 'titillating' act. He continues in this vein briefly before tartly emphasizing in conclusion that Jackie was not 'enjoying her art at all. In fact, she would far rather try some other art (Brick-laying, for instance), any day'.⁶⁴

The reader is also engaged with Jackie through the use of the second-person pronoun, as in the following confidingly anecdotal excerpt where theatrical producers who sexually harass aspiring actresses as a matter of routine are lampooned:

you at last found yourself in a small room where your producer ... would by slow degrees familiarize himself with your hand, look into your eyes and murmur, "You don't want a job. What do you want a job for?" Your producer did not say this because he really thought you didn't want a job ... but because he was not, at the moment, concentrating upon his profession, but dallying with matters nearer his heart.⁶⁵

This (admittedly rather genteel) *aperçu* is one of a whole series which Jackie, as the focaliser of the narration, is granted. Just as these insights are ascribable, then, to her narrative function, so also her ultimate fate is explicable as an effect of the dominant literary discourse informing Twopence Coloured: once again, marriage is Victorianly mobilized to stem the generation of further narrative.

In her resignation telegram to her last director, Jackie writes: 'I am tired of all this acting, so will not come up today.'⁶⁶ The word 'acting' here connotes histrionics in general and is consonant with, for example, that critique of the theatricalization of bourgeois social life in the Twenties articulated by Vile Bodies.⁶⁷ The implication is that Jackie

⁶⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 296.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 354.

now desires a 'real' life in that 'other' of the glitzy, public realm of the theatre -- the domestic space of *home*. And so she flees to Richard's quiet and manly cricketing brother, Charles, whose earlier proposal of marriage she had turned down in favour of a continued career on the Stage. Her intention is to live with him in his village of Knottley Lodge, which, with its 'fast-rising local Fascist organizations',⁶⁸ promises Arcadia indeed!

This taint of Fascism besmirches the terminus of Jackie's voyage of self-discovery, but it is not the only element to trouble the ending of Twopence Coloured. Philip Hobsbaum makes a comment about The Pickwick Papers which could also be applied to Hamilton's picaresque novel:

In the end, we do not much care about Pickwick and his three friends gallivanting about the countryside. Rather it is the set-pieces of the Pickwick trial and the Sawyer party that have prior claim on our attention.⁶⁹

Similarly, it is the stagey episodes of Twopence Coloured, which exhibit a delight in the affected theatricality ostensibly under critique, that remain in the memory. One such scene occurs in Richard Gissing's dressing-room, early in the novel, after he has played 'Dick Dudgeon' in George Bernard Shaw's The Devil's Disciple. Jackie has come backstage and is treated to an actorly altercation between her new-found mentor and his fellow performer, Mr. Grayson.

⁶⁷ A 'too, too' ghastly image of this theatricalization is invoked in Vile Bodies by Agatha Runcible's recollection of a dream she has had while convalescing in a nursing home from her madcap racing-car accident: 'I thought we were all driving round and round in a motor race and none of us could stop, and there was an enormous audience composed entirely of gossip writers and gate crashers ... all shouting at us at once to go faster, and car after car kept crashing until I was left all alone driving and driving'. -- Waugh, 1938, 188.

⁶⁸ P. Hamilton, 1929, 184.

⁶⁹ P. Hobsbaum, A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens, London 1972, 36.

Regularly punching together his white kid-gloved hands, the latter banteringly addresses Richard thus: "Well, and how are we tonight, Mr. Gissing?"⁷⁰ The royal 'we' here communicates at once indifference and camaraderie; the punching hints at an incipient row simmering beneath the surface.

"The Great British Public in a curious mood this evening, I think?" hazarded Mr. Grayson. [Denying it a verb!]

"Really?"

"Or do I malign the Great British Public?"

"I thought they were rather sweet."

"Yes. You would. Poor old Dabell, though. He nearly passed out about his round. It's the first time the dear old thing's missed it since we opened."⁷¹

The contemptuous enunciation and repetition of the cliché, 'Great British Public', the word 'sweet', the arch emphases, and the 'dear old thing' phrase, all bespeak a 'bitchy' discourse of camp. Grayson then inveigles Jackie into framing Richard with a mock-derisive gaze:

"I mean, *look* at him, I mean," said Mr. Grayson, "I mean, have you *ever*? *Did* you ever? I mean, I could understand it if there was any *talent* Or any looks even It must be influence, that's all. What do you think, Miss Mortimer?"⁷²

Grayson's affected manner is meant to be an object of satire, but the pugnacious élan of his badinage entertains, even so.⁷³

⁷⁰ P. Hamilton, 1928, 60.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 61.

⁷³ The same Grayson is later involved in a contretemps with a Mr. Place, who, 'with his Thousand and One Old Actor's Tricks,' endeavours 'to Queer him' in rehearsal (229). Their duel is rendered on the page in dramatic form, and in this suggests the extent of the imbrication of these actors in theatrical discourse in a manner reminiscent of (say) Dickens in Nicholas

As with Hamilton's other early novels (especially), this archness of tone in Twopence Coloured is articulated with a narrative voice which omnisciently orchestrates a hierarchy of discourses within the fiction.⁷⁴ The following excerpt from the opening section of the novel exemplifies those features typical of Hamilton's prose style:

For experience has exhibited, with respect to Managers, that although there may yet be a certain quantity extant who (as this girl imagined the greater part of them do) relieve their daily energies in a nefarious round of cigar-eating, champagne-drinking, being bloated, buying souls, and turning beautiful and trusting creatures into Things and so forth -- and although there can never be any natural guarantee against the acquirement of any of the above-mentioned characteristics by Managers -- they are a great deal more likely to appear in everyday affairs as middle-aged and heavily married bodies, in the habit of returning to their wives punctually for supper For the domesticity of the average Manager, experience would affirm, is as pious as it is proverbial.⁷⁵

This syntactically complex sentence -- with its parentheses, its concessive clauses, and its pile-up of agent-deleting, mechanical verbal nouns -- is nevertheless neatly balanced ('experience has exhibited'/'experience would affirm'). Illustrated here is a desire for control on the part of the ironic authorial voice which can be seen more strikingly in another of the novel's dressing-room scenes, where the narrator's master discourse subordinates and mocks that of the Chorus girls in "Little Girl". To be fair, there is an attempt made here to demystify femininity ('This is a place of flesh, and blood, and sinew, and human need'),⁷⁶ but the general timbre of the narration is superciliously ironic. Jackie's receipt of a gift of a book of Shelley's poetry

Nickleby -- see, for example, the fustian altercation between Nicholas and Mr. Lenville in Dickens, 1950, 379-80.

⁷⁴ For the theory informing the formulation of this sentence, see C. Belsey, Critical Practice, London, 1980, 74-80.

⁷⁵ P. Hamilton, 1928, 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

provokes a barrage of mildly salacious jokes, which are rendered indirectly as in the following: 'Here Miss Hawke again arrogantly reveals herself as no woman of letters, by remarking that she (if given Five Minutes for the purpose) would take some of the Shell out of him.'⁷⁷ The feyness with which Hamilton marks some of the women's conversation as 'unprintable' (with a dash), contrasts ill with the titillation afforded by his description of a wrestling match between two of them, each clad in the 'flimsiest of clothes':⁷⁸ 'Whereat both ladies began to pant very hard, and to push very hard, and to look very amiable very hard, and to grit their teeth and strain.'⁷⁹ The sneering sarcasm audible in the enunciation of the (horrible) word 'ladies' betokens a sexism unworthy of Hamilton's early (albeit partial) feminism.⁸⁰

The word which the great Russian Marxist literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin would have applied to Hamilton's mode of narration is 'monologic:

All confirmed ideas are merged in the unity of the author's seeing and representing consciousness: the unconfirmed ideas are distributed among the heroes, no longer as signifying ideas, but rather as socially typical or individually characteristic manifestations of thought. The one who knows, understands, and sees is in the first instance the author himself.⁸¹

This sense of an author is as important to the young Patrick Hamilton (especially) as it was to his lodestar, Dickens, and is consonant with the Victorian conjuration of marriage as

⁷⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The entire episode is strongly redolent of Waugh's sexist account of the dressing-room antics of Miss Melrose ape's 'angels' at Lady Metroland's house in Vile Bodies [Waugh, 1938, 93-4].

⁸¹ M.M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, trans., Caryl Emerson, Manchester, 1984, 82.

(in Steven Connor's words) 'an image of a naturalized system, an entry into Symbolic relations without the splitting of the self'.⁸² Twopence Coloured was, however, destined to be the last novel in which Hamilton (himself married for the first time in 1930) tried to endorse that marital image; moreover, his brother records that, after its publication, he began to go 'a little off Dickens' in general.⁸³

The penchant for the monologic would remain though, intertwined with the recollection of autobiographical experience -- particularly in his next novel, The Midnight Bell. This addiction to self-narration (together with a fussily mannered prose style and a weakness for caricature) Hamilton shares with Christopher Isherwood, who learned *his* acting in the Auden troupe, and who seems to have devoted most of his life to writing his autobiography. It is as if some of the sensitive members of that generation (perhaps publishing prematurely because of the virtual absence of the generation immediately before them) felt a compulsion to 'get a fix' on their own stories in order to begin to establish a coherent world-view. In Hamilton's case (-history), the ingestion of the philosophy of Marxism, from 1933 onwards, would at least render more profound the monologism evinced in his lightweight fiction of the Twenties.

⁸² S. Connor, Charles Dickens, London, 1985, 164.

⁸³ PAT, 264,

Chapter Seven

The Last Days of London

I have "Das Kapital" up here with me and to my joy am finding it within my grasp In a study of Marx I am finding that my brief excursions into philosophy are standing me in good stead -- enabling me to get the real hang of the meaning of dialectical materialism and the actual philosophical and historical basis of the whole show.

This thing means something to me. It is not a game -- like all my other romps -- it is my vocation -- however humble the part I play. It is not only my religion -- it is my hobby -- the details interest me -- in the same way that stamps interest a philatelist. For this reason I am in a position to master it -- as I mastered novel writing.

Patrick Hamilton, in a letter to his brother, Bruce Hamilton, written from Overy Staithe, King's Lynn, 25 September 1933, 2-5 (source: AHA).

In Twopence Coloured, Jackie Mortimer's rustic retreat from the theatrical world of London is redolent of an entire tradition of pastoralism embedded in nineteenth-century English drama. Michael Booth reminds us that the figuration of rural life as a 'lost Eden appears again and again in plays seen and enjoyed by metropolitan audiences in their tens of thousands',¹ in Victorian London. Jackie's sequestration in that bucolic seed-bed of Fascism, Knottley Lodge, stands as a rebuke to that pastoral 'ideal'. Not avoidance of the city, but critical engagement with its complexities, is to be the watchword of Patrick Hamilton's fiction of the Thirties and Forties. In this he will follow Rupert Cadell's injunction in Rope -- a play first performed one month after the

¹ M. Booth, 'The Metropolis on Stage', in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), The Victorian City, cited in F.S. Schwarzbach, Dickens and the City, London, 1979, 21.

publication of The Midnight Bell (March 1929) -- to 'do up to date'² Oliver Goldsmith's A City Night-piece and recuperate thereby the acerbity of that commination against the immorality of Ancient Rome for an indictment of the contemporary malaise afflicting London, as a gargantuan capitalist metropolis.

In May 1927 Hamilton recounted to his brother his 'extraordinary expeditions' into Soho, where he mixed 'a great deal with the courtesans therein, and also the low life'.³ He went on to declare that:

it has always been one of my leading ambitions to write about the life of servants -- particularly female ones -- and their oppressed hideous conditions. And it's also been my ambition to write about harlots it's suddenly occurred to me to write a novel which is about both servants and harlots (possibly the slow transformation of the one into the other).⁴

These ambitions were to fructify in The Siege of Pleasure (1932), the second novel of the trilogy, Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky (1935). Its heroine, Jenny Taylor (eventually 'Jenny Maple'), had a real life prototype in the shape of Lily Connolly, a West End prostitute with whom Patrick, following in his father's footsteps, fell in love in the late Twenties. We have Bruce Hamilton's (possibly jaundiced) testimony that Lily

played hell with her ardent but still relatively innocent and impecunious lover, taking all and giving nothing, making and breaking appointments as the whim (or the exigencies of her trade) moved her, and reducing him to a condition of helpless despair rarely broken by moments of delirious happiness.⁵

Patrick's confidante in his pursuit of Lily was his mother,

² P. Hamilton, Rope, London, 1929, 54.

³ P. Hamilton, letter from Chiswick, May 1927 [AHA].

⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵ B. Hamilton, The Light Went Out, London, 1972, 52.

whose letters to her gallivanting son -- in the words of a current Hamilton biographer, Nigel Jones -- 'make Proust's relationship with his mother look distant'.⁶

The final novel of the trilogy, The Plains of Cement (1935), written after the end of the Lily Connolly business and following the suicide of Ellen Adele Hamilton, is a (blessedly) less autobiographical text which also benefits from Hamilton's ingestion, in 1933 and 1934, of Marxism -- a thought-system which augmented his existing analytical capacities and (in my view) improved him as a novelist. By the time he came to write The Plains of Cement, Hamilton had decided to present the entire trilogy as

a kind of London cycle, in which the lives of a number of insignificant people could be made to symbolize those of the rootless millions whose perplexed quest for happiness was foredoomed to frustration amidst the heartless anonymity of a great city stonily indifferent to their destinies.⁷

The extent to which he succeeded in thematizing the capitalist urban condition in the 1930s is a question which will be addressed in the final part of this chapter -- to some extent by way of comparison with the work of two other Marxist novelists of the period, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and John Sommerfield. The nature of Hamilton's Marxism and its impact on his art will be considered in a section subsequent to a character-based account of each of the three novels.

In Bruce's words, The Midnight Bell was the story of Patrick's 'enslavement to Lily, tailored to the needs of fiction and form'.⁸ The vessel for this story is a sailor-turned-waiter called Bob, an aspirant author in his mid-twenties, of Irish and American parentage. His 'pert companion in toil', at

⁶ N. Jones, 'Through a Glass Darkly', The Printer's Devil, Kent, 1990, 77.

⁷ B. Hamilton, 1972, 66.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

'The Midnight Bell' pub (in the vicinity of the Euston Road and Warren Street) is Ella, 'a humming, buoyant' young woman who is silently in love with him.⁹ Alas for her, Bob becomes infatuated with the prostitute, Jenny, on whom he squanders his eighty pounds savings, before, chastened, resolving to return to life on the ocean wave.

Bob is endowed with Hamilton's own growing addiction to the evanescent pleasures of alcohol. His drinking bouts and subsequent hangovers are related in knowledgeable detail, extending beyond the narration of excitement followed by remorse to include such things as the 'drunkard's interlude' in the small hours -- 'giddy but horribly lucid',¹⁰ and the ravenous 'false hunger'¹¹ of the intoxicated. This theme of intoxication is related to the effect that Jenny -- and the always deferred promise of the transient pleasures she represents -- has on the waiter of 'The Midnight Bell'. When Jenny and her friend Prunella first enter Bob's pub it is the three beers he has already consumed which, 'plotting their subtle loosening along his brain',¹² impell him into intercourse with them. In a later episode, having finally located an errant Jenny in Shaftesbury Avenue, Bob finds, as she is due to leave him, his 'grammar ... in pieces'.¹³ Thus she effects the same order of linguistic disruption as does alcohol, a phenomenon which goes to the very core of Bob, the would-be writer. On the third fateful occasion when Jenny breaks her appointment with him he finds himself 'beyond responding to the situation. He must find her, that was all'.¹⁴ This intellectually paralyzed state of compulsion

⁹ P. Hamilton, Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky (1935) repr., London 1987, 13 and 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

epitomizes the zombified condition to which Bob has allowed Jenny to bring him. By the time of his final, Boxing Day, disappointment (when Jenny fails to appear at Victoria when due to go on holiday to Brighton with him), Bob has become an alcoholic automaton, a self-deceiving actor:

Bob conceived it his duty to get wildly drunk and do mad things. He had no authentic craving to do so: he merely objectivized himself as an abused and terrible character, and surrendered to the explicit demands of drama'.¹⁵

The self-conscious role-playing which animates Bob's final, cathartic, binge is presented as inherent in his character throughout. Wandering the streets of the West End in pursuit of Jenny -- or a film, or nothing in particular -- Bob's mentality approaches that of the Baudelairian *flâneur* as elucidated by Walter Benjamin:

For him [Edgar Allan Poe], as for Engels, there was something menacing in the spectacle they [the urban masses] presented. It is precisely this image of the big city crowds that became decisive for Baudelaire. If he succumbed to the force by which he was drawn to them and, as a *flâneur*, was made one of them, he was nevertheless unable to rid himself of their essentially inhuman makeup. He becomes their accomplice even as he dissociates himself from them. He becomes deeply involved with them, only to relegate them to oblivion with a single glance of contempt.¹⁶

Periodically succumbing to the 'extraordinary allure of walking around'¹⁷ the city streets at night, the waiter of 'The Midnight Bell' maintains on such occasions an attitude of hauteur:

Bob was not susceptible to the faintest glimmering of the fact that the people he was passing in the street really existed. He observed their faces, he even caught their eyes, but he had no notion of their entity other

¹⁵ Ibid., 211.

¹⁶ W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London, 1973, 173-4.

¹⁷ Hamilton, 1987, 70.

than as inexplicable objects moving about in that vast disporting-place of his own soul -- London.¹⁸

The consonant vainglorious belief that he is 'something better than his fellow men',¹⁹ is, for Bob, a conviction to which he invariably returns for solace whenever jilted by Jenny; and it is this 'priggish conceit',²⁰ fortified by his savings, which motivates his relationship with her in the first place. When he first decides to give Jenny some money (to help with her rent), he senses a secret frisson before handing over the 'doings' (outside, in the street):²¹ 'It was almost as though he were making love to her.'²² Perversely, he is sanctimoniously exulting in the paradox of giving money to a prostitute for 'nothing'. For it is clear that Jenny's fascination resides in the contradictions generated around her social identity as a prostitute. When she kisses him his heart leaps at the thought of her tainted innocence as a Whore-Madonna: 'The kiss of a wicked woman -- the kiss of Sin! A miraculous and exhilarating contradiction!'²³

There is something profoundly masochistic in Bob's infatuation with Jenny. It is as if her sexuality is more magnetic still because it is perceived as possessed by scores of other men. In Deceit, Desire and the Novel, René Girard stresses the particular importance of triangulation in masochistic sexuality, where the prestige of the rival is 'imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusory value. Triangular desire is the desire which transfigures its object'.²⁴ At the 'Globe' in Leicester

¹⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹ Ibid., 196.

²⁰ Ibid., 45.

²¹ Ibid., 38.

²² Ibid., 37.

²³ Ibid., 82.

²⁴ R. Girard, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, trans., Y. Freccero, Baltimore,

Square, Bob watches Jenny dancing:

He observed her body, embraced by another, as he had embraced it, swaying to the tune. A kind of jealous sense of ownership prompted him to smile at her nearly every time she came round. She never failed him. She was phenomenally desirable, and he was proud of her. He had never had such a delightful evening. He was drunk.²⁵

Jenny's ultimate revelation to this would-be husband that her body has been 'officially' possessed by another man in marriage secures Bob's masochistic enthrallment:

After this he was prostrate before her. She had got him beaten. He loved her. He adored her Another, before him, had known the same. They were both beggars for her kindness. Was there some magic in her? He looked at her. Yes, assuredly she was magic. She seemed transcended with an unholy beauty.²⁶

Note once again the satanic oxymoron, 'unholy beauty', and the highlighting of the male rival in this discourse 'between men'.²⁷

Of course, were Bob to transform Jenny, through marital ownership, from a prostitute into a wife he would not only slake his desire but extinguish it, since it is always-already through the category of 'a prostitute' that he apprehends her. After coming close to realizing this on Westminster Bridge early in the morning after his binge, Bob looks across the Thames and is inspired:

The river, full to the brim, sped quickly by, wallowing in its liquid and twinkling plenitude -- flowing out to the sea -- flowing out to the sea
The sea! The sea! What of the sea?

1965, 17.

²⁵ Hamilton, 1987, 59.

²⁶ Ibid., 140.

²⁷ The inverted commas here are by way of allusion to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Between Men, New York, 1985, drawn on in chapter two of this thesis.

The sea!

The solution -- salvation! The sea! Why not? He would go back, like the great river, to the sea! To the sea of his early youth -- the mighty and motherly sea -- that rolled over and around the earth!²⁸

This (ridiculously overwritten) passage echoes the beginning of the novel, when Bob, in a drunken stupor, dreams of setting to sea, and it highlights this character's felt need to be cleansed and healed (by maternal saline). With its sing-song repetitiousness, irritating ejaculations, and sentimental feyness ('twinkling plenitude'), this paen amounts to no more than a romantic gesture. Ken Worpole has demonstrated how this idea of flight (to sea) is one prevalent in the fiction of such working-class Thirties novelists as James Hanley, George Garrett, and Jim Phelan:²⁹ but with those writers the trope is fleshed out and laid bare as inadequate (for example, the hero of Hanley's Boy, James Fearon, is mercifully released from a hellish maritime existence by death).³⁰

I shall briefly return to this matter of the hollowness of the strained climax of The Midnight Bell at a later point; just now I wish to turn to the object of Bob's adoration and 'her' volume of Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky.

Initially, The Siege of Pleasure follows on chronologically from its predecessor, but the bulk of the novella takes place some five years earlier. Unlike its two companion volumes, Jenny's story is given chapter headings ('The Treasure', 'A Glass of Port', and 'The Morning After'), a prologue and a conclusion -- features which implicate its instructional nature as a cautionary tale relating the 'downfall' of a servant-girl.

The voice which narrates this story polices and marks as inferior the discourse of Jenny. We can see as an example of

²⁸ Hamilton, 1987, 220.

²⁹ K. Worpole, Dockers and Detectives, London, 1983, 83-88.

³⁰ J. Hanley, Boy (1931), London, 1990, 190.

this linguistically superior placing of the prostitute's prattle in the following excerpt from The Midnight Bell:

"I like music," she said. "Don't you?"

Bob said that he did.

"Specially them waltzes", she added, "an' all those Sad ones. Don't you?"

"Yes. I do. I think that the waltz is the best of the lot."

"You know what I mean." She was in great travail to make herself clear. "I ain't sloppy, but I think I got a taste for Good Music, like. You know what I *mean*."³¹

The capitalization of her clichés (a device generally overused by Hamilton), and the interruption of her flow by the dry barb, 'She was in great travail to make herself clear', ('travail' being a word belonging to Hamilton's register, not Jenny's) invites the reader to mock the poverty of the street-girl's parlance. In The Siege of Pleasure -- with Jenny now as the focalizing character -- Hamilton proceeds further by parodying her thoughts from within her 'own' internal discourse. For example, in the following passage 'literary' inversion structures have been infiltrated into Jenny's (indirectly rendered) drunken ruminations on a 'suggestion' made by one of the two men who pick up her and her 'boy-mad' friend Violet in Hammersmith Broadway (before Jenny's descent into prostitution):

Nobody had ever "made suggestions" to Jenny in her life before. It was the sort of thing, she knew, which inevitably befell "fast" girls who went into pubs. But was she not in a pub herself, had she not within the last hour awakened to new things, stepped forth from the limited apparel of prudery?³²

This is not, of course, how an eighteen-year-old working-class woman would think: but it is how Patrick Hamilton, as monologic author, insists on making available her thoughts.

³¹ Hamilton, 1987, 51.

³² Ibid., 281.

Another aspect of the authorial trammelling of Jenny's thought processes is the tendency towards hysterical self-interrogation with which she is endowed. The event which generates most of these bouts of mental torture is the car accident in which she is implicated (as a passenger in the guilty vehicle). While one of the other passengers -- to whose Richmond house she has been brought, and who is eventually instrumental in her ruin -- splashes around 'like a freshly captured seal'³³ in his bath, Jenny frantically worries about getting to her second day at work:

How cruel he was. Could she instil no sense of urgency into him? He seemed without care. Why didn't he offer to forgo his bath? Suppose she asked him to? She must ask him. But how? How dare she interpose her "skivvy's" will between a "gentleman" and his bath?³⁴

These question pile-ups become rather tiresome but they are nonetheless significant since they indicate the author's role as the agent who polices the characters' discourses. When Jenny laments that, 'the police found out everything. They were like God -- they knew everything and punished all',³⁵ she unwittingly bespeaks the power of her creator, Patrick Hamilton.

However, Jenny is not merely a *tabula rasa* for the narrator of her tale, she is also so for everyone she encounters. On reading her various 'opinions' in The Midnight Bell, we realize that these are drawn from a compendium of commonplaces gathered from her professional clientelle (which includes clergymen and authors). Following Bob's reference to Mrs. Warren's Profession, she ventriloquizes that she only reads the "'threepenny dreadful stuff ... written for factory girls"³⁶ And in a discussion with Bob and her

³³ Ibid., 309.

³⁴ Ibid., 281.

³⁵ Ibid., 305.

friend, Prunella, she 'sternly' informs them that she does not believe that 'the Races should Intermix'.³⁷ Like a chameleon she takes her colour from the surrounding environment, playing the part, for example, of a 'Treasure' at the Chiswick house of the old folks (Marion, Bella, and Robert) in The Siege of Pleasure. As Hamilton comments of her 'character' at this stage in her career:

Though not frequently inspired with true generosity, she had no active evil in her soul, and her gift of pleasing was as yet an invaluable discipline in her conduct If Jenny desired to continue pleasing (and she desired this keenly, since pleasing people was by now almost her hobby), she had to live up to her reputation.³⁸

With 'no active evil in her soul', with an infinitely malleable sensibility, she functions as a blank screen onto which others (especially men) project their own fantasies -- a feature which renders her suitable for both prostitution and domestic service.

Another facet of Jenny's character which facilitates her professional life is her sexlessness. Michael Holroyd (in his introduction to the 1987 reprint of the book) thinks it is 'one of the ironies of the trilogy that the prostitute is sexless and the barmaid, Ella does not drink'.³⁹ These conundra are not so baffling, though. If Jenny is an empty vessel in all other respects then why not in this? Unfortunately, when Hamilton does try to flesh out the psychology of a Jenny figure the result is the misogynist depiction of Netta Longdon in Hangover Square. Moreover, there is a sense in which Jenny's spectacular lack of development (one small index of which is the tenacity of the word 'glaring' as 'the final epithet of impeachment in [her] genteel vocabulary')⁴⁰ is profoundly

³⁶ Ibid., 137.

³⁷ Ibid., 175.

³⁸ Ibid., 248.

³⁹ Ibid., 6.

significant. For Jenny does, it is evident, fall into prostitution because of some great change of fortune (she could easily remain in Chiswickian domestic service, itself a form of prostitution), and she is not utterly transformed by the experience: in other words, Hamilton is making the salutary point that 'harlots' are ordinary people).

However, the equivalencing of prostitution and wage-slavery, as foregrounded by The Siege of Pleasure and illustrated by the following epistolary comment by its author, is surely problematic. To Bruce, Patrick wrote in 1927: 'if you reject a courtesan's commodity, you might just as well reject a poached egg from a waitress in a sweat restaurant'.⁴¹ Now while there may be some polemical value in scandalizing bourgeois propriety by denouncing all wage-labour as a form of prostitution, it is also, more saliently, the case that people who sell their labour power are structurally endowed with a capacity to collectively transform society denied to those who 'merely' sell their bodies. Moreover, in the 1930s, the proportion of the British population engaged in domestic service had shrivelled to only five per cent,⁴² whereas there had been an enormous increase in the number of women in other sectors of the workforce, particularly in factories and offices.⁴³ Yet, Hamilton's repertoire of women characters remained restricted to servants, prostitutes, and (at best) barmaids. It is to his portrayal of a woman in the latter category that I shall now turn.

Ella's story, The Plains of Cement, spans the same time-scale as The Midnight Bell, ending this cycle of novels by, in

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 258. Here this word is applied to Violet; in The Midnight Bell it is applied to the 'Governor's Wife', 183.

⁴¹ P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, Chiswick, 1927, [AHA].

⁴² A. Prochaska, London in the Thirties, London, 1973, 7.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

part, reaccentuating episodes rendered in the earlier book -- although the main part of the narrative is concerned with a new story-line, the beseiging courtship of Ella by the appalling Mr. Eccles (an incorrigibly shy and amazingly egocentric middle-aged gentleman from Chiswick). Eventually, inspired by her idealization of Bob, Ella manages to slough off her importunate suitor and shrug off both the recovery from illness of her detested step-father and her failure to secure a position as a nanny with an India-bound Hampstead family. Her unrequited love for Bob outlasts his departure, though.

Whereas the narrative voice in The Siege of Pleasure functions to put Jenny in her place, in The Plains of Cement the main female character is cosseted in hers. For example, Eccles' opening advances to Ella are refracted through a lengthy authorial rendition of her thoughts:

"By the way," he said with another smile, "I don't think you *know* my name, yet, do you?"

"Why, no. I don't believe I do. What is it?" She replied thus at once in a smiling and off-hand way, as she busied herself with putting his money in the till: but secretly she knew that her worse misgivings had received further nourishment ... the "yet" scared her. "You don't know my name *yet*." What did that infer? What else, but that there was some obligation on her part to know his name in the end, that she had by suggestion admitted some compact with him wherein the knowing of his name was a necessary, an immanent step leading to involvement beyond? She felt trapped in the meshes of that "yet", and her spirit strove to escape.⁴⁴

These thoughts, of which Ella gives 'no sign',⁴⁵ continue well beyond the time-span she would have available to think them in. The narrator is here paying the barmaid a serious compliment in allowing her a complex mental life belied by her outward demeanour. The syntax and vocabulary are not

⁴⁴ Hamilton, 1987, 339.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 340.

hers, however: the subordinate clause with hyper-correct 'wherein' and the verbal noun 'knowing'; the Hegelian nuance of 'immanent'; the prefix 'en-' in the metaphorical phrase, 'entrapped in the meshes of that "yet"' -- all these features announce the register of Patrick Hamilton rather than that of Ella Dawson.

Yet the linguistic licence enjoyed by Ella is quite remarkable for a Hamilton character. Although invariably employing the 'stale and hackneyed expressions'⁴⁶ of the sort usually articulated by the butts of this author's pasquinades, she is indulged in this vice, endowed as she is with the capacity to breathe 'life into old forms'.⁴⁷ Similarly, unlike the majority of this author's female characters, she is allowed to 'vamp' without penalty:

a strange little thrill of power and exaltation ran through her as she realized that she was, perhaps for the first time in her life, flirting with, "encouraging", and to some extent prostrating a male. But then, so many strange things had happened since half-past two in the afternoon, and why should she not have her share of such sensations?⁴⁸

Why not indeed? The fetching whimsicality of 'half-past two in the afternoon' precludes any other kind of response.

A set of blinkers is also clapped on Ella though. We are told that she functions at 'The Midnight Bell' by virtue of a 'sovereign blindness' to the seedier side of the lives of its habitués. This impercipient also characterizes her understanding of Mr. Eccles. Although the matrimonial intentions of the latter are as plain as the plainest of pikestaffs to the reader, Ella is depicted as dumbfoundedly perplexed by 'the mystery of his pursuit'⁴⁹ for much of the novel. Similarly, despite a close acquaintanceship with her

⁴⁶ Ibid., 335.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 376.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 384 .

downwardly mobile stepfather, Mr. Prosser, as someone 'uncomprehending of social causation' she can (unlike Hamilton) see 'no excuse' for his ill-tempered taciturnity.⁵⁰ The narrator also tends to confine Ella's thoughts within a straight-jacket similar to that strapped on Jenny in The Siege of Pleasure. For example, on the morning after her first (ultimately farcical) date with Eccles she is plagued by a barrage of self-recriminating questions:

Well, that was that -- she had Put him Off, and she supposed she was relieved in a way. But was not this Putting Off symptomatic of the general miscarriage of her technique and manners? Was she not always Putting people Off with her childishness and self-consciousness? Why must she always be so critical, why couldn't she have let Mr. Eccles go on saying "What" and embracing her? Who did she think she was, that she could be so fastidious? And she proceeded to loathe and castigate herself.⁵¹

Of course, the controlling voice which interpellates Ella thus is that of the narrator: again we have an indirect formulation of mental activity supposedly 'internal' to the character, again the authorial markings (here the capitalization of the cliché and the uncontracted form of the questions). Since Ella is shown throughout as frustratedly maternal, the occurrence of the word 'miscarriage' in this bout of self-flagellation is of significance too. Her deepest fear is thus revealed to be that, in aborting relationships such as that with Mr. Eccles she is also aborting the unconceived foetus for which she longs.

This maternal bent is consistently underscored. In The Midnight Bell her badinage with the customers is pointedly desexualized by the narrative voice:

She had only one sin: she was without beauty. But she had all the heart-breaking desires, and you could see them there, on her charming face, as she laughingly and maternally answered -- a creature eternally maternal,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 391.

⁵¹ Ibid., 385.

eternally fruitless -- the insincere compliments of the men.⁵²

Ella has not the function of the mother, but instead behaves according to the *nostra* of an idealized conception of motherhood. The misapprehension of children entailed by this mode of behaviour is borne out by her misplaced indulgence of Eric, the schoolboy grandson of the Governor of 'The Midnight Bell', in The Plains of Cement. This 'healthy yet loathsome little boy' sports a 'green school cap'⁵³ of the kind which reappears in Hamilton's oeuvre on the maleficent head of Ernest Ralph Gorse in The West Pier.⁵⁴ Eric is a sadist who delights in tying Ella 'up into intellectual knots'⁵⁵ with questions derived from his school knowledge. From her he receives nothing but kindness right up to that moment when, bursting with 'a submerged snobbish hatred',⁵⁶ he physically assaults her.

The import of this presentation of Ella's maternity is mixed. It is clear that her muddle-headed desire to 'have something to do with "kids"',⁵⁷ together with her 'sternly conventional hierarchy of love'⁵⁸ (Mothers before Aunts, and so on), are being lampooned; but the bestowal of that green cap upon young Eric has to be taken into consideration here since it links him with Gorse and thus (since the latter's school career is similar to Patrick's) Hamilton himself. We have Bruce Hamilton's testimony that the models for the two eccentric old ladies who employ Jenny as a servant in The Siege of Pleasure were the brothers' mother and godmother.⁵⁹ In the year preceding the completion of The

⁵² Ibid., 209.

⁵³ Ibid., 386.

⁵⁴ P. Hamilton, The West Pier (1951), London, 1986, 42.

⁵⁵ Hamilton, 1987, 387 .

⁵⁶ Ibid., 489.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 447.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 445-6.

Plains of Cement, *Ellen Adele Hamilton* committed suicide and there is thus a sense in which the positive, though critical, portrayal of *Ella Dawson* signifies a guilty expiation for the satire of the previous volume of the trilogy.⁶⁰

We can discern the signs of this functioning of Ella as a mother-figure who is to be 'taken for granted and eventually ... left',⁶¹ in the novel's rendition of her corporeality and account of her sexuality. She is shown as a 'humming buoyant body'⁶² whose vitality, however, is far from sexually mature. At the theatre with Eccles, Ella's body becomes an infantile consortium: 'As soon as the curtain went up she surrendered to and prostrated herself before its illusions with the freshness and gravity of a child.'⁶³ In the matter of her unrequited love for Bob, she is a paragon of inconceivable self-control:

She was, she found, incapable of inspiring his tenderness. While another might have pined and sickened at this, she, in the efficiency and resource of her healthy character had automatically mastered and diverted her emotions and now, without languor or jealousy, bore him nothing but good will.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ B. Hamilton, 1972, 66.

⁶⁰ Patrick Hamilton's peculiarly 'close' relationship with his mother is borne out by the following (insincere?) compliments which feature in a letter probably written in 1930 concerning his marriage to his first wife, Lois Martin: 'My darling Mummie -- I am writing this to tell you that I have at last done what you, in your wickedness, have known all the time I probably would do -- married! I want to write and tell you that no woman on earth can come between me and my love and adoration of yourself. My love for you has been going on for twenty six years, and will never, never, abate. I shall never wander away, or regard you as anything but the first and loveliest woman on earth. I mean this, my own.' From 52 Upper Berkeley Street, London [AHA].

⁶¹ M. Holroyd, in Hamilton, 1987, 8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 348.

This, as with the depiction of Miss Roach in The Slaves of Solitude, would seem to be evidence that Hamilton could only present as 'good' those women characters who are (relatively) asexual, 'without languor'.

If Ella is a mother-icon she also represents, in a sense, that class which Hamilton had come to recognize as the agent of universal human emancipation, the working-class. Not that Ella is a communist worker -- far from it. But she does utilize her badge of class to clever effect -- as when she wields it as a weapon to secure a 'Stay of Engagement' from Eccles: "'Besides there's *my* people, too", she said, playing her trump card. "They're only poor people, you know. *They* haven't got an Aitch to their name."⁶⁵ This 'trump card' she plays one last time in writing her final letter of rejection to her 'gentleman' suitor: 'we are not in the same class',⁶⁶ she stresses -- with pride, not humility.

The Plains of Cement yokes together the disparate class discourses of Ella and Mr. Eccles, whose linguistic register bespeaks his Edwardian middle-class provenance. In a comical early exchange with a bemused Bob and Ella, Mr. Eccles reveals his cliché-encrusted outlook on the economics of life;

"But then everything's so expensive nowadays", said Mr. Eccles.

"Yes, it is", said Bob, and "You're right", said Ella, both of them imagining that Mr. Eccles was merely keeping the ball of conversation rolling. Oddly, however, with Mr. Eccles' next observation the ball came to a complete standstill.

"Unless one's looked into the matter", said Mr. Eccles....

Unless one's looked into the matter. Now what, wondered Bob and Ella, did that mean? How might a private person have looked into the social matter of the cost of commodities nowadays?

"I've got something comfortable put by", said Mr Eccles, italicizing his

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 429.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 501.

"I've" in a purely scientific and self-effacing distinction between himself and the poor devils who hadn't.⁶⁷

Here is satirized, through the leaden pomposity of Mr. Eccles, the peculiar petty-bourgeois belief that thrift and sensible speculation can defend one from the anarchic fluctuations of capitalism. Eccles is portrayed as an anachronistic figure in the eye of the storm of bourgeois modernity. Whereas Bob is at times reminiscent of the Baudelairian *flâneur*, Eccles reveals himself to be utterly bereft of that 'training' which Benjamin maintained was drilled into the inhabitant of the modern city:

Moving through the traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery ... today's pedestrians are obliged to [glance in all directions] in order to keep abreast of traffic signals. Thus technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training.⁶⁸

That this conditioning has gone very badly wrong serves as an index to Eccles' anachronicity: 'He had a peculiar way, particularly when crossing traffic (which always drove him mad) of going yellow in the face and saying, "come on!" or "Make up your mind then!" with uncontrollable spleen.'⁶⁹ This habit of 'quarrelling with the traffic'⁷⁰ also highlights Eccles' inflated sense of self-importance: it is as if the city exists for his own convenience. At one point we observe him 'strap-hanging' on a bus, 'peering out of the window, rather as though London were being partially managed by him'.⁷¹

Yet, to some extent, this proprietorial preciousness is a

⁶⁷ Ibid., 354-5.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, 1973, 177.

⁶⁹ Hamilton, 1987, 438.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 439.

⁷¹ Ibid., 372.

cover for a genuine vulnerability. Eccles is not so much a braggart and a bully -- in the manner of (say) Mr. Thwaites in The Slaves of Solitude -- but an intensely shy man who lives under a carapace of ritualized mannerisms, and a panoply of accessories. In his opening campaign against Ella he fortifies himself with a new hat which costs him 'sharp torture'⁷² to wear, since he cannot then see it on his head. The 'minute ostentation'⁷³ of his disrobement in restaurants is habitually followed by the creation of a 'private cloakroom for his innumerable accessories'.⁷⁴ These are 'Dickensian' touches, reminiscent of the portrayal of Mr. Augustus Minns in Sketches by Boz, whose 'brown silk umbrella' with its 'ivory handle'⁷⁵ functions as a ridiculous symbol of his dignity in a manner similar to that of Eccles' new hat.

The terrible shyness suggested by Eccles' chronic dependence on affectation is evinced in a terror of linguistic self-commitment. A 'terrific Oh nothings'⁷⁶ prone to hysterical spasms of 'whatting', he presents himself to Ella as an idiotic 'Houdini of the world of conversational commitments'.⁷⁷ She is forever baffled by the 'peculiarly non-committal'⁷⁸ nature of his missives and bewildered by his intentions. He seems pathologically incapable of being explicit, but, irritating though this may be, we realize that he is only protecting himself.

Less tolerable is his ludicrous misconstruction of Ella. At best he is patronizing towards her: "'I thought we were getting into the Tantrums for a moment.'"⁷⁹ More sinisterly,

⁷² Ibid., 338.

⁷³ Ibid., 368.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 304.

⁷⁵ C. Dickens, Sketches by Boz (1839), Oxford, 1957, 312.

⁷⁶ Hamilton, 1987, 369.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 417.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 403.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 443.

we are shown how he scripts an inappropriate part for her, manoeuvring her into situations where flirtatious behaviour is socially required. Following an imbecilic exchange about 'first Knowing' and 'having a Feeling',⁸⁰ Mr. Eccles (now to be called 'Ernest in Earnest') insinuates one of his suggestive questions into the conversation:

"You love to play with me, don't you?"

She could yet marvel at the blithe effrontery with which he took it on himself to write and produce her entire psychology and role in this light drama of bashful love, but she had no weapon with which she could meet him, and thought it best to play the game his way.

"Do I?", she said, for all the world as though roguishly confessing that she did.... "You little Puss!" said Mr. Eccles. You make me want to squeeze you!" Ella's soul went faint.⁸¹

As does the reader's. The mild hint of sexual sadism merely spices the awfulness of the stew into which Eccles is stirring Ella's emotions. The reader is securely positioned on Ella's side. Her invidious situation is that she cannot commit the *faux pas* of attacking Eccles head on and so she must needs play his game. When, following his revolting Christmas Eve letter (in which he styles himself 'Toodlums'), Mr. Eccles is finally given his come-uppance, we can only be pleased. And yet we realize that Eccles, too, is a victim of the discourse of romantic love and so we cannot loathe him. The entire affair counts among Hamilton's finest achievements in prose fiction, bringing together a sympathetic depiction of a female character, a flensing of the banalities of everyday discourse, and a Dickensian satirical portrait of a male character from the London world he knew best -- that of the (petty) bourgeoisie.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., 422.

⁸¹ Ibid., 423.

⁸² Arguably, the most entertaining episodes of Twenty Thousand Streets are the (Osbert) Sitwellian caricature of Hamilton's parents and godmother in chapters one and four of The Siege of Pleasure, and the farcical job interview

The elevation of The Plains of Cement above the level of its antecedents is due, in part, to Hamilton's conversion to Marxism in the year of Hitler's accession to power in Germany, 1933. Hamilton's cast of thought at the moment of Rope and The Midnight Bell was a curious mélange of fatalism and voluntarism:

I regard happiness, like pain and excitement, as a mere momentary and fortuitous occurrence, and I know that life is a great deal simpler when it is entirely thrown out of your calculations The truth is that no good will ever be done until somebody does it (the realization of this profundity is the secret of the success of such people as Mussolini and Lenin). And it is in the hands of anybody so inclined to do what he is fitted to do towards bringing about what he desires.⁸³

These are the ideas which animate the depiction of Bob, with his 'momentary and fortuitous' pleasures and his never-say-die decision to go back to sea and pick up his quill. The yoking together of Mussolini and Lenin betrays something of the naivety of these sentiments and echoes the strained triumphalism audible in the 'You can never make [men] ... say die' passage with which The Midnight Bell closes.⁸⁴

given Ella by the impossibly distant Mrs. E. Sanderson-Chantry (and her dog) in chapter twenty-five of The Plains of Cement. The former household is in Chiswick, the latter in Hampstead. Incidentally, Hamilton regarded Sitwell as 'the genius of our day'. [PAT, 471].

⁸³ P. Hamilton, 'The Faith of a Modern Young Man', Evening World, 3 March 1930, 8.

⁸⁴ Andrew Cramp is, I think right to describe the peroration on page 211 of The Midnight Bell as 'trite' and 'a major fault' in the novel' -- see his 'Prose Fiction in the 1930s: Elizabeth Bowen, Rex Warner, and Patrick Hamilton', Ph. D., University of Loughborough, 1984, 325. The passage does have its admirers, however, and is highlighted by Andy Croft as illustrative of 'the argument of all Hamilton's fiction, the enduring capacity of ordinary people - the common people -- for optimism, generosity and goodness'. [A. Croft, Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s, London, 1990, 145.]

Personally, I consider this to be an overly rosy conception of Hamilton's work, which is, if anything, fascinated by the 'enduring capacity' of human beings for evil.

Ironically, in view of his later apostasy, it was Bruce Hamilton who first introduced his brother to Marxism, fired up with an enthusiasm for the 'Russian Experiment'. Bruce felt that, 'with all its imperfections and teething troubles the Soviet Union might be pointing to the whole western world a way out of its apathy, defeatism and political cynicism',⁸⁵ convinced as he was by the popularizing tracts of the chief English prolocutor for Stalinism in those years, John Strachey.⁸⁶ Unlike Bruce, Patrick never ventured to the 'socialist sixth of the world' himself, but he did make a thoroughgoing study of the work of Karl Marx. To Bruce (in Russia) he wrote enthusiastically in October 1933: 'I am sweating (a terrible task) at "Capital" now. But I am winning, and thrilled by every word of it. What a book!'⁸⁷ This intellectual engagement with classical Marxism was supplemented by subscriptions to official Communist publications, of which he wrote, '[I] really believe that one may have found some form of adult replica of the weekly bliss of the "Magnet" or "Gem"!'⁸⁸ While perhaps suggesting the rather puerile nature of Hamilton's 'commitment' (Bruce records that his brother, 'never became a party member or any sort of an activist')⁸⁹ this comment is also a quirky demonstration of the serious extent to which Marxism permeated his intellectual life.

Bruce Hamilton was of the opinion that his brother's preoccupation with Marxism interfered with 'the work for which he was supremely gifted',⁹⁰ and that his conversion

⁸⁵ PAT, 341.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 342.

⁸⁷ Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, from Norfolk, 26 October 1933, AHA. The italics are to indicate a double-underlining in the text.

⁸⁸ Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, from Norfolk, 1934.

⁸⁹ B. Hamilton, 1972, 81.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 81.

was essentially 'religious' in character:

He had always, as has been seen, had a passionate longing for a firm and final belief. This predisposition had been for long almost in abeyance; now it found a focus in what he was convinced was a logical and irrefutable philosophy-creed serving the welfare of mankind; and he held that any fully adult person expressing the slightest doubts or reservations was living in a state of wilful ignorance.⁹¹

While there is some truth in this judgement, it is also the case that Patrick's assimilation of Marxism lifted the level of his art: the excellence of The Plains of Cement, and of his next novel, Impromptu in Moribundia, in comparison with the more conventional earlier work attests to that. Moreover, Hamilton seems to have possessed a degree of psychological insight into his obsessive 'longing for a firm and final belief' denied by his brother's diagnosis. In a late and unpublished autobiographical fragment, 'Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man', he wrote of his inability, dating from childhood, 'to engage in any lark or pleasure without having the door shut'.⁹² This he carried to obsessive-compulsive extremes:

Not only had the door to have the appearance of being shut: it was necessary to ascertain that the knobs had been properly turned; and even when this had been ascertained, it had to be ascertained over and over again ... Here were the beginnings of the malady of doubt -- the desire for the insurance of insurance of insurance indefinitely.⁹³

Knowing of this 'predisposition', Patrick would have been unlikely to have blindly embraced Marxism, blithely unaware of any psychological function it may have had for him. In this respect I am more inclined to accept Claud Cockburn's assessment that his friend's avowed philosophy

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² P. Hamilton, 'Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man', MS dated 2 February 1959, 23 [AHA].

⁹³ Ibid., 23-4.

was a major and, so to speak, nobler more respectable tension than is brought out in Bruce's biography. He wasn't a naively-accepting liberal, suddenly accepting Marxism or accepting communism. It was a torturing thing for him. It wasn't just an easy creed which he adopted as a way of salvation and then got disillusioned. He thought about it and it was very much part of his life. And a very elevated part of his life.⁹⁴

Hamilton's Marxism does not, however, dull the wit in his work: quite the contrary, in fact, since he is able to squeeze much humour out of the impacting of the theoretical categories of historical materialism onto the concrete observation of everyday life. For example, the description of the fall of the morosely taciturn Mr. Prosser is a gem of its kind:

A more silent and reticent man there never was. He had a thin body, an ashen face, glowering eyes, and a large grey moustache. A saddler by trade, he had been, before and just after the war "in his own way". The laws governing the benign progress of capital, however, had by slow and painful methods pitched and hurled him from the ranks of the proletariat, with the result that, instead of being "in his own way" he was now in almost everybody's way, and a misery to himself.⁹⁵

The movement from the concrete description of Prosser to the abstract rhetoric of Capital and back again to a playful rendition of the unfortunate ex-artisan's plight is consummately dialectical. There is perhaps a surfeit of archness displayed in this ironized rendition of the generalities of Marxism: a near cabbalistic delight in the tropes of a new-found discourse, shared by an elect. And indeed, in a letter to Bruce, Hamilton wrote the following with regard to the deeper sociological implications of The Plains of Cement: 'in this last book I am giving such people [the cognoscenti] just enough to work on'.⁹⁶ However, the

⁹⁴ C. Cockburn, speaking on 'Now Read On', BBC Radio Four, 21 June 1972, transcript, 4.

⁹⁵ Hamilton, 1987, 391.

entertainment provided seems to me to outweigh any misgivings one might have about the excessive dryness of such passages.

Hamilton's Marxism also enabled him to conceptualize the condition of contemporary London as a metaphor for the crisis of capitalism in the early 1930s. Whereas, as Peter Widdowson comments, 'The Midnight Bell' is, in the first volume of the trilogy, 'no more than a punctiliously observed pub',⁹⁷ in The Plains of Cement its culture is intended to signify more widely. In another letter to Bruce, Hamilton wrote of a possible title for the 'Ella novel' -- 'Time, Gentlemen, Please ... with commas, and without an exclamation mark -- rather as a gentle reproof and warning to civilization than as rendering the familiar pub-cry'.⁹⁸

A similar metaphorization of London can be located in Martin Amis' most recent novel, London Fields. Once again we have a microcosmic focus on London and its pub world by an English satirical novelist intensely conscious of 'the end of things'. Amis is more concerned with impending ecological catastrophe, of course, and his imagery reflects this. As the American narrator of London Fields flies in to Heathrow, he presents the reader with a simulative snapshot of London, 'as taut and meticulous as a cobweb'.⁹⁹ The simile takes on a profounder significance with the dawning realization that Nicola Six is, as a spider-woman with a death wish, at the centre of this intricate cobweb. Hamilton also employs zoological metaphors which convey a sense of entrapment (for example, of Ella and Eccles as 'small fish in the weird teeming aquarium of the metropolis'),¹⁰⁰ but they do not

⁹⁶ Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, from Norfolk, 26 October 1933 [AHA].

⁹⁷ P. Widdowson, 'The Saloon Bar Society: Patrick Hamilton's Fiction in the 1930s', in J. Lucas (ed.), The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy, Hassocks, 1976, 123.

⁹⁸ Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, from Norfolk, 10 October 1933, 6, AHA.

⁹⁹ M. Amis, London Fields, London, 1989, 2.

quite communicate the same sense of the fragility of city life emblemized by Amis' cobweb analogy. But this is perhaps only to enunciate a distinction between the modern and the postmodern urban condition.

Differences aside, both these projects portray London as representative of global social decline in a manner which could elicit the charge of 'Londoncentrism'. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that (even) in Hamilton's day about 'one fifth of all the people in great Britain lived within a radius of fifteen miles from Charing Cross',¹⁰¹ and that, in any case, the fictional thematization of big city life is an important and enduring facet of our novel-drenched culture.

Indeed, the seemingly organic link between urbanization and the 'rise of the novel' is one which has frequently been made; for example, Malcolm Bradbury has written of how, 'the unutterable contingency of the modern city had much to do with the rise of that most realistic, loose and pragmatic of literary forms, the novel'.¹⁰² Hamilton's literary lodestar, Charles Dickens, is usually cited as *the* novelist of the city of London. Walter Bagehot maintained that Dickens 'describes London like a special correspondent for posterity',¹⁰³ and similar claims have been lodged for Patrick Hamilton (by Doris Lessing, for example).¹⁰⁴ There is, however, a deep-going 'country-city' opposition in Dickens' fiction, elucidated by Schwarzbach in Dickens and the City, which is absent from Hamilton's work: 'Dickens' deepest creative and imaginative force had been invested in a complex psychological and fictional struggle between a mythic version of pastoral innocence and a hellish nightmare of urban experience.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Hamilton, 1987, 356.

¹⁰¹ Prochaska, 1973, 31.

¹⁰² M. Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', in M. Bradbury and J. McFarlane (eds.) Modernism 1890-1920, London, 1976, 99.

¹⁰³ W. Bagehot, cited in Schwarzbach, 1979, 1.

¹⁰⁴ See M. Holroyd's comments below.

This was so partly because Dickens was rendering the traumatic experience of migration to London from the countryside which he himself shared with many others in the first half of the nineteenth century. By the end of his career the English literary cityscape had been transformed from a *terra incognita* into a world which was '*the world, and the only world there was*'.¹⁰⁶

The London alluded to by 'Modernist' writers like Pound and Eliot constituted, as Bradbury puts it, a subjective 'environment of personal consciousness, flickering impressions',¹⁰⁷ (rather than an object to be fictively totalized and dissected). 'By 1920', continues Bradbury, 'much of the attraction of London for such people had gone',¹⁰⁸ and the city was left to the rendition of less introversive writers. What Hamilton's depiction of 1930s London in Twenty Thousand Streets instantiates, therefore, is a Marxian rethinking of the city of the kind also exemplified by John Sommerfield's May Day (to which I shall come in due course).

Before proceeding to a consideration of the extent to which Hamilton's trilogy succeeds in thematizing capitalist London in the Thirties, I wish to debunk the romanticized mythology which is beginning to surround this author. A prime mover in the propagation of this myth (of Hamilton as 'down and out' in Soho and Earl's Court) is Michael Holroyd whose Introduction to the Hogarth Press' 1987 reprint of Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky overstates the touchstone value of the author's personal experience. Holroyd is doubly wrong to aver that it is 'the insignificant, the needy, the homeless and the ostracized'¹⁰⁹ who overwhelmingly populate Hamilton's

¹⁰⁵ Schwarzbach, 1979, 213.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁰⁷ Bradbury, 1976, 100.

¹⁰⁸ M. Bradbury, 'London, 1890-1920' in Bradbury and McFarlane, 1976, 177.

¹⁰⁹ Holroyd in Hamilton, 1987, 4-5.

novels, and that 'he didn't write about the Upper Classes, he didn't write about the Middle Classes, he wrote about the defeated classes'.¹¹⁰ On the contrary, Hamilton wrote best about the social milieux he knew best -- those of (upper)-middle class Southern England. Furthermore, in The Plains of Cement, he analyzed as an acutely observant bourgeois Marxist, omnisciently narrating from a socially, politically, and textually privileged position. To endorse the Holroydian myth would be to miss the significant points about Hamilton, and make him vulnerable to a debunking consonant with a banal literary ideology which insists on grounding the work of a writer in his or her life.

Let us take, for instance, the 'Doss House' episode in The Midnight Bell, wherein a nightmarishly hung-over Bob lies amid his despair in the company of the tramps of the 'great' city.

Within the room London's defeated slept.... Slept and snored, in an extraordinarily violent way, as though grasping angrily at oblivion.... One groaned.... Another's breath was a recurrent whistle.... Nearly all snored, and the only one awake banged ferociously at his pillow.... The peace of despair was here unknown: sleep revealed the truth, and the angry souls of the downtrodden complained and raged in dreams.¹¹¹

This Dantesque piece of writing, with its lyrical evocation of the hellishness of the sleeping underworld of the 'downtrodden', gains nothing from being related to the fact that its author spent a night in a doss House in Drury Lane in August 1927 (after a long session at a pub called 'The Admiral Duncan' with his wealthy Scots-Peruvian friend, Charles). Of the aftermath of this event Patrick wrote:

I came out at about half-past five, so's Mummie wouldn't miss me at

¹¹⁰ Holroyd, speaking on 'The Late Show', BBC 2, 27 February 1989. This latter comment is particularly off-beam, I think.

¹¹¹ Hamilton, 1987, 217.

home. And I had Oh such a lovely walk along the river by Westminster Bridge at six o'clock. It was divine, and I'm sure that Wordsworth's Sonnet is the best in the language.¹¹²

This 'experience' was clearly a lark and the rather camp description of it make the following comments by Holroyd look daft:

By moving into a lower social sphere, Patrick Hamilton did not shed the insecurities implanted by his upbringing; his emotional vulnerability helped to make him one of the chronically dissolute and distressed who wander the dingy London streets and find refuge in its pubs and doss-houses.¹¹³

Unlike George Orwell, Patrick Hamilton did not pauperize himself for his art, but that does not mean that, for example, Down and Out in Paris and London should automatically be valued over (say) The Plains of Cement: other criteria would govern such discrimination.

From the author, then, to the text. Where Holroyd is on firmer ground is where he cites Doris Lessing as saying that, 'if you want to know what it was like to live in London in the 1930s, do not go to that roll-call of okay names, go to Patrick Hamilton'.¹¹⁴ This judgement was, moreover, current at the time of the London trilogy's publication. In an otherwise unflattering review in Time and Tide, the Communist novelist Ralph Bates hailed Twenty Thousand Streets in the following terms: 'Here, far more than in the vulgar Brompton Oratory of Elgar's Cockaigne is the artistic presentation of London, even though it be a partial product.'¹¹⁵ Bruce Hamilton informs us that, after the publication of Twopence Coloured, his brother acquired 'almost a taxi driver's knowledge of the topography and character' of the streets of London by cycling around the

¹¹² Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, from Chiswick, August 1927, 2 [AHA].

¹¹³ Holroyd, in Hamilton, 1987, 5.

¹¹⁴ Holroyd, on 'The Late Show', 1989.

¹¹⁵ R. Bates, 'New Fiction', Time and Tide, vol. xvi, 24, 15 June 1935, 898.

streets.¹¹⁶ And certainly, the constant reiteration of street names in the trilogy evinces this knowledge and helps to build up a strong sense of place (particularly of Soho).

Less prosaically, the crepuscular imagery which pervades the work conveys the dehumanized inscrutability of London as an anonymously overpopulated and fog-bound city:

There were millions and millions of people, millions and millions of winking lights, and millions and millions of cars, taxis, and buses. And the people themselves were as silent and placid as the machinery was blustering, resolute, and violent. It was a horrible scene and Bob wondered what the world was coming to.¹¹⁷

The fog improved not at all as the day wore on, and at eleven o'clock, when the house was opened and the people came in, the struggling electric light was burning everywhere, and it was neither day nor night. Rather it seemed, as you saw one wretched customer coming in after another from the abysses of mystery outside, that the gods had at last convicted human nature of its crimes and had thrown them all into a vast dungeon away from the light of day forever.¹¹⁸

This is a modern 'mass' city, illuminated by 'millions of winking lights' and animated by temperamental 'machinery' (note the collective noun there and the pacification of human agency in the 'scene' depicted in the first passage, in general). And it is also a place susceptible to depressing weather of a seemingly supernatural and divinely punitive nature (but actually caused by industrial pollution). Crystallized in these excerpts is something of the lived experience of the inhabitants of 1930s London.

This realist evocation of the phenomenological world of Twenty Thousand Streets is charged with an atmosphere which captures important aspects of urban living. For instance, a sense of the invariably multifarious nature of the

¹¹⁶ PAT, 264.

¹¹⁷ Hamilton, 1987, 58.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 478.

metropolitan inner city is caught in the positioning of 'The Midnight Bell' as 'the nucleus of a London zone less than half a mile in diameter', composed of a 'nightmare variety'¹¹⁹ of social castes, and (as befits the novel form) social discourses. This encapsulated variety is also shown as twisted by alienation. We can see this emphasized in the following authorial comment on the backdrop to the interaction of Jenny, Violet, Andy, and his friend Rex in the pub in which they have so recently foregathered:

Outside in the tram-shaken street Hammersmith roared and swirled on its own furious and meaningless course. As meaningless and obscurely motivated as that crowd and chaos surrounding them were the relationships of these four respectively to each other: yet to the onlooker, who heard them laugh, they gave a perfect impression of unity and exclusiveness, of close friendship even So erring are the fleeting judgements made in public places.¹²⁰

Against a determining background of 'furious' mechanical noise these four play out a meaningless social script, alienated from each other by the very connections which govern their being together, and from any observer by the semiology of those self-same conventions (this is, seemingly, a 'foursome', two heterosexual couples off-limits to intrusion).

A conception of the city space as confining and alienating is also realized by the unintended form of the trilogy that was spawned by The Midnight Bell. John Bayley has remarked that the individuality of Twenty Thousand Streets 'consists to a very large extent in the dégustation, as the French say, of boredom'.¹²¹ Not only is the trilogy a 'cycle', it is also repetitiously cyclical. Both the first and the third volumes

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 334.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 267.

¹²¹ J. Bayley, 'Falling in Love with the Traffic Warden', in London Review of Books, 1 October, 1987, 6.

end by passing through the same 'foggy yet festooned Christmas tunnel'.¹²² Both, perforce, repeat the same episodes -- but each with different focalisers who are doomed to re-enact in The Plains of Cement the little tales of entrapment narrated in The Midnight Bell. We can see the import of this by comparing the telling and the re-telling of the story of Ella's rejection by Mrs. E. Sanderson-Chantry:

Bob began on the brass as usual, and Ella came down a little later. Her nose was very pink, and her first news was in accordance with the general atmosphere of the day. India was Off. She had had a letter only that morning.

She took it well, but it had an effect upon Bob as well as herself. A fog obliterated the Universe, and India was Off Would anything ever be On again?¹²³ [The Midnight Bell].

India was Off -- that was the burden that lay on her soul all the long dark day. She wished she had not told Bob about it, as she now had to tell him that it was Off. He was sympathetic, but he had his own thoughts to attend to, and she could see he had no comprehension of a fog-ridden world in which India was Off.¹²⁴ [The Plains of Cement].

The re-accentuation of this episode underscores the opacity of the characters to each other. Contrary to Bob's perception, Ella does not 'take it well', and, in a sense, amends are made to the barmaid by the re-narration. However, a compact of full cognition is also now sealed between author and reader against the characters, whose entrapment is, by contrast, thrown into relief: we know that India is 'Off' long before Ella does. In the final analysis, the narrative method used to render the lives of these characters, who, in Priestley's

¹²² Hamilton, 1987, 485. Patrick Hamilton's own lifelong feelings about the great festivals of the Christian calendar are captured in the following comment by his brother: 'Christmas (like Easter) became for him a horrible black tunnel of days when normal life was suspended and a commercial racket played, under the guise of good fellowship, for all it was worth.' PAT, 70.

¹²³ Hamilton, 1987, 90.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 478.

words, 'work and play in a desparate lost fashion, ignorant and forlorn',¹²⁵ are the traditional ones of the classic realist novel. And certainly one feels that Hamilton is unlikely to have dissented from the following conception of 'radical' authorship enunciated by his fellow Communist, Ralph Fox: '[the author] must be a mixture of Henry II and Tamerlaine, a ruthless master and conqueror bending all to his will'.¹²⁶

I now want to turn to a comparative consideration of the less conventional modes of narration used to thematize the city in the work of two other Marxist novelists of the period, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and John Sommerfield.

The third volume of Grassic Gibbon's trilogy, A Scots Quair, Grey Granite, was published one year before The Plains of Cement. It thematizes the impact of the imagined city of Duncairn on the lives of Chris Colquohoun and her son Ewan, who has come to the city to work as an apprentice in a steel works. Duncairn figures as the industrialized 'other' of the rural hinterland between Dundee and Aberdeen, and has topographical features of Glasgow and Edinburgh. It is thus symbolic of a process of industrialization that is placed, both geographically and historically: in other words, the city's relationship with a different time (before an urbanization that has 'actually' not happened) and place (the country) is foregrounded in a manner foreign to that of Hamilton's trilogy.

The character of Chris is the main vehicle for conveying the sense of Duncairn as a city spatially and temporally positioned. Her constant *ubi sunt* reminiscences of her old life as a crofter's daughter, and the rural similes which attach to her apprehension of things urban are two of the means used to effect this placement. Here is an example of the latter (my italics):

¹²⁵ J. B. Priestley, Introduction to Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky, London, 1935, xi.

¹²⁶ R. Fox, The Novel and the People, London, 1937, 145.

Going up and down the Windmill steps with her baskets of groceries Chris would see the town far below under the rain's onset move and shake and shiver a minute *like and old grey collie shaking in sleep*. The drive of wind and rain cleared the wynds of the fouler smells; down in the Mile, shining in mail, the great houses rose above the wet birl and drum of the trams, buses creeping about *like beasts in the fog, snorting, and blowing the wet from their faces* ¹²⁷

As we have already seen, Hamilton also animates city traffic -- but his 'snorting' vehicles are more akin to the furious motorists driving them than cows or oxen.

More fundamentally, the narrative method of Grey Granite seems to me to be more apt to a democratic rendition of the polyphony of city life than that of Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky. What Gibbon does is to develop a mode of narration operative in the first volume of A Scots Quair, Sunset Song, whereby the story is told, not by a monologic narrator, but by a variety of disparate voices. There is still an extra-diegetic authorial voice, but the narrative is variously focalized by different characters who are addressed and given voice under the sign of the second-person pronoun, 'you'. Sometimes this 'you' is Chris, and sometimes Ewan, but quite often the co-narrating voice belongs to a marginal character. For example, in the following passages the narrative baton passes from the implied author to an unnamed man who joins an unemployment march which is eventually brutally suppressed by the police:

Jim Trease had planned the march for the Friday, Broo day, with all the unemployed of Paldy and the contingents from Ecclesgriegs and Footforthie and a gang of chaps of the Kirriebeen Broo. The main mob marshalled up in the Cowgate, the Communists crying for the folk to join up -- *we'll march to the Council and demand admittance, and see the Provost about the PAC*. And a man'd look shame-faced at another

¹²⁷ L. G. Gibbon, Grey Granite (1934), in A Scots Quair (1946), London, 1982, 102.

childe, and smoke his pipe and never let on till big Jim himself came habbering along, crying you by your Christian name, and you couldn't well do anything else but join -- God blast it, you'd grievances enough to complain of.... Syne the drum struck up and off you all marched, some gype had shoved the handle of a flag in your hand, it read DOWN WITH THE MEANS TEST AND HUNGER AND WAR, the rest of the billies made a joke about it, they would rather, they said down a bottle of beer.¹²⁸

This section (which continues for four more pages) constitutes a kind of interior monologue, but with the character confiding anecdotally to the reader, and with the author inscribed as an interviewer, noting down testimony. It is particularly significant that this technique is used to narrate such 'urban' experiences as demonstrations, meetings, and strikes¹²⁹ -- in other words, precisely those moments of city life untouched by the more traditional Hamilton trilogy. The major lacuna of Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky remains the lack of any representation of the socialist movement in London, whose advent at the turn of the century is characterized in the following terms by Raymond Williams:

Out of the very chaos and misery of the new metropolis, and spreading from it to rejuvenate a national feeling, a civilizing force of a new vision of society had been created in struggle, had gathered up the suffering and the hopes of generations of the oppressed and exploited, and in this unexpected and challenging form was the human reply of the city to the long inhumanity of country and city alike.¹³⁰

So now to a 1930s novel which foregrounds the London revolutionary movement -- John Sommerfield's May Day, a text which, like Grey Granite, instantiates a mode of narration more experimental than that of the Hamilton trilogy. Ken Worpole suggests that May Day owes much to the films of 'Eisenstein and Dovchenko with their dramatic crowd

¹²⁸ Ibid., 58-9.

¹²⁹ See ibid., 85-90, and 130-2, for examples of the last two phenomena.

¹³⁰ R. Williams, The Country and the City, 1973, repr., London, 1985, 231.

scenes, non-naturalistic lighting, images of individual anguish as well as processions, funerals, work in fields and factories, and villainous kulaks and capitalists', and even more to 'those documentary films whose aim was to capture the multi-faceted reality of city life, of which Ruttmann's Berlin: Symphony of a City was the most seminal'.¹³¹ Whereas Hamilton's synopticizing technique is to re-do Dickens, Sommerfield narrates through a quasi-cinematographic voice, italicized on the page to render it discontinuous with the numerous micro-stories which comprise the bulk of the text:

The sirens have sounded again, punctuating the day, marking a changed tempo of living, signalling a new phase in the movement of the human tides that flow ... through the channels of the streets This flow consists of daily tide between the centres of production and distribution and the places in which workers live. No description of it in purely geographical and statistical terms is adequate. It can only be understood and interpreted in the light of the economic structure of society.

Only the mathematics of class struggle can make order and design out of this seething chaos of matter in motion.¹³²

This section is headed, 'The Movements of People in London on April 30th', providing a military backdrop to the metaphorizing about 'tides', and the invocation of the 'mathematics of class struggle' as implicitly superior to the arithmetic of bourgeois political science. This anonymous rendition of the masses -- here as at once soldiers, forces of nature, and algebraic variables -- is supplemented elsewhere with a host of highly specific portraits of individual workers, housewives, politicians, and businessmen.

As in The Midnight Bell, the main character (out of May Day's 'ninety named "typical" characters')¹³³ is a sailor. However, James Seton's trajectory is the inverse of Bob's.

¹³¹ Worpole, 1983, 89.

¹³² J. Sommerfield, May Day (1936), London, 1984, 170-1.

¹³³ A. Croft, *ibid.*, xiv.

For the former -- a communist -- returns from the sea to be with his own people, on strike on (a fictional) May Day in London. Just before he is able to meet up with his brother, John (a carpenter at a factory which has spectacularly joined the strike), he is bludgeoned to death by a policeman. There is certainly little implicit in the political line of *this* Communist novel!

The Marble Arch is islanded in a dark sea of caps in whose midst slowly move forward the red sails of the banners. For two hours the contingents have been marching in.

Last of all come the East London marchers, the band playing slowly, a revolutionary song to a funeral beat. The workers seethe around the base of the Arch like an angry sea, and the noise comes up to the men at the top like the sound of a storm as James's flag-draped body is held up and saluted by a hundred thousand clenched fists raised in the air, a hundred thousand shouts of 'Red Front.'¹³⁴

Nor is this badly written: the present tense narration is genuinely moving and the language chosen effectively apt for the figure of the dead sailor: 'Marble Arch ... islanded', 'the red sails', 'an angry sea', and 'the sound of a storm' -- all build the passage up to a crescendo less embarrassing than Hamilton's 'the sea, the sea!'

A few months after the publication of May Day, Sommerfield went to fight in Spain, with John Cornford. With the completion of Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky, Patrick Hamilton also felt a compulsion to become more overtly political -- in his own way.¹³⁵ During the final

¹³⁴ Ibid., 242.

¹³⁵ We can see this growing tendency in Hamilton in his drama criticism for Time and Tide in 1939. Witness his review of James L. Dodson's 'Harvest in the North', produced by Unity Theatre in June of that year. Hamilton berated the play's 'defeatist' attitude, and absence of 'clean political conclusions' -- 'seen in the present state of society and system of production, it has the air of a deep groan rather than a call to action', Time and Tide, 10 June 1939, vol. xx, no. 23, 780

stages of The Plains of Cement he wrote to Bruce Hamilton as follows:

I have had practically to abandon Socialism pro tem, and it makes me quite furious to see all my lovely books and papers all lying unread. However, the sooner I get the book done the sooner I will be able to get back to them with a whoop of joy.¹³⁶

In an earlier letter he had written of his intention to call the 'Omnibus volume THE LAST DAYS OF LONDON', in order to mark the 'end and expression of the first phase of [his] intellectual existence'.¹³⁷ More formally experimental, and more explicitly political, Impromptu in Moribundia was an attempt to inaugurate a new such phase.

¹³⁶ Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, from Norfolk, March 1934,[AHA].

¹³⁷ Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, from Norfolk, 10 October 1933, 6, [AHA].

Chapter Eight

'World upon World': *Impromptu in Moribundia* in Context.

I suspect that Pat arrived at Communism much like all the early ones did. Creatively, society was felt to be increasingly stifling. You arrived at Communism not just because your heart bled for the poor, as was the case with Spender, but because the place where you lived as a writer was becoming increasingly frustrating (indeed moribund), the connections with readers were being torn to pieces; moreover, it was this inability to make the connections which Literature ought to make which drove one to a revolutionary position The attitude to Zhdanov was one of horror because that was no way to write. Turning yourself into a fake proletarian was no way to cope with the problems of writing if you weren't one.

Arnold Rattenbury, in conversation with the present writer, 15 August 1988.

In its rational form [the dialectic] is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction

Karl Marx, Preface to the Second Edition of Capital, vol. i, trans. Ben Fowkes, London, 1976, 103.

In the minatory years from 1936 to 1938, Patrick Hamilton effected a shift from the punctilious Victorian realism of Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky (1935) to the

uncompromisingly fabular mode of his satiric dystopia, Impromptu in Moribundia (1939). Only one of a flood of non-naturalist yet, non-modernist socialist novels written in the 1930s, Impromptu has, like its forty odd counterparts,¹ now largely been forgotten. Contrary then to the received critical wisdom, the British Left literary intelligentsia of the Thirties perceived a quotidian 'bourgeois' realism as inadequate to the urgent task of fictive social critique and therefore tended to ignore the wooden 'socialist realism' beloved of Zhdanov and his acolytes. Witness, for example, the curious treatment in Left Review of the 'Proceedings' of the 1934 'Soviet Writers' Congress' -- at which the tenets of Socialist Realism (character typicality, 'Stakhanovism', joyous optimism, and plodding verisimilitude) were espoused by Zhdanov himself. Amabel Williams-Ellis omitted to mention Zhdanov altogether in her eyewitness account of the Congress and instead highlighted Ilya Ehrenburg's polemic against 'the government department approach to literature'.² The 'Proceedings' themselves were later reviewed in Left Review by Montagu Slater alongside W.H. Auden's Skeltonic anthology, The Poet's Tongue, and the 'Group' gathering Poetry of Tomorrow. Slater's article called for a national particularisation of the general thematica of the contributions made by Gorki and Bukharin and moreover suggested that the seeds of such a development were germinating in the work of Auden.³ Slater's editorial colleague at Left Review, Randall Swingler wrote elsewhere of the strategic need to

outflank the primary mental blindness produced by traditional education. The novelist who presents a Marxist view of England today runs the risk of

¹ A. Croft, "Worlds without end Foisted upon the Future" -- Some Antecedents of Nineteen Eighty-Four, in C. Norris (ed.), Inside the Myth. London, 1984, 188.

² A. Williams-Ellis, 'Soviet Writers' Conference', Left Review, i,2, November 1934, 27.

³ M. Slater, 'The Turning Point', Left Review, ii, 1, October 1935, 15-23.

having his whole picture rejected by the ordinary reader ... the value of allegory lies in the fact that it can construct an argument upon its own terms.⁴

These inclinations would seem to attest to the somewhat heterodox nature of the aesthetic ideas extant among the CPGB's literary intellectual milieu.

However, it was not merely the official Communist approbation of literature, 'national in form, socialist in content' which fostered the development of non-Zhdanovite literary forms. For progressive prose writers in the Britain of the 1930s evinced a formally experimental brio which drew upon European surrealism and the work of Franz Kafka, as well as (more heavily) upon a more indigenous tradition of Swiftian satire. This development surely somewhat vitiates Valentine Cunningham's rather bald assertion that, 'the politically radical '30s fiction was not as innovative as some of its friends wished'.⁵

Edward Upward's 'The Railway Accident' (1929), and his communist short story 'Journey to the Border' (1938) are symptomatic in their treatment of what Isherwood dubbed the 'fantastic realities we conspire to ignore'.⁶ Rex Warner's allegories The Wild Goose Chase (1937), The Professor (1938), and The Aerodrome (1940), are similarly emblematic, being, respectively, parables of socialist revolution, of fascist takeover, and of 'Love' pitted against an insidiously seeping totalitarianism. The first mentioned of Warner's novels is closest in method and ideology to Impromptu in Moribundia. The story's manly hero, George, is one of three brothers charged with a quest to find the Wild Goose (a utopian symbol of unattainable human perfection). His journey

⁴ R. Swingler, Daily Worker, 6 October, 1937, 7.

⁵ V. Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties, Oxford, 1988, 322.

⁶ C Isherwood in E. Upward, The Railway Accident and Other Stories 1969, London, 1988, 34.

takes him beyond the border into a land whose countryside is ground under the heel of a totalitarian régime based in the Town. The power of the Government George analyzes as resting 'more on the prestige which they enjoy and on the submission of most people to this prestige than on either the devotion of the governed or on a really strong military force'.⁷ This suggests that Warner's tale is less a satire on German Nazism or Italian Fascism than on the (suitably exaggerated) Britain of the National Government. And certainly, the literary influences which the novel wears on its sleeve are very English: The Faerie Queene, Erewhon, and Boys Own adventure stories are all called to mind in a reading of The Wild Goose Chase.

The overarching narrative of revolution against the Town's oligarchs is punctuated by a series of satires which lambast identifiable features of contemporary political and intellectual culture. The main target is the cloistering of art and philosophy in the Universities and amongst the metropolitan intelligentsia. Unfortunately, from today's angle, this critique focuses on the blurring of stable gender identities as fascistic, and relies upon a muted strain of heterosexism. The students at the Town's 'Convent' are hermaphrodites whose surgically-engineered number George (understandably) has no wish to join. He tells them, 'Before I began my travels I met some people who would, no doubt, have liked to undergo your surgery. They passed their exams with honours, but they were no good at games and could only review books.'⁸ Warner is here possibly having a tongue-in-cheek 'go' at his friends Auden and Isherwood, but, in any case, his prolocutor's opinion that 'one of the most important prerequisites of education [is] that a man or woman should know his or her own sex',⁹ is unlikely to meet with

⁷ R. Warner, The Wild Goose Chase (1937), London, 1990, 235.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 399.

unqualified assent from anyone versed in (post)-modern feminism. The Wild Goose Chase is, nevertheless, an exciting and imaginative work, the wit of whose specific satires (on aestheticism and Liberalism, for example) is deadly.

Comparable techniques of caricature and 'questing' allegory pervade Ruthven Todd's Over the Mountain (1939): the chief antagonist of which realises, in a dream, his desire to traverse the mountain range as Higgs does in Erewhon (1872). The society he thereby discovers is peopled by caricatured versions of recognizable types from his own country -- including policemen who are mental defectives, and café Communists who are stereotypically devoid of human emotion.

Hamilton's contribution to this generic development of the Thirties Left, Impromptu in Moribundia, is a hugely entertaining work whose flensing of the 'moribund' English middle-class values it makes flesh, is coruscating enough to merit favourable comparison with Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932) and George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (1948). At the time of its original publication, The New Statesman praised it highly: 'Mr. Hamilton, wisely choosing a well-defined target, hits with precision and Impromptu in Moribundia is not only extremely amusing but an excellent piece of satire'.¹⁰ However, I hope in this chapter to go beyond a mere 'promotion-to-the League' polemic by teasing out the socio-political implications of the deployment of this particular literary mode by a range of historically differently-placed writers: from Swift and Zamyatin, to Edward Thompson and Vladimir Voinovich. Consideration of the work of the latter two will be appended to a lengthier contextual exposition of Impromptu in Moribundia itself.

My discussion of Hamilton's novel takes the form, firstly, of an account of its strategy and characteristic devices; secondly, an outline of the ideology and social structure of

¹⁰ The New Statesman, 11 February 1939, 226.

Moribundia as facilitated by the discursiveness of this strategy; and then comparative analyses of H. G. Wells' 'The Time Machine' (1895), and Elmer Rice's A Voyage to Purilia (1930). In order to enable a larger assessment of Hamilton's work to be made, I shall then invoke that more famous dystopian lineage which consists of Zamyatin's We (1924), Huxley's Brave New World, and Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Patrick Hamilton's basic strategy in Impromptu in Moribundia is to invent a world animated by the prejudices and modes of behaviour typical of the English petty-bourgeoisie. The representation then enacted is redolent of what Tom Nairn has recently characterized as 'the national spirit-essence'¹¹ which subtends to this day the United Kingdom and its monarchy. This soul of the nation Nairn analyzes as a 'land of the mind'¹² crucial to the 'real' body politic, and dubs it 'Ukania', after Robert Musil's soubriquet for the Hapsburg empire in The Man without Qualities, 'Kakania'. Hamilton's 'Ukania' is focalized by a nameless narrative agent who functions as a proxy for the reader. This narrator reaches the 'planet' of Moribundia by means of the *Asteradio*-- a Wellsian machine described with suitable vagueness and assembled by a savant called Abel Crowmarsh.¹³ As with Lemuel Gulliver or Josef K., our hero undergoes a series of experiences which together make up an imaginative analysis of contemporary society. His actual 'voyage' to Moribundia recalls that of Alice through the Looking-glass as well as that peregrination through time of the hero of Wells' 'The Time Machine': 'Nwotsemaht' (Thamestown), with its 'Yliddaccip Sucric' (Piccadily Circus), and 'Sodnahc Teerts' (Chandos Street), is

¹¹ T. Nairn, The Enchanted Glass, London, 1988, 91.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Incidentally, Hamilton's earliest extant play, entitled, 'The World for Which Men Work' (pre-1927), is a Wellsian piece about a poor, unmarried couple who are transported to a Utopia [in AHA].

meant precisely to provide a *camera obscura* image of London in the 1930s; the mirroring of English words also contributes to the novel's estrangement of the reality these words normally bespeak.

Before his entry into 'Nwotsemaht', however, the narrator is positioned as witness to the climax of *the* Public School cricket match celebrated in that atrocious Newbolt poem which features the immortal line, 'Play up, play up and play the game!' ('Vitai_Lampada'). The flat narration of this 'primal scene' of Edwardian Upper-class values serves well to sound the parodic keynote that rings throughout the rest of the book. For the pre-war codes of masculinity betokened by the cricketing of these 'young dreaming Raleighs'¹⁴ were, by the mid-Thirties, cue for a laugh -- albeit a laugh tinged with the grim realization that (in Peter Parker's words) 'the fatuities of "Vitai Lampada" ... continued [from the time of publication in 1879] to exert a baleful influence on popular patriotic verse and thought to the Somme and beyond'.¹⁵ It is, however, the cliché-ridden culture of the middle-classes of the 1930s that constitutes the text's primary terrain of critique.

The absurdities of commercial advertising are depicted as the source of much of this cliché and are debunked through actualisation. For example, on the way to a general store with his cicerone Anne, the narrator encounters a man with rheumatism smitten with lightning bolts of pain; a woman with a target on her nose and two arrows labelled 'Germs' and 'Infection'; a man with a dripping tap on his nose; and a young man suffering from indigestion, as signified by the little devils who prod his stomach with forks. Such fantastic devices as these effect a 'defamiliarisation' of the habituated discourses of everyday life -- which, in the inter-war years in Britain and the United States, were saturated by the intensive

¹⁴ P. Hamilton, Impromptu in Moribundia, London, 1939, 34.

¹⁵ P. Parker, The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos, London, 1987, 59.

advertising that went with an economy that was increasingly dominated by the production of ceaselessly differentiated consumer durables.¹⁶ (The relevance of this form of 'making strange' to our own even more intensely consumption-oriented economic life should be clear enough.) According to Darko Suvin, the effectuation of 'cognitive estrangement' is something typical of Science Fiction¹⁷-- a genre which was beginning to proliferate in the 1930s. It is also a feature of that proto-Science Fictional work Gulliver Travels (1726), wherein Swift coins such Brobdignagian words as 'splacknuck' in order to establish an alternative, 'alien' world which can be abruptly brought to bear on the object of his invective, Walpole's polity.¹⁸ Again, Samuel Butler in Erewhon effects a defamiliarisation of habitual social perceptions by utilising methods similar to those of Hamilton -- the use of anagrams; the distorted mirroring of tendencies and features of Victorian England (such as the utterly confusing and confounding criminalisation of illness and pathologising of crime in Chapter Ten of that book); and the ironisation of Higgs' oft-expressed 'surprise' at how 'different' is Erewhon.

The cleverest of Hamilton's defamiliarizing comic inventions -- namely 'ballooning' -- is, however, more original and deserves fuller comment. He uses this technique to illustrate the socially objective inscription of verbal cliché within the conversational discourse of the individual petty-bourgeois subject. In Moribundia, whenever a commercial-like dialogue takes place between petty bourgeois, talk balloons *simultaneously* appear, hovering above the heads of the speakers in an almost Laputan (or Carrollian) materialization of alienated verbal discourse. Similarly, any commodity-

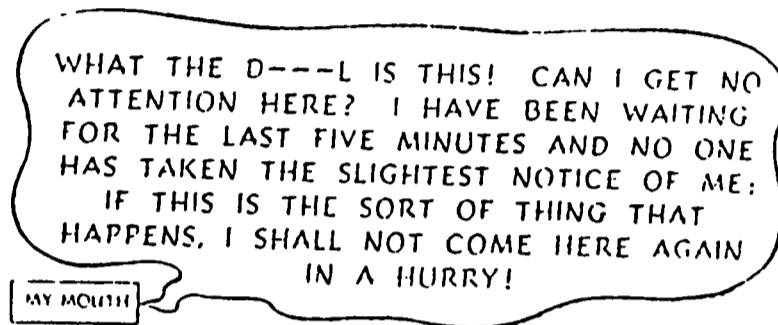
¹⁶ M. Spindler, American Literature and Social Change, London, 1983, 102.

¹⁷ D. Suvin, The Metamorphoses of Science Fiction, New Haven, 1979, 4.

¹⁸ B. Hammond, Gulliver's Travels, an Open University Guide, London, 1988, 32 .

fetishistic thoughts a Moribundian may have are rendered socially transparent in a 'Thinks' balloon. The involuntary nature of this phenomenon is wittily underscored by the shock felt by the narrator at the appearance of his 'own' first such balloon on his arrival at a hotel; from his rictal mouth there emerges, in capitalized outrage, the following outburst:

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From his awkward position, the narrator is able only to get a 'squinting, elongated' view of his balloon and notes that, like all Moribundian balloons, it is subject to an 'automatic and vigilant' censorship.²⁰

The narrator then goes on to present a (narrative-disrupting) 'selection' of interchanges which take place over dinner in a posh hotel ('The Moribundian'), including a mini balloon-drama which lampoons both the inanity of the comic-strip commercial, and the odious social snobbery by which it is informed. Hamilton first portrays the two couples involved with the painstaking accuracy which typifies his earlier novels:

four people sitting at a large table some distance away -- a fat, elderly, prosperous-looking man, his wife, also stout and prosperous-looking, but with a kindly and capable appearance, and a young couple, well dressed, but bearing the slightly subdued and deferent demeanour of people who have yet to make their way in the world.²¹

¹⁹ Hamilton, 1939, 83.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 100.

The conversation then enacted recalls Swift's critique of 'polite conversation', the rationale of which is, as Edward Said remarks, 'that polite talk really speaks itself'²² -- since it is codifiable within a pointedly superfluous instruction manual. The 'conversation' (or rather, 'exchange') is inscribed within the balloons themselves 'in exactly the same handwriting, and in approximate conformation to an established shape and manner'.²³ Difference -- the very stuff of energetic social dialogue -- is therefore suppressed in favour of the unguent inanities of the affirmation of sameness. Note how, in the following interchange, the young man's wife gushingly parrots the very (italicized) letter of the elder's flummeries:

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The elder woman good-naturedly expressed herself thus:

Golf! What children men are, my dear . . . I may say that my husband, though he would be the last to admit it, invariably takes my advice in all matters relating to his business, and that it was my favourable impression of you which made me feel sure that your husband would be the right man for the post. A woman's importance in a man's career cannot be exaggerated, and unless she can be bright and entertaining after a long day's housework, she will only be a drag on him. How "fresh" you look in that pretty frock of yours. You must tell me where you got it. I hope we will be seeing a lot more of each other now-a-days.

²² E. W. Said, The World, the Text and the Critic, London, 1984, 59.

²³ Hamilton, 1939, 101.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

Thank you, Mrs. Overbury. I can modestly say that I have always felt it was part of my business to keep bright and fresh for my husband's friends at the end of the day, and the results tonight have exceeded my wildest hopes!

Finally, Hamilton amusingly indicts the ideology of commercial capitalism by lampooning the debased rhetoric which encodes its mendacious advertising. Within the socially incongruous outline of the concluding soliloquy are inscribed the characteristically jejeune devices of workaday advertising: the monotonous reiteration of the corny brand-name; the absurdly hyperbolic claims made for the product; and the contrived repetitions and alliterations ('No more back-breaking days at the tub, no more harsh scrubbing and scouring for me'):

THINKS

And to think that a few weeks ago I was so weary and exhausted after a day's washing that I was snappy and irritable with Jack, refusing even to go out with him to the local cinema! What a difference "SLOOSHALL" has made to my life — and also to Jack's career! Washing, which at one time never took me less than six or seven hours is now achieved in its many seconds by "SLOOSHALL", which is not injurious even to the most delicate fabrics. No more back-breaking days at the tub, no more harsh scrubbing and scouring for me! Even this frock I am wearing, which Mrs. Overbury has taken for new, was washed in "SLOOSHALL", which has, in addition, the supreme merit of being the cheapest product of its kind on the market, and is within easy reach of the poorest housewife's purse

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The target of Hamilton's satire -- which debunks the discourse of advertising by literalizing its figurative promises -- is that ideology of commodity fetishism which generates this kind of banal rhetorical tricksiness in the first place, which presents the products of human labour back to their producers as mysterious 'things', endowed with a life of their own.²⁶

A more explicit elucidation of Moribundian ideology is, however, facilitated by the very discursiveness of the quasi-allegorical form of this satire on the values of the Home Counties middle-classes; the values which govern life within 'Ukanian' civil society. That the latter should be the locus of Hamilton's satire, is, moreover, not insignificant. The contrast is with Swift, who -- particularly in 'A Voyage to Lilliput' -- exposes the corruption of what the French Marxist Louis Althusser would have called the political 'Ideological State Apparatuses'. Hamilton, on the other hand, as a Marxist contemptuous of all the bourgeois parliamentary factions of the heyday of the National Government, is not playing the same satirical game as that of Swift, the Tory partizan. In a digressive chapter dealing with the economic domain of Moribundian civil society, Hamilton foregrounds the absence of the Marxist labour theory of value from this petty bourgeois thought-world: 'it must be understood that in Moribundia wealth is not created by labour'.²⁷ Instead the acquisition of money is a matter of 'personal merit totally unrelated to any objective facts in the social scheme'.²⁸ Hence, the narrator finds in his pocket on the morning following his arrival in Moribundia the sum of £25, his ideally ordained daily worth.

²⁶ The classic Marxist exposition of this phenomenon is to be found at: Marx, 1976, 163-5.

²⁷ Hamilton, 1939, 134.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

The world of Moribundia is thus precisely analogous to what Marx called 'the world of commodities', wherein the money-form 'conceals the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers, by making their relations appear as relations between material objects'.²⁹

One of the formal features of fantasy literature -- what Rosemary Jackson calls its tendency to project 'a suspension, an eternal present'³⁰-- is converted by Hamilton into the pivotal ideological regulator of life in Moribundia: "'Unchange": it was ideal because it could not change: it could not change because it was ideal.'³¹ 'Ideal', that is not just in the sense of being smugly 'just right' -- as in the 'British Ideal Homes Exhibition' -- but also in the more philosophical sense of 'idealist': 'Mind precedes matter, the idea comes first and the reality is made to obey it.'³² Hamilton's specific target here is that homespun English idealism propagated during the inter-war years by Sir Arthur Eddington ('Ris Ruhtra Notgnidde'), and Sir James Jeans ('Ris Semaj Snaej'). In 1928 the latter wrote, in connection with what Caudwell (*inter al.*) called the contemporary 'crisis in physics', that: 'Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter.'³³ In 1931 Eddington encapsulated the symbiosis attained in Hamilton's Moribundia between Science and Religion. 'The skeleton', he wrote, 'is the whole contribution of physics to the solution of the Problem of Experience; from the clothing of the skeleton it stands aloof', since, 'the inmost ego can never

²⁹ Marx, 1976, 168.

³⁰ R.Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, London, 1981, 47.

³¹ Hamilton, 1939, 165.

³² *Ibid.*, 141.

³³ Sir J. Jeans, The Mysterious Universe, London, 1928, 133.

be part of the spiritual world.'³⁴ This Self-Denying Ordinance was apotheosized by Jeans with his re-casting of God in the role of 'mathematical' consciousness endowed with 'a designing or controlling power'.³⁵ These recuperative asseverations are couched in a homely, platitudinous language that beckons the lambent wit of a Hamilton: 'I must confess,' Eddington confides in an avuncular aside, 'that when I think of a Test Match in Australia, I cannot help picturing it as played upside down.'³⁶ (Impromptu actually includes several pages which re-write this conception as utterly terrifying.)³⁷

Hamilton depicts the less cerebral and more socially normative operation of Moribundian ideology by illustrating its willing internalisation. An example of this occurs when the narrator is rejected by his erstwhile lover, Anne, and 'togs himself up' in the apparel required of Moribundia's caste of lipping drunks -- 'picture postcard' top hat and tails.³⁸ This obeisance to social convention is consonant with the thoroughgoing absorption of Moribundian ideals by its working class, the 'Yenkcocks' (Cockneys). For example, Mrs. Juggins, the woman with whose family the narrator is compelled to lodge subsequent to the (magical) depreciation of his status and (thus) income, declaims to him, in response to a question concerning the (mythical) 'change' in the 'conditions' of the working class:

"Oh yes, it's nice enough ... but bless your heart do we appreciate it? Are we thankful for it? Of course not. Instead of being grateful for what we've got, all we do is ask for more. And it all comes out of the taxpayer's money too."³⁹

³⁴ Sir A. Eddington, Science and Religion, London, 1931, 7-8.

³⁵ Jeans, 1928, 137.

³⁶ Eddington, 1931, 9.

³⁷ Hamilton, 1939, 187-9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 201-4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

In this Edwardian Punch version of the working class, the 'Jugginses' and 'Mugginses' really *do* keep coal in the bath and smash up grand pianos for firewood. Similarly, the manual workers with whom middle-class householders are most familiar (repair men) invariably overcharge and scamp on their work. Mr. Juggins, for example, is a plumber who habitually forgets to bring the appropriate tools with him and is forever popping back home. As we saw earlier no value is created by the class to which the Juggins family belongs. The 'Yenkcocks' are devoted 'not to work, but to amusement',⁴⁰ and their districts in the East End of 'Nwotsemaht' are accordingly awash with cinemas and greyhound tracks while their houses are packed with wirelasses and overfed dogs.⁴¹

They are indulged in this behaviour by Moribundian society at large because they constitute a thoroughly incorporated class whose sub-culture is systemically functional (my italics):

For without these high spirits, this incessant and illogical cheerfulness, this delicious gaiety under irksome and difficult tasks, this taking of everything as a joke, it is doubtful whether any of the vaster Moribundian undertakings -- such as, for instance, protracted wars (*in which, alas, Moribundians are still, against all their dearest wishes and instincts, compelled to engage*) -- could be undertaken at all.⁴² [My italics].

Note especially the ironic rendition of Moribundian public opinion in the italicized portion of this extract: this is just one example of how Impromptu in Moribundia is freighted with a greater degree of Bakhtinian 'heteroglossia' than Hamilton's previous novels -- in the one sentence can be discerned the voices of the narrator, Moribundian common opinion, and the implied author.⁴³ This merging of discourses facilitates

⁴⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁴¹ Ibid., 208-23.

⁴² Ibid., 62.

Hamilton's implication that a petty-bourgeois conception of the working class as peopled by cheerful imbeciles is inextricably linked with thinking the nation as unproblematically unified and ready for war: thus a lampoon on a silly misperception turns into an unmasking of a pernicious species of false consciousness.

Literally 'chained to his bed by rheumatism', during his sojourn with the Juggins family, the narrator is conveniently given the chance to devour and assay Moribundian literature and thereby give voice to Hamilton's opinions concerning contemporary literature. The chief victims of his invective are 'Moribundia's Holy Men', 'Draydur Gnulpik', 'Ris Yrneh Tlobwen', and 'Nhoj Nahcub' (Rudyard Kipling, Sir Henry Newbolt, and John Buchan). Theirs is the literature of the 'Straight Bat', a corpus of writing which promotes a colonialist homosocial bonding and evinces 'a sober joy in a kind of freemasonry binding each 'Akkup Bihas' (Pukka Sahib) to his fellow, even if their interests are opposed and they are in actual physical conflict with each other'.⁴⁴ Hamilton here encapsulates a function of the dominant ideology under capitalism that is, arguably, its most significant -- namely the unification of the ruling class itself.⁴⁵

Hamilton also pungently dismisses the Fabians 'Wahs' and 'Sllew' (Shaw and Wells) as 'bees that have stung without wounding'.⁴⁶ His strictures against such modernist writers as 'Ecyoj', 'Yelxuh', and 'Ecnerwal' are also impeccably orthodox

⁴³ For the theory behind these remarks, see 'Discourse in the Novel', in M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, ed. M.Holquist, trans., M. Holquist and C. Emerson, Austin, 1981, 301-8 . Thanks are due to Terry Eagleton for suggesting the possible relevance of Bakhtin to a reading of Impromptu.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, 1939, 240.

⁴⁵ Cf. N. Abercrombie *et al.*: 'In general, ideology has an importance in explaining the coherence of the dominant class but not in the explanation of the coherence of the society as a whole.' [In The Dominant Ideology Thesis, London, 1980, 3.]

⁴⁶ Hamilton, 1939, 247.

in their adherence to Communist nostras. The following malediction recalls Radek's notorious castigation of Ulysses at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers:

I think that any worldly critic of these writers would agree that they are for the most part hopelessly and morbidly turned in upon themselves, and sterile in consequence They must look through the microscope, all the horizons for the telescope being closed.⁴⁷

The half-truth here asserted is obscured by the use of such cant pejorative words and phrases as 'morbidly' and (later) 'meaningless masturbation' when applied to work as palpably tremendous as Joyce's Ulysses.

Opposition to Moribundia's ruling ideology as expressed in its philosophy of science, its everyday life and its literature is not, as we have seen, generated among the 'Yenkoccs' (which fact is, perhaps, a consequence of the paucity of Hamilton's experiential knowledge of his formally favoured agency for social change). Nor does the sole 'tsinummoc' (communist) encountered by the narrator bode very well since he is bought off with consummate ease by Anne for £1,000 and becomes a capitalist himself within a fortnight. In any case, his soap-box oratory is rendered almost nugatory by the 'extraordinary jargon'⁴⁸ in which it is becloudedly encoded. Hamilton is here perhaps taking a swipe at the pidgin Marxist vernacular of the Communist Party's official organs. (If so, however, the critique is a veiled one since the 'tsinummoc' speaks precisely as the average apolitical middle-class philistine would expect him to speak).

Moreover, the unprepossessing portrayal of the 'tsinummoc'

⁴⁷ Ibid., 251. Karl Radek referred to Joyce's Ulysses as, 'A heap of dung, crawling with worms, photographed by a cinema apparatus through a microscope', and described it as set in 'Ireland in 1916' (sic!): see A. Zhdanov *et al.*, Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress, London, 1935, 153.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, 1939, 128.

notwithstanding, the counter-ideology of 'Msixram' (Marxism) is clearly valorized -- and the (separable) pathetic faith in the wonders of 'Eht Teivos Noinu' affirmed -- within the text. Against its socially global threat are ranged the avatars of Moribundia's ruling ideology -- the hordes of umbrella-brandishing, bowler-hatted 'Little Men' who come to drive the narrator out of their planet for appearing to transgress their codes of decency and honour.

The harrowing *dénouement* of the novel begins to unravel when one of the bowler-hatted dwarves witnesses the delivery of a staggering blow by the narrator to Anne's brother, an 'Akkup Bihās' newly returned from 'Aynek' (Kenya). The latter's wrath has been aroused by our hero's (putative) 'interference' with Anne, and he is accordingly out to avenge her honour -- which *has*, of course, been besmirched since, to a society as hypocritical as Moribundia's, appearances are everything. The final, scandalized stampede of the 'Little Men' is unleashed by the cumulative effect of the narrator's failures to observe such acts of outward decorum as the singing of the National Anthem. The population of Moribundia (like the population of Tom Nairn's 'Ukania') is afflicted by a particularly virulent strain of monarchism which renders its members listless when the King has 'flu, and hysterically happy when the Queen has a baby.⁴⁹

The actual account of this pursuit is indebted, it seems to me, to Wells' scarifying depiction of the chase visited upon the beleaguered narrator of 'The Time Machine' by the troglodyte Morlocks. The following passage is Hamilton's -- and although (as we shall see) it is indubitably imitative, it is also a comic delight whose ludicrous images deserve, in their precision, to be savoured:

Some, bolder than the rest, flung themselves upon me, but they could not maintain their hold, and were sent spinning away; others I kicked out of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 268-70.

the way, like so many absurd and protesting little footballs, as I ran. The air was thick with the umbrellas they threw at me from all sides, but which were too small to hurt me.⁵⁰

And this is Wells:

The pattering grew more distinct, and then I caught the same queer sounds and voices I had heard in the Under-world. There were evidently several of the Morlocks, and they were closing in upon me....⁵¹

The parallel draws closer at the moment of escape. Frantically fumbling to connect the Time Machine's levers, the traveller is confronted with an imbroglio of wild Morlockian faces. He relates it thus:

The little brutes were close upon me. One touched me. I made a sweeping blow in the dark at them with the levers, and began to scramble into the saddle in the machine. Then came one hand upon me and then another. Then I had simply to fight against their persistent fingers for my levers, and at the same time feel for the studs over which these fitted ... it was a nearer thing than the fight in the forest, I think, this last scramble.⁵²

Hamilton's narrator faces a similar peril when perched precariously upon the *Asteradio*:

How they swarmed upon that grating, how they huddled and pressed forward, how they shook their fists and glared! The noise they made, the way they fought for a view of me, the way they tried to poke at me with their umbrellas!⁵³

Similar narrow-squeaks, with similarly unnerving scenes at departure evident in both tales, then. However, whereas the Morlocks can be read as projections from the Fabian nightmarish unconscious, the repugnant features of the 'Little

⁵⁰ Ibid., 281.

⁵¹ H.G. Wells, 'The Time Machine', in Selected Short Stories (1927), London, 1958, 67.

⁵² Ibid., 73-4.

⁵³ Hamilton, 1939, 283.

Men' suggest the fascistic tendencies of the petty bourgeoisie in revolt:

Instead of the harmless, helpful, friendly, tolerant, duty-doing, little business men I saw cupidity, ignorance, complacency, meanness, ugliness, short-sightedness, cowardice, credulity, hysteria, and, when the occasion called for it, as it did now, cruelty and blood-thirstiness. I saw the shrewd and despicable cash basis underlying that idiotic patriotism, and a deathly fear and hatred of innovation, of an overturning of their system, behind all their nauseatingly idealistic postures and utterances.⁵⁴

In this final, explicit unmasking of the social hypocrisies of Moribundia, Hamilton (like the *soi-disant* Leninist intellectual that he professed to be) lists no fewer than eleven abstract nouns as predicates of the 'Little Men', in a strenuous descriptive bid for political-cultural clarity, attesting to the 'thesaural' nature of his habit of mind and world-view.

Where Impromptu ultimately triumphs, for me, over 'The Time Machine' is where it also 'scores' over Zamyatin's We, Huxley's Brave New World, and Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. For, unlike all of these texts, Hamilton's novel is not structured by that exasperating binary opposition which eviscerates 'The Time Machine' *et al.* of the representation of any real dynamic towards progressive change, and indeed consecrates 'Unchange'. The simian Morlocks -- and the mad Mephis, Huxley's malcontents, and Orwell's Pickwickian 'proles' -- are just so many kitsch Foucauldian 'resistances', mere epiphenomena of the regimen of Power. Impromptu's Yenkoccs are, by contrast, patently absurd figments of the petty-bourgeois imagination; the novel functions, then, more as a satirical disquisition upon contemporary *mores* than as a fully-fledged dystopia 'foisted upon the society's future.'⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., 284.

⁵⁵ This phrase is taken from Leslie Mitchell's, Gay Hunter, London, 1934,

Hamilton's debt to H.G. Wells is, moreover and however, paltry indeed compared to that owed the Jewish American radical writer, Elmer Rice. For the latter's A Voyage to Purilia (1931) is subtended by that selfsame strategy subjacent to Impromptu; only, in Rice's novel, the traveller journeys to a world which enacts the oddities of the Hollywood films of the 'Silent Era'.

Rice wrote A Voyage to Purilia subsequent to his unhappy experience of working as a writer for Sam Goldwyn's studio in the late Twenties. In his autobiography he refers contemptuously to Hollywood as 'the old sausage machine',⁵⁶ and in his satirical novel he lampoons its inanities and absurdities with considerable brio. His manner of so doing does not confine itself essayistically to debunking the racist and sexist ideologies propagated by Hollywood, but also derides its characteristic technical devices (such as the 'close-up') as infantile and inane. Nonetheless, its (formally implicitly critical) absurdly adventitious plot must needs -- like Impromptu's -- be intercalated with discursive digressions, if its invocation of a fabular world is to be coherent, and if its polemical points are to be driven home.

The most extensive of these digressions is contained in Chapter vii. Its account of social stratification in Purilia reveals an interesting contrast with Impromptu; for whereas Hamilton, the (very) English Marxist, is more concerned with distinctions of class (or perhaps rather of *caste*), Rice, the American liberal, focuses much more upon divisions of race and gender. Within white society are arrayed the 'Umbilicals' (impossibly ancient mothers), the 'Pudencians' (asexually beautiful and completely imbecilic young maidens), the 'Paragonians' (knights-errant of the Pudencians), the 'Vauriens'

49, and is cited in A. Croft, Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s, London, 227.

⁵⁶ E. Rice, Minority Report: An Autobiography, London, 1963, 139.

(black-hatted villains), and the 'Bordellians' (meretricious *femmes fatales*). The literal 'blissful obliteration' in marriage on Purilia is the culmination of Rice's witty pasquinades upon Hollywood's simultaneous representation and suppression of human sexuality (the Purilians have no genitalia!). The narrator's timely escape from this unenviable fate adumbrates that depicted in Impromptu: he evacuates the planet pursued by the clergyman and his congregation,

howling with rage and pelting me with missiles. To them I was a blasphemer, an iconoclast. I had violated the most ancient and inflexible of Purilian laws and profaned the most sacred of Purilian mysteries.⁵⁷

In this excerpt, the author and his narrator are univocal. Generally, however, Rice makes skilful use of the disjunction between these two voices. For example, the absurdity of the idea, as recorded by the narrator, that only the Purilian whites 'have the capacity for spiritual love'⁵⁸ encourages the reader into reading ironically the following, less neutral, narratorial remark:

When they [the marines] had finished their splendid work of extermination, only a few smouldering embers and a heap of dark-skinned bodies remained to tell of this erstwhile stronghold of savagery.⁵⁹

The authorial ironization of this blandly horrendous observation is an illustration of the most interesting aspect of Rice's novel -- namely its exposition of how Hollywood's cynical filmic inscription of a racially-derived binary opposition between 'Goodies' and 'Baddies', together with the empathy generated for its hero by the simple adventure yarn can enmesh even the most culturally aware spectator within the most vile of ideologies. This insidious process is

⁵⁷ E. Rice, A Voyage to Purilia, London, 1931, 286.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

explicitly enunciated within the text in the following extract:

But it was the man [that is, the movie-goer] and not the scientist [that is, the implied reader], who stood concealed, behind the grated door in the underground fortress of the Chinks, and gazed helplessly at the plight of Molly and Johnson, in the clutches of Millwood and his yellow-skinned confederates.⁶⁰

Such textual self-awareness cannot, however, entirely unpick the thread of racism which runs through the novel's entertaining plot: paradoxically therefore, Rice's critique is contradicted somewhat by its novelistic enactment.

For what A Voyage to Purilia lacks -- and what Impromptu in Moribundia does not lack -- is the capacity to invoke an explanatory dimension to its satire. Purilia's self-inscription within the narratological conventions of Hollywood escapism -- unlike Hamilton's narrator, Rice's is clawed into an intra-Purilian story -- precludes the novel's attending to the actual, commercial conditions which engendered the banalities debunked. Implicitly, Rice's only explanation for the tawdrification of film in the Twenties must lie with the intellectual vapidness of the mass audience. And sure enough, in his autobiography we find him writing:

The absence of dialogue and the rather limited aesthetic and intellectual capacity of the mass audience for whose entertainment films were designed necessitated a concentration upon scenes of action: melodramatic, comic, erotic.⁶¹

The justice Rice here fails to do to America's downtrodden correlates with the iniquity of his blanket dismissal of the silent movies and their characteristic conventions (such as the 'last minute rescue'). One does not need to subscribe to Walter Benjamin's contention that the 'distracted state'⁶² of

⁶⁰ Ibid., 200.

⁶¹ Ibid., 173.

⁶² W. Benjamin, Illuminations, London, 1973, 242.

the moviegoer presaged a new kind of aesthetic emancipation to protest that Chaplin and Griffith were rather better than A Voyage to Purilia would have us believe.

Although less successful than Impromptu in Moribundia, then, Rice's novel remains nevertheless something of a template for Hamilton's novel. Moreover, the essential synoptic technique employed in both texts -- that of the interpolated digression into social structure or ideology -- is one which is also abundantly in evidence in such works as Gulliver's Travels or Erewhon. This feature is significantly less common in that more dominant corpus of modern dystopian fiction, We, Brave New World, and Nineteen Eighty-Four. For in all three of those novels recourse is made, for a societal overview, to the paradigmatic parable of 'The Grand Inquisitor' in Fyodor Dostoevsky's The Brothers' Karamazov (1880). (Hamilton is not the only 'derivative' writer assayed in this chapter!) It is this lineage that I wish now to trace, as a prelude to a summary assessment of Impromptu itself.

In the parable related by Ivan Karamazov to his brother, Alyosha, Christ returns to the world only to find himself entangled in the Inquisition in Seville. He is incarcerated by the Grand Inquisitor himself and upbraided for the impossibly exacting nature of the religion he has bequeathed. It would have been better far indeed, the cynical old Jesuit fulminates, if Christ had sensibly succumbed to the temptations of Lucifer in the desert -- for mankind would thereby have been the more surely enfolded. Scripting himself as selfless unworldly custodian of theological Truth, burdened with the curse of knowledge, the Inquisitor asseverates that universal freedom and human happiness are mutually inimical. In his peroration he moves -- as the Benefactor, Mustapha Mond, and O'Brien will move -- to outflank his addressee:

Know that I fear Thee not. Know that I too have been in the wilderness, I

too have lived on roots and locusts, I too have prized the freedom with which thou hast blessed men But I awakened and would not serve madness. I turned back and joined the ranks of those *who have corrected Thy work*. I left the proud and went back to the humble, for the happiness of the humble.⁶³

The wordless rejoinder provoked from Christ by the Grand Inquisitor -- a tender kiss -- is not, however, one to be found in the later re-enactments of this scene, and it is these with which I shall now deal.

The Russian writer Yevgeny Zamyatin enfolds a Grand Inquisitorial scene within the Gogolian form of his dystopian novel, We. His deployment of this encounter is, however, parodic. It begins, predictably enough, with the Benefactor's confiding comments:

If your silence signifies that you agree with me, why, let us talk as grown-ups do when the children have gone off to bed. Let's talk everything over to the end. I ask you: what is it have men from their swaddling-clothes days, been praying for, dreaming about, tormenting themselves for? Why, to have someone tell them, once and for all, just what happiness is -- and then weld them to this hapiness with chains.⁶⁴

The rebellious D-503 seems to listen, then, recalling E-330, his lover-revolutionary, he is seized by a paroxysm of laughter:

Sitting before him was a bald-headed, a Socratically bald-headed man. And with beads of sweat all over that bald head Laughter was suffocating me; it escaped me in billows. I put a hand over my mouth and dashed out of there pell-mell.⁶⁵

This anarchic piece of Symbolist writing (the conjuration and

⁶³ F. Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov (1912), trans. C.

Garnett, London, 1912, 267.

⁶⁴ Y. Zamyatin, We (1924), trans., B. G. Guernsey. 1960, London, 1972, 204.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

constellation of laughter and demotic rebellion) signifies a revolt against a patriarchal 'Grand Inquisitor' and is consonant with the greater disruptiveness of We, compared with its English counterparts.

Orwell was not slow to demonstrate Aldous Huxley's debt to Zamyatin in a review of We in an article published in Tribune in 1946. However, the irony of this description of the Russian's then obscure novel will not be lost on a reader of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four:

the inhabitants of Utopia have so completely lost their individuality as to be known only by numbers. They live in glass houses (this was written before television was invented), which enables the political police, known as the "Guardians", to supervise them more easily.⁶⁶

Huxley's dystopian society is, however, actually less physically oppressive than either Zamyatin's or Orwell's; and in Mustapha Mond, the 'World Controller for Western Europe', we have the most genial of Grand Inquisitors. Through Chapters xvi and xvii Mustapha Mond regales Brave New World's troika of social misfits (Helmholz, Bernard Marx, and the irritating Shakespeare-spouting John Savage), with the 'full story' of Fordian society -- wielding thus the Delphic mantle more usually borne by an implied author less resigned than the purblind Huxley. Like the old Jesuit of Ivan's tale, and like Orwell's O'Brien, the Controller is a fundamentally ambiguous authority figure, an erstwhile dissident who, as a youth, had dabbled in 'a bit of real science'⁶⁷ and had been 'threatened' with exile. Like Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, Mustapha Mond resolutely counterposes happiness to freedom, but also gladly grants Mr. Savage the freedom to be unhappy. The salient point to register here is that Huxley's world-

⁶⁶ G. Orwell, The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, iv, ed. S.Orwell and I. Angus, London, 1968, 73.

⁶⁷ A. Huxley, Brave New World (1932), London, 1977, 181.

weary, exalted Mr. Know-All successfully outflanks the *terribly* revolutionary trio, as Dostoevsky's wizened old Jesuit does not.

O'Brien, in Orwell's 1948 dystopia, is an altogether more sinister figure. Like Mustapha Mond he seems, initially, to be re-hashing the arguments made by Ivan's Grand Inquisitor. "Why should we want power?", he demands of the prostrate, tortured form of Winston Smith, through whose mind there flits the expected answer:

He knew in advance what O'Brien would say. That the Party did not seek power for its own ends, but only for the good of the majority That the choice for mankind lay between freedom and happiness, and that, for the great bulk of mankind, happiness was better. That the Party was the eternal guardian of the weak, a dedicated sect doing evil that good might come, sacrificing its own happiness to that of others.⁶⁸

In despair, Winston then poses the question which puts in a nutshell the problematic of the 'Ambiguous Authoritarian':

O'Brien knew everything He had understood it all, weighed it all, and it made no difference: all was justified by the ultimate purpose. What can you do, thought Winston, against the lunatic who is more intelligent than yourself, who gives your arguments a fair hearing and then simply persists in his lunacy?⁶⁹

Winston's weary retort only wins him an electric shock: he is wrong. For the answer to O'Brien's question is that: 'The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. [It is] not interested in the good of others ... solely in power.'⁷⁰ The deadly new twist given this paradigmatic interface is important, signifying, as it seems to do, a further lurch backwards from Zamyatin and Huxley into a bleaker hopelessness within the dystopian mode.

⁶⁸ G. Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (1948), London, 1983, 226.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 227.

This is only really so, however, if one is oblivious to that wave of dystopian writing produced in the Britain of the 1930s and 1940s, of which Nineteen Eighty-Four was only a part. Patrick Hamilton's Impromptu in Moribundia is one such text, and it is surely significant that it is not dependent for illumination upon a 'Grand Inquisitor' figure; hence no comparable shadow of despondency can be cast by some ambivalently authoritarian 'smart Alec'.

It might be objected that the intermittent divigations thereby made necessary detract from the smooth running of an illusionistic plot: but this kind of criticism could also be made, *a fortiori*, of Samuel Butler's great Erewhon, and, would surely be similarly misplaced. After all, these texts are satires, which by their very nature are 'interested', partisan interventions into the realm of public debate; why should they not wear their discursive facticity on their sleeves?

I wish now to return to face Hamilton's novel more squarely. According to the original contract he signed with Constable in 1938, Impromptu was to be entitled, more 'realistically', Assignment in Moribundia. [my emphasis].⁷¹ Now, in the lexicon of music, an 'impromptu' is an extemporaneous piece, performed in a particular key in a ternary form. This latter formal principle (of return after contrast) is one enacted by the movement of Hamilton's 'impromptu'. Hence, we have an 'extemporaneous' disquisition upon the 'moribund' malaise of the English petty bourgeoisie. Impromptu can thus be seen as Hamilton's 'Party piece' -- a conceit written for the delectation of his fellow Communist intellectuals. Unfortunately for Hamilton, at the time the novel was written the Popular Front policy of Stalin's Comintern was to cajole 'just those middle-class "little men" of "common sense" and "decency" that Hamilton [had] savaged'.⁷²

⁷¹ This information was derived from Constable's file on Patrick Hamilton.

Warner's The Wild Goose Chase was also heterodox with respect to the dogmas of the Popular Front. For example, the President of 'Lagonda', Michael Koresipolous, is lambasted as a representative of ostensibly anti-totalitarian liberal democracy. His 'Free State' is revealed, in his own self-aggrandizing tale, to have been bought from the Government at the (agreed) cost of the sacrifice of his entire revolutionary army.

"Liberty, I felt, had demanded a terrible sacrifice from her votary. It is true that my army had, by mutinies and disaffection, forfeited all just claim to my regard, but I am reluctant to assent to the suffering of any living creature. Yet, I reflected, these men will be laying down their lives in the noblest of all causes, the cause of Freedom, and how should I rob them of the Glory with which, it seems they are to be crowned by Fate? ... In the plain where they died I caused a stone to be set, and on the event I composed an Ode.⁷³

The mode of high-sounding liberal rhetoric is here exposed. The classicism of the balancing inversion structures in the last sentence are in revolting contrast to the murderous spectacle in the valley which Koresipoulos beholds from his mountain top. As a result of his encounter with the President of 'Lagonda', the book's hero, George, exhorts his peasant followers not to 'take a leader who has been educated at the Convent'.⁷⁴

Also discernible in The Wild Goose Chase is a sub-textual critique of Stalinism. The Town sustains itself by draining the countryside, just as Stalin's breakneck industrialization drive in the first two Five Year Plans was sustained by squeezing the peasantry and ruining Soviet agriculture. Two of George's lieutenants, Stanley and Arthur *can* be read as

⁷² A. Croft, 'Socialist Fiction in the 1930s', Ph. D., Nottingham University, 1985, 265.

⁷³ Warner, 1990, 254.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 263.

figurations of Bukharin and Stalin. Arthur is completely odious, eager to expel, purge, and liquidate. In the following passage we see him playing the Stalin to George's Trotsky:

"You may think you're very clever because you're popular with the army and happen to know how to shoot. But let me tell you this. It is Stanley and I who have worked longest for the revolution. We stayed with the peasants while you were wasting your time in the town. And we are not going to be browbeaten by a person like you, who seems always to be after something else."⁷⁵

Even if the anti-Stalinism of The Wild Goose Chase, and the anti-Popular Frontism of both it and Impromptu in Moribundia, were unintentional, it would still have been discernible to the beady eye of the apparatchik and the starry-eyed notice of the Russophilic fellow traveller. It is surely no accident that neither Warner nor Hamilton were actually Party members: a zealous follower of every zig-zag of 'The Line' would have been unlikely to have penned such withering attacks on the petty-bourgeoisie at the zenith of the 'People's Front' against Fascism and War (although it should also be stressed that Party members like Montagu Slater, Edgell Rickword, Randall Swingler, and Sylvia Townsend Warner were far from being sedulous 'hacks').

The actual title of Hamilton's book indicates and foregrounds a problem endemic to the fabular satirical mode in general. Peter Widdowson, with reference to Huxley's novel, expresses the problem as follows: 'Brave New World is only a satire if the reader agrees to accept Huxley's reading of the world as true; otherwise it is fantasy.'⁷⁶ This judgement elides the rhetorical nature of allegory as (to use Lynette Hunter's terms) a 'stance' which 'encourages involvement in the process of the text, and while necessarily stating position

⁷⁵ Ibid., 408.

⁷⁶ P. Widdowson, 'English Fiction on the 1930s', in J. Clark *et al.* (eds.), Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 1930s, London, 1979, 60

does not impose it'.⁷⁷ For example, I personally would repudiate what Raymond Williams describes as Huxley's 'black amalgam of Wellsian rationality and the names and phrases of revolutionary socialism, in a specific context of mobile and affluent corporate capitalism'⁷⁸ as an absurdly perverse matrix; that is my readerly prerogative, as it was that of the Times Literary Supplement's reviewer to haughtily dismiss the 'airy nothings'⁷⁹ of Hamilton's satire in 1939.

This indubitable problem does not, however, necessarily vitiate entirely the fabular satiric mode in general, nor Hamilton's novel in particular. Indeed, one could argue, as Darko Suvin persuasively does, that the formal framework of (quasi-) Science Fiction effects, perforce, a cognitive estrangement of common-sense reality, and that consequently the genre is *essentially* oriented towards social critique,⁸⁰ just as the liberal-realist novel is oriented towards the treatment of personal relationships. Of course, it is true that a considerable degree of co-operation must needs be exacted from the (perhaps hostile) reader of Impromptu in Moribundia or Nineteen Eighty-Four; but this is true also of, for example, Swift's superbly ironic and deeply disconcerting tract, A Modest Proposal (1729). Moreover, it is surely decidedly satirically advantageous for a writer to have the systematicity of an invented world at his/her fingertips, in preference to the phenomenally restrictive conspectus of the realist novel?

In any case, the ternary form of Hamilton's Impromptu ensures the jolting return of the 'traveller' to Earth -- to the ('Moribundian') Constitutional Club in Northumberland Avenue

⁷⁷ L. Hunter, Modern Allegory and Fantasy, Basingstoke and London, 1989, 184.

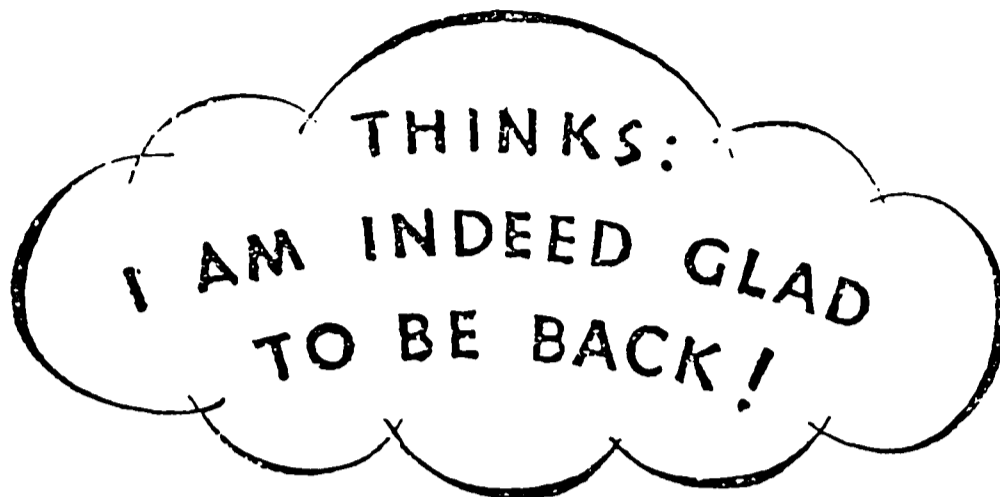
⁷⁸ R. Williams, in P. Parrinder (ed.), Science Fiction: A Critical Guide, London, 1979, 60.

⁷⁹ Times Literary Supplement, 4 February 1939, 75.

⁸⁰ Suvin, 1979, 7.

and consequent arrest. His relief thereby spoiled, he emits one last (ironized) balloon:

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Although Bruce Hamilton considered his brother's Communism to be an aberration which destroyed him as a writer, he did not, in fact, adduce its subtending of Impromptu as a fatal flaw in its construction. Instead, he asserted that

Patrick's satire tended to miss its mark by being mainly directed against less big impostures and falsities than trivial irritations such as a rather silly series about 'Cockney humour' that the Evening News had been running, and the mendacious absurdities of the world of advertising.⁸²

This kind of criticism is as misguided as those standard strictures against, for example, Book Three of Gullivers Travels -- that the 'Voyage to Laputa' therein described is insufficiently 'general', and so on. For it surely misses the point about satire as a mode -- namely, its interventionist specificity. As Edward Said puts it of Swift: 'With a few exceptions, most of his writing was precisely occasional: it was stimulated by a specific occasion and planned in some way to change it.'⁸³ Moreover, with regard to Impromptu in

⁸¹ Hamilton, 1939, 289.

⁸² B. Hamilton, The Light Went Out, London, 1972, 86.

⁸³ E. W. Said, The World, the Text and the Critic, London, 1984, 56.

Moribundia, criticisms like the following (by Andrew Cramp) are analogous to critiquing Karl Marx for whittering on about commodity fetishism in Capital rather than constantly denouncing mid-Victorian factory conditions:

the novel fails in its intention to provide a serious and concentrated attack because rather than confront issues of primary importance, like social injustice for example (which is only hinted at), it becomes too involved with the general misconceptions, vain ideals and prejudices of the middle classes. Often these are too petty to be critically effective.⁸⁴

Our own specific historical moment has recently seen the issue of a self-consciously Swiftian novel, emanating from one who emerged from that selfsame milieu of London-based Communist literary intellectuals of which Patrick Hamilton was a part: The Sykaos Papers by the socialist historian E.P. Thompson. A Gulliver's Travels in reverse, this book unfolds the tale of the poet Oi Paz, who voyages from the dying, computer-dependent planet of Oi Tar to an Earth increasingly imperilled by ecological catastrophe and thermonuclear Armageddon.

Like Hamilton's Impromptu, Thompson's book constitutes a partizan intervention into a culture in crisis; for example, like the former, Sykaos evinces, through cross-cultural investigation, the signs of a subjacent social malaise in the debasement of language. In conversation with the novel's chief mortal protagonist, the anthropologist Helena Sage, the linguist David Nettler reveals how he managed to 'crack' the main everyday discourse of Oitar (a ludicrously jargonised computerese):

A. Funny thing. It was through noting Earthly affinities. Never mind about Oitar. Earth language is going that way as well. Civil service circulars. Proclamations of the CPSU(B). Number-crunchers. Defence experts with

⁸⁴ Arnold Cramp, 'Prose Fiction in the 1930s: Elizabeth Bowen, Rex Warner and Patrick Hamilton', Ph.D, Loughborough University, 1984, 330.

their acronyms ... language is dying now, all over the world. It's being cured and modernised. It's like a deciduous forest, poisoned in mid-summer, shedding its leaves, so that only the skeletal structures of the trees are left. Then they will cut it down and feed the wood into the computer.⁸⁵

The clever wit and timeliness of this latter metaphor notwithstanding, the historian's satire on this, and other aspects of contemporary culture, is (like Orwell's 'Newspeak') less limpid than Hamilton's -- academic elucubration as against ballooning! Nonetheless, Thompson's tome is an important work whose manifold riches and manifest flaws (not the least of which is its Thompsonian *length!*) merit fuller discussion than is possible here.

Also published in 1988 was another timely satirical work - - Vladimir Voinovich's Moscow, 2042. Formed, like Thompson and Hamilton, within a Marxoid political culture, Voinovich has penned an intervention into the long-simmering Soviet debates about social stagnation which skewers official Soviet communism while, nevertheless, affirming a continued belief in the ideal of socialism. Incarcerated with the Big Brotherly Genialissimo Bukashev -- whose regime has just fallen to a resurgent Tsarism -- the narrator Kartsev angrily upbraids this self-confessed confutor of communism:

"You call this communism?" I asked indignantly. "This society of pitiful paupers who can't even tell the difference between primary and secondary matter?" [Food and excrement!]

"Yes, I do, my dear man", he said with a grin that I didn't see but felt. "This is what communism is".

"That's funny", I said, "I had a different picture of that dream which has been with mankind for so long."⁸⁶

Like The Sykaos Papers, Voinovich's novel is, moreover, explicitly subjunctive in its vatic imagining of society's dire

⁸⁵ E. P. Thompson, The Sykaos Papers, London, 1988, 318.

⁸⁶ V. Voinovich, Moscow, 2042, London, 1988, 400.

future. Thompson's 'Preface', detailing the fictive origin of his text, comments that: 'We will have to wait with what patience we can command to discover whether the Gracious Goodnesses sent us this input as an admonition or as a programmed doom';⁸⁷ and 'Kartsev's' account ends on a similar hypothesizing note -- 'May the reality of the future not resemble the one I describe',⁸⁸ he enjoins the reader by way of adieu.

Both of these novels are then conceived of as (to employ Said's adjective) 'worldly' polemical interventions into the public realm. Thus far they are reminiscent of the other texts discussed here. However, in typical 'post-modernist' fashion, both render explicit their own facticity to a greater extent than the earlier works. Sykaos is, for example, woven out of fragments of differentially focalised documentation, while Moscow, 2042 wittily foregrounds itself by turning up as a fateful influence upon the future citizens of Moscowrep, before 'Kartsev' has even had the chance to write it!

It is within one account of the paradigmatic shift from 'modernism' to 'post-modernism' that I wish to (tentatively) situate my conclusion. Writing of the 'critical disrepute' into which allegorical literary forms have fallen in the twentieth century, Lorna Sage comments that:

Two main strands in the modernist aesthetic, the doctrine of the autonomy of the artefact, and the association of literature with collective and recurrent 'myth', combine to leave little room and few terms for allegory.⁸⁹

This modernist denigration of such deliberately worldly literary forms as allegory is one against which the texts discussed in this chapter protest.

⁸⁷ Thompson, 1988, viii.

⁸⁸ Voinovich, 1988, 424.

⁸⁹ L. Sage, in R. Fowler (ed.), A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms, London, 1987, 6.

Hamilton himself belonged to a particular political-cultural milieu whose critique of the world-view endorsed by what would later be designated as 'modernism' was more sophisticated than is usually supposed. Writing in The Mind in Chains, Edgell Rickword articulated this critique in the following terms:

In literature it is not merely the technical superiority of such writers as Joyce, Eliot, Huxley, or Virginia Woolf, which ensures that they shall be treated as "representative" writers. Their various degrees of pessimism, of confusion, the very skill with which they represent life as a skein of infinitely interwoven sensations, and motives whose 'meaning' can no more be consciously grasped than the exact colour of a mist at sunrise, suggest to the reader a feeling of impotence faced with the complexity of life, and leave him, if with any certainty, that no line of behaviour is better than any other.⁹⁰

It is this critique of the relativism and subjectivism typical of much 'modernist' writing (which often went with an appreciation of the technical expertise of Joyce and Woolf) which informs Impromptu in Moribundia.

In his comprehensive conspectus of what he calls 'post-modernist' fiction, Brian McHale usefully delineates the shift in the literary 'dominant' betokened by the transcendence of modernism -- a shift, which, he argues, replaces epistemological with ontological questions. For whereas modernist texts typically ask such questions as: 'What is there to be known?' and 'What am I?',

typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world it projects, for instance What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?⁹¹

⁹⁰ E. Rickword, 'Culture, Progress and the English Tradition', in C. Day Lewis (es.), The Mind in Chains, London, 1937, 250.

⁹¹ B. McHale, Postmodernist Fiction, London, 1987, 10.

In raising this kind of question, contemporary metafiction borrows liberally from the stock of motifs of temporal and spatial displacement typical of its sister genre, Science Fiction -- the snobbish repudiations of 'SF' invariably affected by writers such as Voinovich notwithstanding!⁹²

'Postmodernist' fiction (at least on McHale's definition) seems then to have come full circle to those extroverted non-modernist literary forms which began to proliferate during the 1930s. McHale's explanation for this phenomenon is that, 'if you push epistemological questions far enough ... they "tip over" into ontological questions'.⁹³ This would seem to gloss over his earlier suggestion that, 'the term "post-modernism" signifies a poetics which is the successor of, or *possibly a reaction against* [my emphasis], the poetics of early twentieth-century modernism'.⁹⁴ In any case, the social crises we all have to contend with today are, if anything, even more ominous than those of the 1930s and therefore, it seems to me, require literary responses *both* more inventive (at a formal level) and more 'worldly' than those of that decade of hope and defeat. And certainly, we could do without the cultural pessimism of fictional representations which place the reader in a world which precludes revolt.

In that context, the seeming recrudescence of satirical allegory illustrates what Frederic Jameson has predicated of such a literary 'mode':

when we speak of a mode, what can we mean but that this particular type of literary discourse is not bound to the conventions of a given age, nor indissolubly linked to a given type of verbal artefact, but rather persists as a temptation and a mode of expression across a whole range of historical periods, seeming to offer itself, if only intermittently, as a formal possibility which can be revived and renewed.⁹⁵

⁹² Voinovich, 1988, 103.

⁹³ Ibid.,11.

⁹⁴ Ibid.,3.

⁹⁵ F. Jameson, cited in Jackson, 1981,7.

Patrick Hamilton's Impromptu in Moribundia is an especially inventive example of the realisation of the tempting 'formal possibility' of the quasi-allegorical satire and deserves republication.

Unfortunately, such a re-issue is unlikely to meet with any great commercial success if the original publication is anything to go by. In April 1939, Hamilton complained to his brother that the novel was not 'selling at all, and apart from the "balloons" was hardly understood at all by the Press'.⁹⁶ By contrast, Gaslight (which Patrick had worked on simultaneously with Impromptu),⁹⁷ had a 'grand press'⁹⁸ and was a major financial success. Both these texts anatomize those bourgeois vices -- of, for example, greed and patriarchal terrorism -- which have historically helped to gear Britain up for war. By the time Hamilton came to write his next novel, Hangover Square, and his next play, The Duke in Darkness, Britain was at war with Germany.

His own attitude to the conflict could not help but reflect the complexities of Communist opinion in general. Shortly after Chamberlain's declaration, Patrick wrote to Bruce as follows:

Well -- we're off now! And so history marches in the way you and I knew it must ever since 1933. Apart from all the horror and bloodshed and misery which lies ahead I suppose one should be relieved, as Hitler and his pals are going to get it in the neck.⁹⁹

The main factor which was to determine his position on the war was, however, to be the foreign policy needs of the USSR

⁹⁶ P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, Henley-on-Thames, 23-7 April 1939 [AHA].

⁹⁷ PAT, 370.

⁹⁸ P. Hamilton, letter of 23-7 April 1939, 3 [AHA].

⁹⁹ P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, from Henley-on-Thames, 8 September 1939, 1 [AHA].

and 'unlike many working communists in the West, he took the Russo-German pact in his stride'.¹⁰⁰ In any case, the war did present itself as a contradictory phenomenon to even those 'working communists' who were disconcerted by the change in line forced on the CPGB by the Nazi-Soviet Pact. As the Our Timer Arnold Rattenbury puts it retrospectively:

The war was both jingo-nationalist and, in the end, anti-fascist (and, to that extent, anti-nationalist) -- its great inherent contradiction that, with military direction in the hands of reaction, actual political content was increasingly informed by a radical spirit in the soldiery.¹⁰¹

The complexities and contradictions engendered by the war's raising of the political stakes compelled Hamilton to mobilize as effectively as possible the resources in the economy of his writing. This entailed a shift from connotation to denotation in prose fiction and vice-versa in drama. Hence, the double-move from the commercially unsuccessful allegory of Impromptu in Moribundia to the (still relatively connotative) realism of Hangover Square, and from the money-spinning melodrama of Gaslight to the more politically explicit allegory of The Duke in Darkness (wartime conditions were unlikely to be conducive to commercial success for serious theatre anyway). The following chapter will follow through the first aspect of this move in a discussion of Hangover Square and Hamilton's other wartime novel, The Slaves of Solitude.

¹⁰⁰ PAT, 412.

¹⁰¹ A. Rattenbury, letter to the present writer, 18 December 1989.

Chapter Nine

'Pray to the Red Star in the East': Fiction on the Home Front

I cannot tell you how much I have been enjoying the relief over here It isn't the big things but the little things that keep on giving one satisfaction. Just as the beginnings of the war slowly brought one maddening little mental toothache after another, so the peace has begun to bring, and will go on bringing a series of little anti-toothaches -- the lifting of the blackout, the weather forecasts again, the allusions to cricket in the newspapers, the hope of petrol and a car again, the arrest of prominent Nazis etc.In fact it was all a very funny business altogether, and I don't think I shall ever stop being grateful for its being over -- just as I'll never stop being glad I'm not in hospital with my accident.

Patrick Hamilton, in a letter written to his brother Bruce just after V.E. Day, cited in PAT.

'Nazis plunge world into War' was how Patrick Hamilton's favourite newspaper, the Daily Worker, hailed the outbreak of hostilities on 2 September 1939.¹ In an official CPGB pamphlet of 14 September, Harry Pollitt went on to stress that, 'the Communist Party supports the war, believing it to be a just war which will be supported by the whole working class and all friends of democracy'.² This ringing declaration was to sound rather hollow one month later when, at the behest of the Comintern, the British Communist Party executed a complete volte-face. The new 'Line' was spelled out in the following terms:

¹ Cited in S. Bornstein and A. Richardson, Two Steps Back: Communists and the Wider Labour Movement, 1935-1945, London, 1983, 62.

² Cited in *ibid.*, 63.

On 2 September the Communist Party published a manifesto which presented the aim of "the struggle on two fronts", for the military defeat of Hitler and the political defeat of Chamberlain. This policy was basically incorrect. It failed to take account of the imperialist character of the war and assisted the imperialist camouflage of the war as an "anti-fascist war". The call for the military defeat of Hitler meant objective support for British imperialism and its military victory.³

The secret essence of the conflict was further elucidated by the leading Party intellectual, R. Palme Dutt: 'Behind the war "against Hitlerism" appears ever more clearly the real anti-Soviet aims of the British imperialists, which they have pursued through all these years since 1917.'⁴ As for the deceptive detail of German Nazism -- in the words of another Party propagandist, Peter Kerrigan, 'only the working class'⁵ could settle accounts with that particular side-show.

Although Patrick Hamilton supported the war against Germany at the outset, his enthusiasm had always been tempered with a self-consciously cold-eyed assessment of the international situation. Like Palme Dutt he looked to the USSR as the main player in the field. Following the CP's change of position, he made the following fantastic comments in a letter to his brother:

Hitler's power is on the decline, however long he may take in going. The arrangement he made with Russia was a terrible symptom of weakness from which there is no sort of recovery in the long run. It is rather amusing to note how National Socialism, which in its early days shed its socialism completely in favour of nationalism, is now again having to slip back a little under the awful exigencies of the situation.⁶

This rather blasé armchair prognosis is remarkable both for

³ Cited in *ibid.*, 66.

⁴ R. P. Dutt, Why this War?, London, 11 November 1939, 8.

⁵ P. Kerrigan, The New Stage of the War, April 1940, 19. 12.

⁶ P. Hamilton, letter, Henley, 30 November 1939, 2 [AHA].

its simple equation of the Soviet Union with 'socialism', and the unproblematic ascription of the latter aspiration to the 'Strasserite' tendency of the Nazi Party in its earlier days. Hamilton seems to have experienced 'the awful exigencies of the situation', as genuinely apocalyptic. In a letter to Bruce written on New Year's Eve 1939 he wrote: 'I always knew that the Second World War would be the end of life as we knew it, and, alas, I still think so.'⁷ He seems to have found it difficult to conceive of a role for himself in the conflagration -- as a physically semi-crippled fellow-traveller of a political movement which, until June 1941, was vehemently anti-war.

Before the involvement of the Soviet Union Hamilton remained profoundly dispirited. To his brother he wrote, in May 1941:

About the future I am personally very gloomy, but very resigned, and I still get a lot of fun. As I see it, either the war goes on indefinitely, or there is the wrong sort of peace, which will mean intensified fascism over here, which will mean incredible misery for people like us.⁸

In case of Nazi invasion, Hamilton held medicinal tablets 'in reserve' at their Henley house for both himself and Lois.⁹ The invasion of the USSR 'silenced Patrick for a while'¹⁰ on the letter front, but the victories of the Red Army were eventually to buoy him up a little, and in late 1944 we find him signing off a letter to Bruce with the following adjuration: 'Pray to the Red Star in the East that we may be delivered to meet each other again sooner than we thought.'¹¹

The vicissitudes of war notwithstanding, Hamilton was

⁷ P. Hamilton, letter, Henley, 31 December 1939, 2 [AHA].

⁸ P. Hamilton, cited in PAT, 415.

⁹ Ibid., 420.

¹⁰ Ibid., 415.

¹¹ Ibid, 417.

remarkably productive during this period, both in the fields of drama and of prose fiction. The 'Christmas "tunnel" of 1939 saw the genesis of what he referred to as a 'Blitz Novel'¹² - - presumably Hangover Square. He got down to working on the book in earnest in April 1940 and finished it in February 1941.¹³ It was thus written during that twelve-month period beginning in June 1940 known as 'the Blitz'. Of the German bombing of the capital and its environs, Hamilton wrote: 'These blitzes in London are bloody But again it is astonishing how quickly the town pulls round, and establishes a new modus vivendi in a few days'.¹⁴ This attitude of struggling on in the face of the 'total war' impacts on Hangover Square.

The Slaves of Solitude belongs to a quite different historical moment. It was begun during the war at a time when Hamilton was trying to write according to the precepts he advanced in an article for Our Time published in June 1941. He argued there, a propos the solipsistic malaise allegedly afflicting modernist literature, that, 'only when once more there is change and development around them can they [writers] cease to be introspective and consequently impotent, and begin once more to create and develop'.¹⁵ Now that the Soviet Union had entered the fray, the world was 'changing all right -- and very rapidly and noisily'.¹⁶

The first of these new fruits of 'potency'¹⁷ for Hamilton was The Duke in Darkness, published in the year in which The Slaves of Solitude is set, 1943. Finished 'in bed'¹⁸ over a

¹² P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, 31 December 1939, 1 [AHA].

¹³ PAT, 394.

¹⁴ Ibid., 415.

¹⁵ P. Hamilton, Our Time, vol i, no. 4, June 1941, 8.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ It is perhaps not irrelevant that Hamilton should, according to his brother, have come to sexual maturity during the war years; see PAT, 427.

¹⁸ B. Hamilton, The Light Went Out, London, 1972, 115.

six-week period in the winter of 1945-6 at Henley, this novel is written from the vantage point of victory, and foregrounds the necessity for the decent 'private' citizen to choose an active engagement in the 'public' war against Nazism.

This wartime dialectic between public and private, as rendered in Hangover Square and The Slaves of Solitude, constitutes the terms of discussion of this chapter. In an analysis primarily concerned with character representation I shall make reference to the work of other contemporary English novelists who register in their fiction the 'private' experience of that most 'public' of events, the 'total war'. With the partial exception of Martin Amis, these writers belong to Hamilton's generation of ex-Public School writers who narrowly missed the slaughter of the Great War and who also sat out the rematch on the Home Front -- specifically here, Graham Greene, George Orwell and Henry Green.

Hangover Square begins on Christmas Day 1938 and climaxes on 4 September 1939. It tells the story of an infernal triangle of deracinated petty-bourgeois characters who play out a drunken existence in a London overhung by the shadow of the looming war -- their alcoholic purblindness functioning as a metaphor for the wider malaise of English middle-class society. The extra-diegetic narrator's favoured character is George Harvey Bone -- a rather simple middle-aged man with a small independent income. This enables him to take his place in the retinue of Netta Longdon, an attractive, lazy, and selfish out-of-work actress whose cruel behaviour exacerbates Bone's schizoid tendencies to the point of full-blown schizophrenia. Eventually, in one of his 'dead' moods, Bone murders Netta and her fascist lover, Peter, before duly committing suicide in the first days of a war of which he is oblivious.¹⁹

¹⁹ In the final year of the war the American film version of Hangover Square -- written by Barré Lydon and directed by John Brahm -- did the rounds of

With eyes 'big and blue and sad and slightly bloodshot with beer and smoke', George Harvey Bone is depicted as a vulnerable big man, a latter day Samson, laid low by a Delilah of the age of the Silver Screen (no fewer than seven quotes from Samson Agonistes are epigraphically strewn throughout the text). He can be read as a simple-minded version of Patrick Hamilton, whose age he shares. For example, his reading matter sometimes recalls that of Hamilton at a low ebb. At his Aunt's house in Hunstanton during the Christmas period of 1938, we find Bone reading a Western called The Bar 20 Rides Again by Clarence Mulford -- a book which Hamilton describes in a letter to his brother written of 19 December 1935 as 'not very intelligent. But about my weight at the moment'.²⁰

British cinemas. While interesting in its own, Victorian Gothic, terms this film bears very little resemblance to the novel on which it is 'based'. Here, George Harvey Bone is a 'well known composer' on the verge of 'international recognition', who lumbers, Hydlike, through the fog-bound streets of London (in 1903), throttling people with a home-made 'Thugee' cord, and who lives in 'Hangover Square' (sic)! Netta is a sexy American singer who is parasitically dependent on George's musical genius and gets her comeuppance on the fifth of November, consequent to her sexual betrayal of George. Her consumption by fire on a Guy Fawkes pyre foreshadows Bone's own eventual end when -- following his discovery by a psychiatrist from 'Scotland Yard', and as a fire rages around his head -- he plays out his masterpiece in concert. Unlike Hamilton's Bone, the Hollywood film character -- played by Laird Cregar -- has a 'good girl' for a fiancée -- his pupil, the well-to-do Barbara.

The critical consensus among British reviewers testifies to the fact that the original novel had been both widely read and highly regarded. James Agate, in the Tatler of 17 March 1945, described the film as 'the worst betrayal of a first-class novel that I ever remember' in an article entitled 'Masterpiece into Rubbish' [450]. The Evening Standard of 3 March 1945 commented: 'Were that sorely-needed institution, The Society for Prevention of Cruelty to authors in being, Mr. Patrick Hamilton would have good grounds for recourse to them.' [6] Elspeth Grant, in the Daily Sketch of 2 March, connected the film with the American glamourization of Gaslight in a patriotic article entitled, 'Picture London should have made' [6]. The entire fiasco probably contributed to Hamilton's increasing anti-Americanism.

More seriously perhaps, the one real talent with which George Harvey Bone is endowed is for a sport to which Hamilton was (less talentedly) addicted, golf. Unmanned elsewhere in his life, Bone recovers some of his manhood on the golf course.

He walked alone along the Downs, this sad, ungainly man with beer-shot eyes who loved a girl in Earl's Court -- carrying an old bag of borrowed clubs and thinking of nothing but his game of golf. His face shone, his eyes gleamed, and he felt, deep in his being that he was not a bad man, as he had thought he was a few hours ago, but a good one. And because he was a good man he was a happy man, and if he could only break seventy he would never be unhappy again.²¹

The vocabulary of manliness pervading this plangent golfing passage also obtrudes into the 'non-fictional' writings of the brothers Hamilton on the same theme. In the first draft of his memoir, Bruce records that Patrick 'looked his best when playing golf. I once said to him rather diffidently, "You know, when you're doing this you look twice the man you do at any other time". He was not offended and smiled rather sadly.'²² And in a letter to Bruce detailing his exploits on the nine-hole course at Hunstanton, Hamilton wrote the following, sexually-charged lines: '[when] a sweet, club-kissed ball soars up, hangs in the air, plops, rolls a yard, and is two feet from the pin -- a feeling of ecstasy extraordinarily akin to agony fills my whole being'.²³ George Harvey Bone is clearly not the only one to recover his virility on the golf course.

Just as he clutches at fragments of a stable masculine identity, so too does Bone struggle to maintain a toe-hold on the cliff-face of class society. George is a downwardly-

²⁰ P. Hamilton, letter, Overy Staithe, Norfolk, 19 December 1935, [AHA].

²¹ P. Hamilton, Hangover Square (1941), London, 1974, 146.

²² PAT, 444.

²³ P. Hamilton, letter (headed, 'All About Golf'), Overy Staithe, Norfolk, 1935 [AHA].

mobile petty bourgeois with a 'precious store'²⁴ of savings bequeathed by his mother. Like Bernard Hamilton (who inherited a veritable fortune from his mother), and like Bob in The Midnight Bell, Bone fritters away his nest-egg on alcohol and female 'company'. His three hundred pounds worth of 'War Loan' government bonds, and his (fully spelt out) 'seventy-eight pounds twelve and threepence'²⁵ in a current account, bespeak his position as one of those whose precarious savings can easily be wiped out by the anarchic fluctuations of capitalism. Moreover, he is depicted as a man who thinks through the shop-soiled categories typical of people with a 'bit put by'. For example, he construes his introduction to Netta of his friend Johnnie Littlejohn -- who works for a theatrical agency, it will be remembered -- as something which raises 'his stock tremendously'.²⁶

Bone is also located by the rhetoric of Hangover Square as an embodiment of Edwardian culture, still vestigial in the England of the inter-war years. In this respect, Andrew Cramp's doctoral discussion of Hamilton's prose fiction of this period is instructive:

the christian name George suggests everything that is typically English. This is especially true during the thirties since, after Edward VIII's abdication in 1936, George V was followed by George VI [While the surname] implies the "bare bones" of English middle-class society More specifically, George represents certain Edwardian characteristics of the English middle classes which have deteriorated so badly that only the bare bones are left.²⁷

This symbolic reading of George Harvey Bone is particularly apt for the successor to Impromptu in Moribundia, which was

²⁴ P. Hamilton, 1974, 140.

²⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁶ Ibid., 140.

²⁷ A. Cramp, 'Prose Fiction in the 1930s: Elizabeth Bowen, Rex Warner and Patrick Hamilton', Ph.D. Loughborough University, 1984, 346.

so very connotative.

George's relationship to Netta also opens itself up to symbolic interpretation -- whilst nonetheless being denotatively grounded to a highly tangible degree. Bone's yearning for Netta, 'the net' Longdon is represented as classically masochistic. On the occasion of the reader's first encounter with Netta, George cowers in her presence, 'afraid of her loveliness',²⁸ and wincing in expectation of 'some new weapon from the arsenal of her beauty'.²⁹ This masochism is sustained by his ever-present compulsion to place himself in Netta's ambit. Indeed George is neurotically obsessed by his dominatrix in a full, psychiatric, sense. When he forgets about her for five whole minutes, this is a 'record'.³⁰ Every morning of his hellish life in Earl's Court he feels compelled to re-establish the reality of Netta by looking at her flat in Cromwell Road, seized by 'the same sort of obsessed motivation which might make a miser ever and anon go and look at the outside of the box which contained the gold which was the cause of all his unhappiness'.³¹

In addition to his masochism and obsessive-compulsive disorder, Bone is endued with properly schizoid tendencies (to which he gives the term 'dead moods'). These have been with him since childhood and bring to mind Hamilton's own (lesser) 'dead' moods.³² The stresses induced by George's addiction to Netta have brought him to a state in which he periodically lapses into a catatonic condition dominated by the insistent incantation, 'he had to kill Netta Longdon'.³³

Yet Bone's schizophrenia is constructed in terms that owe more to the tradition of the 'double' in nineteenth-century

²⁸ P. Hamilton, 1974, 36.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 23.

³¹ Ibid., 57.

³² B. Hamilton, 1972, 116.

³³ P. Hamilton, 1974, 18 (the first of many occurrences).

fiction than to the discourses of modern(ist) psychiatry. The increasingly louder 'click' inside Bone's head which triggers the 'dead moods' corresponds to the potion-drinking device which turns Dr. Jeckyll into Mr. Hyde. And just as the 'killer zombie' in George takes over his entire personality towards the end of Hangover Square, so too it is 'the dissociation and autonomy of the complex that is Hyde which allows it to dominate, and eventually arrogate, the personality of Jeckyll'.³⁴

The trope of the split personality is one which recurs with frequency in the inter-war literature produced by other writers of Hamilton's class, gender, and generation. Valentine Cunningham records that Auden entitled the American edition of his 1941 collection, New Year Letter, The Double Man. Similarly, he draws attention to the young Evelyn Waugh's 'toying (late in 1920) with the "study of a man with two characters" as a scheme for a first novel',³⁵ and to Graham Greene's 1929 novel, The Man Within, which actually features a divided hero. This generational preoccupation may be, in part, ascribable to the disruption of received notions of the confident, unified, male subject engendered by the literal pulverization of the bodies of the slaughtered of the Great War, and the figurative fragmentation of the psyches of the shell-shocked. The radicalized awareness of the divisions in bourgeois society attained by many writers of that generation may also have disposed them to thematize split-mindedness.

The conception of schizophrenia which largely informs Hangover Square is represented by a quotation from Black's Medical Dictionary which serves as the novel's epigraph: 'SCHIZOPHRENIA: a cleavage of the mental functions, associated with assumption by the affected person of a

³⁴ J.Herdman, The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, London, 1990. 135.

³⁵ V. Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties, Oxford, 1988, 217.

second personality'.³⁶ George's condition is more complex than this because there is no absolute 'cleavage' in his consciousness; moreover, it fits in more accurately with a less dramatic definition of simple schizophrenia (or 'dementia praecox') given in a specialist dictionary almost contemporary with Hangover Square:

The basic symptomatology is built around emotional regression. From early childhood the individuals are as a rule quiet and self-contained, extending very little of their feelings to conditions outside of themselves.³⁷

The supplement to the same dictionary expands on the notion of 'schizoidism' (as distinct from fully-fledged schizophrenia) as follows:

[This] is an expression used to denote the aggregate of personality traits known as introversion, namely quietness, seclusiveness, "shut-in-ness". The schizoid individual splits or separates from his surroundings to a greater or lesser degree, confining his psychic interests more or less to himself.³⁸

As a description of Bone in one of his 'dead' moods, obsessed by the ritualized 'rules' that govern his murder project,³⁹ this rings true.

A more recent dictionary of psychological terminology emphasizes the language patterns that characterize schizophrenia:

Thought processes may become disturbed, so that thinking becomes vague, with unusual logic and idiosyncratic use of words or association of ideas. There may be sudden breaks in the flow of thought or speech, which may become incomprehensible.⁴⁰

³⁶ Hamilton, 1974, 6.

³⁷ L. E. Hinsie and J. Shatzky, Psychiatric Dictionary, New York, 1953, 151-2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 475.

³⁹ Hamilton, 1974, 191.

Again this description is not inappropriate in regard to the psyche of George Harvey Bone. Here, for example, is a rivulet of his consciousness sourced in the name of his sexual icon:

Netta. The tangled net of her hair -- the dark net -- the brunette. The net in which he was caught -- netted. Nettles. The wicked poison-nettles from which had been brewed the potion which was in his blood. Stinging nettles. She stung and wounded him with words from her red mouth. Nets. Fishing nets. Mermaid's nets. Bewitchment. Syrens -- the unearthly beauty of the sea. Nets. Nest. To nestle. To nestle against her. Rest. Breast. In her Net. Netta.⁴¹

The snakelike slithering of this little word 'net' -- its contraction from Netta and its expansion into 'brunette', 'netted', 'poison-nettles' -- traces over the terrain of Bone's split-minded desire for escape and confinement ('To nestle In her net. Netta'). The Thesaurus entries which vie with Samson Agonistes for epigraphical space in Hangover Square are significant in this, word associationist, regard. For they bespeak both a striving for verbal accuracy and an eternal slippage of meaning from one signifier to another. Thesaurus entries enticingly promise precision -- just as Netta and her ilk promise the 'last word' in penetrative sex; but they also suggest the pixillating exchangeability of words. One signifier can always do the job of another, just as one sexual partner can perform the same task as another, and as one alcoholic beverage can allay the same thirst as another. It is also noteworthy that thesaurus entries tend to pay scant regard to conventional hierarchies of linguistic value -- slang words can brush shoulders with the orotund: a 'schizophrenic' lexicon indeed.⁴²

⁴⁰ H. J., Eysenck, W. Arnold, R. Meili, Encyclopaedia of Psychology, London, 1972, 175.

⁴¹ Hamilton, 1974, 27.

⁴² See *ibid.*, 133 for one example of the 'democracy' of the thesaurus entry.

There is, however, a well-attested aspect of thoroughgoing schizophrenia which is in little evidence in Hangover Square: that of visual and aural (paranoid) hallucinations. Now, insofar as Bone is a character in a novel who acts murderously, 'as though somebody had told him'⁴³ to do so, then this facet of the schizophrenic condition finds expression in Hangover Square. But essentially the narrative operates so as to validate the perceptions of Bone. When the narration is not focalized via George's consciousness it is rendered from the position of a friend (Johnnie in Part four, Chapter one), or a well-wisher (John Halliwell, Part eight, Chapter one). His perceived need to 'kill Netta' is never problematized by the suggestion that he is maybe hallucinating his torment and is being insanely paranoid.

By contrast, there is merit to be found in the novel's articulation of schizophrenia with the impaction of modern(ist) technology upon the individual human subject. For example, the palm-sweating telephone calls endured by Bob in The Midnight Bell and the explorations of telephonic alienation in (some of) Hamilton's radio plays are recalled and exceeded by Bone's periodic incursions into the little world of the telephone booth:

In the line of telephone booths there were a few other people locked and lit up in glass, like waxed fruit, or Crown jewels, or footballers in a slot machine on a pier, and he went and became like them -- a different sort of person in a different sort of world -- a muffled, urgent, anxious, private, ghostly world, composed not of human beings but of voices, disembodied communications -- a world not unlike, so far as he could remember, the one he entered when he had one of his 'dead' moods.⁴⁴

As a concrete image of the anxiogenic nature of the practice of telecommunication (note the schizoid, disembodied, voices), this passage would be difficult to beat. Moreover, its implied

⁴³ Hamilton, 1974, 188.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

valorization of direct human-to-human communication is not impossibly naive. Even today, the only people at ease with the horrors of the telephone are surely the front-line traders in the 'schizophrenic' world of merchant banking?

Bone's schizoid tendencies can also be said to function as a metaphor for the tergiversations of the Chamberlain government in the face of Hitler's growing power in Europe, and the vacillations of the petty bourgeoisie in the context of the division of capitalist society into two fundamental classes. I shall comment later on the role of the 'Munich Agreement' in the architectonic of Hangover Square. For the moment I wish to stress that Hamilton did not advance as a solution to the problem that 'a divided society is made up of divided individuals',⁴⁵ that which Valentine Cunningham contends was uniformly posited by Communist orthodoxy in the 1930s -- viz, 'losing the "I" in the Workers' "We"'.⁴⁶ In any case, engagement in the public world of the war against Germany was not, in 1940-1, really available to Hamilton as an answer to the private mental crisis of his schizoid Edwardian 'hero'.

In recent critical discourse, theories of the contemporary have been construed by way of analogy with schizophrenia. In particular, the writings of Frederic Jameson on the postmodernity of 'late capitalism' have embodied the notion that a genuine sense of history has been expunged from a schizoid culture dominated by pastiche.⁴⁷ Just as the schizophrenic is devoid of a coherent sense of a personality (with a past, present, and future) so too is postmodern society bereft of historicity. Instead, what Jameson calls the 'nostalgia mode'⁴⁸ is dominant in the fields of cultural

⁴⁵ The phrase is Arnold Rattenbury's, speaking on 'the Late Show' of Hamilton, BBC 2, 27 February 1989.

⁴⁶ V. Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties, Oxford, 1988, 218-9.

⁴⁷ See, for example, F. Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', New Left Review, no. 146, July-August, 1984, 66-73.

representation.

The schizoid George Harvey Bone (together with the Edwardian petty-bourgeois culture he personifies) is also dislocated from social history -- detached from the present, blinded to the future, and with a debilitatingly nostalgic conception of the past. His ambition regarding Netta is to take her back in time to 'a good old cottage in the country',⁴⁹ where they could dwell unencumbered by those harbingers of futurity, children. To escape her baleful influence, he sometimes retreats to his hotel room and re-reads David Copperfield -- that veiled autobiography in which Dickens recreates his own childhood. This book is indeed the last to be read by Bone: he lays down his own life after laying down that of Dickens.

His nostalgia billows up in all its vampire-like enormity in his 'dead moods'. For George, the ritual killing of Netta and Peter promises to be the gateway back into the (mis)remembered idyll of the prewar Edwardian garden:

He was going to kill her, and then he was going to Maidenhead, where he would be happy Why Maidenhead? Because he would be happy there with his sister Ellen He would not drink any more -- or only an occasional beer. But first of all he had to kill Netta.⁵⁰

Bone yearns to rid himself from the sexual intoxication signified by the spirit of Netta, to retreat to the 'virginal' small town of 'Maidenhead' where he can live with the shade of his sister -- a woman twice-removed from the realm of the legitimately sexual by the incest-taboo and death. (Ellen, it should be noted, was the name of Hamilton's mother, and is close to the name of his sister, Helen). This 'Maidenhead' refrain echoes throughout the novel. Here, it crops up as Bone

⁴⁸ Ibid., 66 .

⁴⁹ Hamilton, 1974, 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 18.

sits, on the train from Brighton to London, fresh from his first (failed) attempt at murder:

Maidenhead, peace, the river, an inn, a quiet glass of beer, and safety, utter safety ... Maidenhead, where he had been with poor Ellen, the river in the sun, in the shade of the trees, his *hand in the water* over the shade of the boat, the *sun on the ripples of the water reflected quaveringly* on the side of the boat, his white flannels, *tea in a basket*, *the gramophone*, the *dank smell* at evening, the red sunset, sleep! Tonight.⁵¹ [My italics]

The most striking thing about this (rather maudlin) passage is that all five human senses are present (note the italicized portions) despite the fact that Bone is in a 'dead' mood -- which means he has no sensate contact with reality. This always-already mythopoeic hankering after a quintessentially 'English' image of childhood and adolescence ('white flannels, tea in a basket') is one which also turns up in George Orwell's Coming up for Air (1939), and Graham Greene's The Ministry of Fear (1943). It would seem that this Edenic simulacrum, promising but never yielding security, haunted the minds of these writers -- whose childhood ended just as the slaughter of (the) innocence/(innocents) commenced.

In Greene's The Ministry of Fear, the principle protagonist, Arthur Rowe, is Bonely transfixed by the remembrance of Edwardian times past. Before he lapses into amnesia, however, Rowe understands well enough the irrevocable 'pastness' of his retrospective Arcadia. In a dream he tries to impress on his mother's ghost that 'This isn't real life anymore Tea on the lawn, evensong, croquet, the old ladies calling the gentle unmalicious gossip, the gardener trundling his wheelbarrow'.⁵² As 'Richard Digby' in the sinister Dr. Forester's clinic, Rowe becomes a flushed schoolboy once more, with everything about the 'fallen' world, and his 'fallen'

⁵¹ Ibid., 183.

⁵² G. Greene, The Ministry of Fear (1943), London, 1979, 65.

self, to relearn. His temporarily forgotten mercy-killing of his wife mirrors, in its annulment of a love-object, the dénouement of Hangover Square: but whereas Arthur 'wakens' to remember, George -- with his head in the gas oven -- never wakens to forget.

The irony of the fascination signified by these novels for the most 'private' of murders 'in the middle of a daily massacre'⁵³ is obvious enough. Moreover, it suggests that, in their disposition towards the interpersonal, realist novels such as these are more 'at home' with private homicide than with public genocide. Indeed, just as George Harvey Bone finally realizes that 'Maidenhead was no good at all',⁵⁴ so we realize that the realist novel is ultimately 'no good' at registering the full enormity of the 'total war'.

In Bone's own favourite daily newspaper, the News Chronicle, the screenwriter who turned Hangover Square into a Hollywood film, John Brahm, put his finger on the essence of Bone's character (an essence destroyed by this particular cinematic rendition): 'The book character was a poor pub-crawler, but for the enrichment of the character we made him a man and potentially a great musician battling against a destructive woman'.⁵⁵ To strike out Bone's doomed quest for Manliness Lost is to eliminate the mainspring of the narrative in which he is enmeshed. He is depicted as a character cursed with a craving for homosocial bonding, a pathological need to feel 'a man amongst men'.⁵⁶ This childlike alcoholic, 'born' in 1904, is wracked by that crisis of masculinity which, as this thesis has argued, impacted profoundly on those (near-) bourgeois male writers who rebelled against their elders in the 1920s and were more thoroughly radicalized in the 1930s.

⁵³ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁴ Hamilton, 1974, 279.

⁵⁵ J. Brahm, News Chronicle, 7 March 1945, 2.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, 1974, 56.

The main character with whom Bone is homosocially bonded in Hangover Square is his old school-chum, John Edward Littlejohn (again we have three names; in this case comfortingly symmetricalized by the repetition of 'John', and significantly including 'Edward' and the 'handle' of Robin Hood's right-hand man). Through Johnnie -- to the relief of the reader, who thus also greets him as akin to an old friend - - is enacted the first shift of perspective in the novel. Johnnie knows how to be a 'man' -- in his own quietly assured manner -- and it is this capacity which endows his readings of Peter ('a scornful, ultra-masculine man')⁵⁷ and Netta with authority; his assessment of the latter is surgically definitive and clarifies her general significance as a female type:

Because of his connection with Fitzgerald, Carstairs & Scott, Johnnie had an extensive knowledge of the external appearance and different modes of behaviour of a great variety of attractive women: they came up to the office in shoals, with their nails dipped in blood and their faces smothered in pale cocoa. And some were charming and simple beneath their masks, and some were complex and arrogant. This girl belonged to the latter type.... This girl wore her attractiveness not as a girl should, simply, consciously, as a happy crown of pleasure, but rather as a murderous utensil with which she might wound indiscriminately right and left, and which she would only employ to please when it suited her purpose. They were like bad-tempered street-walkers, without walking the street.⁵⁸

Since it informs us that Johnnie has learned from experience to see through the pretensions of these would-be actresses, with their masks of 'pale cocoa' and their vixenish schemes, this passage presents itself as a neutral, indifferent, and equable critique. Its terms of approbation and disapprobation tend to insinuate themselves into the reader's subconscious

⁵⁷ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 104.

as 'natural' terms of reference: who could object to a 'crown of pleasure' or fail (somehow, somewhere) to wince with displeasure at a 'murderous utensil'?

On a loftier plane -- both epistemologically and socially -- than Johnnie is Eddie Carstairs, the theatrical agent pursued by Netta. The valorization of homosocial bonding prevalent in Hangover Square is nowhere more evident than in Bone's attitude to this man -- of whom, of course, he has good reason to be jealous. Despite Netta's ruthless exploitation of George, and his 'precious store', in gaining access to Carstairs, Bone is happy to bask in the latter's reflected glory. Eddie's nonchalant 'How *are* you?' (almost 'Who *are* you?'), in reply to Netta's fulsome 'How *are you?*' serves to put the woman in her *endroit*.⁵⁹ Seemingly not 'particularly interested in women',⁶⁰ Eddie presents himself to George as an attractive and powerful man to bond with against Netta:

It was nice to find Netta out in something -- to enjoy the brief feeling of superiority which that brought... He was delighted -- almost grateful and friendly, rather than jealous or hostile, towards the man who had brought this about.⁶¹

This adulation of Eddie Carstairs culminates in the novel's final Brighton episode. Having been swindled out of a sum of money by Netta, George sets off in alcoholic pursuit to the theatre-land of 'London-by-the-Sea'.⁶² Believing that Netta has sunk her talons into Johnnie, Bone staggers along the 'prom', eventually collapsing into the solaceful arms of his faithful old school-chum. Under Johnnie's wing George is admitted to a private party for one of Eddie's clients, a screen and music-hall comic whom Bone has also Worshipped From Afar. Carstairs himself also appears on the scene and

⁵⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁶¹ Ibid., 74.

⁶² Ibid., 141.

confides how he has contrived to shake off the unwelcome advances of 'that bitch',⁶³ Netta Longdon. And so this all-male party -- 'like a dream'⁶⁴ to Bone -- consecrates its alliance against Netta with draughts of booze and gales of laughter. This scene is one of Hamilton's sentimentally joyful presentations of the little world of the Theatre at its 'best': a sub-culture of authentic theatricals a cut above would-be thespians and quotidian role-players. Such cameos signify an attempted resolution of a typically 'Thirties' contradiction -- generated by the poles of attraction and repulsion animated by everyday play-acting. This specific instance is not merely maudlin but downright misogynistic:

"There's only one thing that's any good with a certain type of woman, you know," went on Eddie. "ask her for what you want, ask her if she means to give it to you, and if she doesn't, throw her out of the window."

They all three laughed at this, because, among other things, he did not use those exact words, but more vulgar, vivid and racy ones. Johnnie laughed shyly, George holding back his tears.⁶⁵

The narrator's knowing wink to the (male) reader is an implication device: we can guess at Eddie's 'original' phrasing and are intended to concur with its ascription to the Netta 'type'. It is this episode to which Sean French is presumably referring when he pronounces (*à propos* Fidelis Morgan's recent stage adaptation of Hangover Square) that: 'In the novel Hamilton gives tantalizing glimpses of the world into which George could escape, if only he could free himself from Netta'.⁶⁶ This endorsement of the book's sentimental extolment of the 'real' Theatre is singularly misplaced.

Bone's comradeship with the other main man in his

⁶³ Ibid., 254.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 256.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 260.

⁶⁶ S. French, Times Literary Supplement, 16-22 February 1990, 172.

essentially triangular relationship with Netta, Peter, is less manifest. It is evident enough nonetheless. George is depicted as showing no real jealousy towards Peter regarding the sexual relationship the latter enjoys with Netta. Indeed, we find him convincing himself that he is grateful to Peter for bringing the 'bitch' down to a 'sordid level' where 'she did not hurt so much. She wasn't violets and primroses in an April rain any more.'⁶⁷ The text offers no suggestion that 'elevating' women to the sentimental plane of 'violets and primroses', and deploring as 'bestial'⁶⁸ female lust are merely opposite sides of the same gynaephobic coin.

George and Peter are also linked by virtue of their membership of much the same social stratum: that of the deracinated petty bourgeoisie. Both characters are described as bearing the stamp of 'Great Portland Street', road houses, and 'transactions with second hand cars'.⁶⁹ Both are said to have been educated at minor public schools, and are presented as adoring that which they hate -- Netta, in George's case, and the bourgeoisie in Peter's:

behind that pallid, sullen, Philip-the-Fourth face, his soul winced when people of the moneyed class, when titled or rich people, were merely mentioned.... his practical 'fascism' in the past, were derived from this sickly envy and passion. Banished, by reason of his birth and lack of money, from the class of which he had so fanatical a secret desire to be a member, he had not turned in anger against that class, or thrown in his lot with any other. That would have been an admission of defeat. On the contrary he sought to glorify it, to buttress it, to romanticize it, to make it more itself than it was already -- hoping thereby, in his ambitious, twisted brain, to gain some reward from it at last, have some place or even leadership in it under the intensified conditions he foresaw for it.⁷⁰

This passage constitutes one of the most acute dissections,

⁶⁷ Hamilton, 1974, 118.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16 (for Bone), and 104 (for Peter).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 128.

in English fiction, of what Wilhelm Reich dubbed 'the mass psychology of fascism'.⁷¹ Hamilton's representation here of an Earl's Court Mosleyite is one of his most important political bequests to the contemporary reading public because it is so much at odds with the popular memory of the 1930s in Britain. Most people today are almost certainly unaware that (for example) the Daily Mail championed the 'achievements' of Hitler and Mussolini,⁷² or that Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson were fascists.

While Bone himself is not a fascist, he is presented as complicit with its growth since he is clearly purblind to the full import of Peter's saloon-bar philosophizing. For example, although he dislikes the fact that the rest of his drinking cronies 'all loved Chamberlain and fascism and Hitler',⁷³ it is the revelation that Peter has done time for the violence associated with his politics that truly mortifies him: 'Jail birds and proud of it. No doubt it would soon transpire that Netta was a shoplifter. Never mind. He could take it. He was frozen inside.'⁷⁴ (Just as many in the class fraction to

⁷¹ Compare Reich's own soundly-researched comments on the psycho-social bases of Nazism in Germany: 'Like any other reactionary movement, Hitlerism gained its support from the various strata of the middle-class. And again: 'this [middle-class] identification with the authorities, the firm, the state, the nation, etc. which can be expressed by the formula, "I am the authority, the firm, the state, the nation", is a potent psychological reality and one of the best illustrations of an ideology which has become a material force'. W. Reich, The Mass Psychology of Fascism, third ed., New York, 1946, 30 and 39. Compare also Trotsky's percipient insistence that fascism was 'basically [the] program of petty bourgeois currents. This fact alone ... shows of what tremendous ... importance the self determination of the petty bourgeois masses of the people is for the fate of bourgeois society.' [L. D. Trotsky, The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany, New York, 1971, 280-1.]

⁷² Lord Rothemere, the proprietor of the Daily Mail, Evening News and Sunday Dispatch, backed the British Union of Fascists. [N. Branson and M. Heinemann, Britain in the Nineteen Thirties, London, 1971, 282.]

⁷³ Hamilton, 1974, 154.

which he belongs were also 'frozen inside', politically paralyzed in the face of the Juggernaut of Hitlerian power.)

Bone's unwitting complicity with Peter and his kind can be read as the source of his vague feelings of shame over the 'Munich Agreement', which sanctioned Nazi thralldom over Czechoslovakia.

Shame, that was all he had felt, shame which he couldn't analyze. He had felt it all the time they were getting drunk [to celebrate 'Peace in Our Time'] He was so ashamed he could hardly look at the pictures All grinning, shaking hands, frock-coats, top-hats, uniforms, car-rides, cheers -- it was like a sort of super-fascist wedding or christening.⁷⁵

Utterly powerless -- like most of us -- in the context of the public world of politics and war, Bone's only access to History is always-already mediated by the signs of the mass media. This powerlessness finds expression in the imagery and language of this excerpt. Most christenings and weddings are socially exclusive and this, 'super-fascist', one is no exception. This exclusion of the spectating masses is compounded linguistically by the dehumanizing 'participial' images of mechanical behaviour -- 'grinning' and 'shaking hands' -- and the list of personless items of dress together with 'car-rides' and 'cheers'. The picture evoked belongs to the gallery of the newsreel, a discursive form to which twenty million British people were being exposed on a regular basis by 1939.⁷⁶ Dominated by an oligarchy of five companies, newsreel production was a crucial constituent in the formation of mass consciousness in this period. Conservative in emphasis at the best of times, it is of relevance to note here that at the time of the Munich Agreement, 'the government decided that it was imperative

⁷⁴ Ibid., 155.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 31-2.

⁷⁶ N. Pronay, 'The Newsreels: the Illusion of Actuality', in P. Smith (ed.), The Historian and Film, Cambridge, 1976, 112.

that no sentiments to the effect that Britain would have to fight Germany one day ... should be conveyed to the world at large at home'.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the Foreign Office contrived to engineer the suppression by the U.S. State Department of unsuitable newsreel footage concerning 'Munich' produced by Paramount.⁷⁸

Although embarrassed by the Munich agreement, Bone never matures into an anti-fascist with a role to play in the Second World War. Early on in the novel, he cloudily discerns the possibility that war 'might put a stop'⁷⁹ to his forlorn existence in Netta's Earl's Court retinue. And there is an obvious sense in which his double-murder of two potential Fifth Columnists constitutes his contribution to the war effort. But when War does at last shuffle into the ante-room of History, Bone finds that it 'bored him stiff':⁸⁰ 'It was all war, war, everywhere He supposed it interested people in a small place like Burgess Hill, because they had nothing else to think about'.⁸¹

There is a precise sense in which the murder and its aftermath connect the fictional character of George Harvey Bone with the scarcely less fictional historical personage of Neville Chamberlain. Having procrastinated over the killing of Netta and her 'blond fascist'⁸² lover, and while obstinately ignoring the outbreak of war, Bone strikes. After the deed, at the same time as he binds together his victims -- literally (as befits a 'Moribundian' character) tying up the threads of the narrative -- the wireless transmits Chamberlain's reluctant declaration of war:

⁷⁷ Ibid., 118-9.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Hamilton, 1974, 31.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 268.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 273.

"... prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland", he heard, "a state of war would exist between us ..."

That was old Neville: he knew that voice any where.

"I have to tell you now ... that no such undertaking has been received ... and that consequently this country is at war with Germany ..."

Oh, so they were at it, were they, at last! Well, let them get on with it -- he was too busy.

"You can imagine what a bitter blow this is to me ..."

He had exhausted two reels and done all he could in here -- now he must go into the bathroom....

At last the thread was exhausted.... All the threads were gathered up. The net was complete.

The net, Netta. Netta -- the net -- all complete and fitting in at the last.

"Now God bless you all. May He defend the right...."

He turned off that nonsense, and put on his coat.⁸³

In due course, having accomplished his task, George exits the world, just as Chamberlain too was to vacate the political stage in time.

The woman here drowned in her bath signifies an apotheosis of Hamilton's fictive working-through of his obsession with the figure of the *femme fatale*, as variously adumbrated by Diane in Monday Morning, Miss Cotterell in Craven House, Jenny Maple in Twenty Thousand Streets, and Nan in To the Public Danger. After Hangover Square, only Vicki Kugelmann in the next novel (less intensively) re-enacts this misogynist fantasy-role in the field of Hamilton's fiction. The execution (of the portrait) of Netta Longdon helped to lance one of this writer's deepest boils. Netta Longdon looked 'like a Byron beauty, but she was a fish',⁸⁴ and her drowning put an end to her 'look, but don't touch' *hauteur*. Bone's infatuation is most probably related to some of the sexual problems that Hamilton experienced with actresses in his heyday as a successful West End playwright. For instance, we know from Bruce Hamilton that his brother

⁸³ Ibid., 274-5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 130.

fell in love, *à la folie*, with 'an attractive young Irish actress'⁸⁵ called Geraldine Fitzgerald in 1936: 'For a time this passion was to cause Patrick great and only too typical frenzy, with its concomitant heavy drinking; but however it began Geraldine was in the end not responsive.'⁸⁶

Whatever the biographical origins of Hamilton's depiction of Bone's frustrated obsession with Netta Longdon, the evidence of the text leadenly demonstrates whose side the narrative voice is on. The main psychological account of Netta's character is weighted with all the authority typical of the ultra-reliable, extra-diegetic narrator -- rather than, for example, transmitted through the patently 'dotty' consciousness of Bone:

Netta Longdon thought of everything in a curiously dull, brutish way, and for the most part acted upon instinct.... Her thoughts ... resembled those of a fish -- something seen floating in a tank, brooding, self-absorbed, frigid, moving solemnly forward to its object or veering slowly sideways without fully conscious motivation.... 'Spoiled' from the earliest days because of her physical beauty ... she had become totally impassive: thought and action were atrophied.⁸⁷

The narrator proceeds to compare Netta with a spontaneous criminal and a somnambulist. In the Hamiltonian scheme of things, 'indifference' is an ethically heavily freighted term, and in Hangover Square specifically is thesaurally foregrounded.⁸⁸ It is invariably the hallmark of his most 'evil' characters, and it is conducive to fascism. With Hamilton the (over-used) adjective, 'inconsequent', is always highly consequential in significance.

It is important to recognize the cogency of this *ex cathedra* analysis of Netta Longdon's psychology --

⁸⁵ B. Hamilton, 1972, 84.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Hamilton, 1974, 124-5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

important, that is, from the point of view of a progressive cultural politics because in order to recuperate the anti-fascist radicality of Hangover Square it is necessary to defuse its explosive misogyny. And in order to do that one needs to understand the means by which the novel's representation of Netta is rendered compelling, to expose the mechanisms by which the reader can be seduced into partaking of the novel's hatred of Netta (as a type). One such device is to palm off the narrator's calculated critique as that of poor, tormented George Harvey Bone:

He could see her as the bad-tempered, haughty, tyrannical little girl she must have been in the nursery, at home, or at school: he could see her as she must have grown up, encouraged in her insolence, hardness and tyranny by the power of her beauty and the slavishness in others it inspired: he could see her later, with a cold decision to exploit this power to the full in a material way.⁸⁹

The obvious point to be made here is that it is highly unlikely that Bone would be able to 'see' anything of the sort; for what we have in this passage -- with its triadic modifications and crafted equipoise -- is the unmediated voice of Patrick Hamilton.

In the BBC-2 'Late Show' special on this writer, Hermione Lee commented that, 'In Hangover Square we long for George Harvey Bone to murder Netta. It is one of the few novels where you want the murderer to get on with it, like Hamlet.'⁹⁰ The question prompted by this remark begins with the letter 'H'. *How* is the reader manipulated into not only loathing Netta but into wanting her murdered? In part, this effect -- which needs to be resisted by a (pro-)feminist reader -- is produced by Bone's insufferable procrastination and the monotonous regularity of some key phrases. 'He was

⁸⁹ Ibid., 74.

⁹⁰ H. Lee, speaking on 'Whatever Happened to Patrick Hamilton?', BBC-2, 27 February 1989.

always putting it off',⁹¹ we are told early on, and he is still prevaricating two hundred pages later. 'He had to kill Netta Longdon and go to Maidenhead', we are told more times than we care to remember. Irritatingly, Bone keeps forgetting these injunctions to finish off Netta -- and the book. But the reader does not. Although Bone is the novel's principal focalizing character, his split-mindedness renders him oblivious to a knowledge shared by narrator and reader. The latter is thus implicated in a 'look-out-behind-you' game, situated at the Pantomime in a reading position which compels us to scream, 'You have to kill Netta!' in response to Bone's declared befuddlement over what it is he has to do. Moreover, the reader is ensconced in this position before s/he even encounters the siren. From start to finish the operations of the narrative tend strongly to enleague the reader uncritically with the 'battered boozier from Earl's Court'⁹² against wicked old Netta.

This would not matter so very much were it not for the general import imputed to the character of Miss Lon(g)don, 1939. Novelists -- even *soi-disant* socialist ones -- are, of course, at perfect liberty to create appalling female characters whose monstrosity is portrayed as inextricably linked to sexual 'misbehaviour'. However, the point about Netta is that she is not merely depicted as unusually callous. As Peter Widdowson remarks, she is 'a product of the inter-war years -- the "waves" she sends out are, pointedly, those of "a small amateur wireless station" -- and George is significantly both attracted and repelled by her'.⁹³ Netta is merely a more exaggerated version of the excessively made-up, cinephilic "Lucky Tip" factory girls who descend on

⁹¹ Hamilton, 1974, 19.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 247.

⁹³ P. J. Widdowson, 'The Saloon Bar Society: Patrick Hamilton's Fiction in the 1930s', in J. Lucas (ed.), The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy, Hassocks, 1978, 130.

Brighton on the occasion of George's first trip there. The following alcoholic ruminations invite the reader to confer benediction on an agitated Bone:

He wondered whether any man, in the history of the world, had been treated as this girl, Netta, had treated him. Did other women say they would go away with men, take money from them and promise themselves, and then coolly leave notes on doors and go away with their best friends instead? Were there other men in London tonight, left stone cold, desolate, with their hope of love and friendship wiped out at one stroke?⁹⁴

"Yes, of course" is the implicated response which needs to be quashed by counter questions, such as: 'and were there any women lying bleeding to death from back-street abortions or rape?'

A wider symbolic significance still of the novel's construction of Netta is suggested by the phallogentric attraction to fascism imputed to her. This is not merely a matter of Peter, but also of 'a feeling for something which was abroad in the modern world'⁹⁵ more generally. The account of this affinity enacts a subtle unmasking of the snobbery characteristic of the 'society columns' of The Sketch and The Tatler as consonant with the horrors of European fascism. Her predilection for this mélange of vicarious Society-watching and fascism is specified in detail:

It was not the avowed ideology of fascism; she was supposed to laugh at all people who had strong opinions of any sort.... She was supposed to dislike fascism, to laugh at it, but actually she liked it enormously. In secret she liked pictures of marching, regimented men, in secret she was physically attracted by Hitler: she did not think that Mussolini looked like a funny burglar. She liked the uniforms, the guns, the breeches, the boots, the swastikas, the shirts. She was, probably, sexually stimulated by these things in the same way as she might have been sexually stimulated

⁹⁴ Hamilton, 1974, 245.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 129.

by a bull-fight.... It might be said that this feeling for violence and brutality, for the pageant and panorama of fascism on the Continent, formed her principal disinterested aesthetic pleasure.⁹⁶

In one respect, this analysis effects a radical exposure of middle-class philistinism as cognate with a passive support for fascism: 'she was supposed to laugh at all people who had strong opinions of any sort'.⁹⁷ And in another, it percipiently highlights the militaristic aestheticization of politics which Walter Benjamin contended was the essence of the mass appeal of Nazism.⁹⁸ Moreover, the connection postulated between 'fascist authoritarianism in Europe and the practice of phallocentrism nearer home'⁹⁹ is one which, as John Coombes points out, was also made by Virginia Woolf in Three Guineas (1938). Nevertheless, Hamilton's inflection of this nexus facilitates a brand of misogyny which is patently vile. If Netta were as indifferent to the blandishments of fascism as she is to the advances of George Harvey Bone then Hamilton would have had difficulties in getting away with his woman-hating portrait -- and in justifying it to his own conscience.

The testimony of a shoal of male critics illustrates how the character of Netta functions to untongue the 'b'-word. A 'selfish and callous little bitch',¹⁰⁰ is Priestley's description; 'the bitch'¹⁰¹ is Bruce Hamilton's word for her; a 'cool and contemptuous bitch'¹⁰² concurs Nigel Jones; 'a bitch'¹⁰³ agrees Peter Widdowson. This critical consensus

⁹⁶ Ibid., 129-30.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ W. Benjamin, Illuminations, London, 1973, 243-4.

⁹⁹ J. Coombes, Writing from the Left, London, 1989, 17 .

¹⁰⁰ In Hamilton, 1974, 9.

¹⁰¹ B. Hamilton, 1972, 97.

¹⁰² N. Jones, 'Through a Glass Darkly', The Printer's Devil, no. 1, Kent, 1990, 82.

¹⁰³ Widdowson, 1978, 131.

evidences the profundity of the splenetic outrage engendered by Hamilton's virago. Netta is able to function like this by virtue of the way in which she is constructed as a catalyst for powerfully contradictory emotions.

The hatred induced by this character is perhaps ascribable to the possibility that her association with fascism is a guilt-laden aspect of her sexual attractiveness. On this view she appears as the leather-clad dominatrix who compels her slave to despise his own desire. This does not seem so very far-fetched when one examines the language in which Bone's craving for Netta is couched:

He hated Netta, perhaps, most of all. The fact that he was crazy about her physically, that he worshipped the ground she trod on and the air she breathed, that he could think of nothing else in the world all day long, had nothing to do with the underlying stream of scorn he bore towards her as a character. You might say he wasn't really 'in love' with her: he was 'in hate' with her.¹⁰⁴

The very rhythm of the second sentence above enacts the radical sado-masochistic ambivalence which characterizes Bone's obsession with his mistress: three clauses climbing towards a tonic peak are growlingly undertoned by a concluding clause dominated by the alliterative phrase, 'stream of scorn'. Nor is the Bone-Netta relationship depicted in a banal manner as merely one of 'love/hate'. Instead, the paradoxical religious vocabulary used to render Netta recalls Jenny Maple: witness Netta's 'unholy beauty',¹⁰⁵ and her 'halo'¹⁰⁶ of sexual attraction. Her magnetism is attributed to 'the blend of cruelty and mischief on her mouth',¹⁰⁷ rather than (say) to a winsomeness vitiated by an unfortunate lack of grace. When Netta comes to visit George in Brighton and

¹⁰⁴ Hamilton, 1974, 29.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

then proceeds to have sex, in the adjacent room, with a casual pick-up (a 'school-bully' type),¹⁰⁸ we have before us a scenario typical of male pornography.¹⁰⁹ It is then little wonder that Bone, Hamilton, and the male critic should get so hot under the collar about 'the bitch'.

Understanding thus the mechanisms whereby the construction of Netta tends to produce misogynist effects we can begin to render Hangover Square more palatable to a modern radical audience. A similar motivation seems to have lain behind Fidelis Morgan's recent dramatization of the novel -- which she has described as 'the most disgusting'¹¹⁰ she has ever read. Morgan decided to subvert the novel's monolithicity of viewpoint by problematizing Bone's version of events. The main element in her strategy is to have two Nettas on stage,¹¹¹ neither of which is consistently good or evil, or even self-identical: 'The two parts of Netta are the same woman from different perspectives. Netta is the Netta of the book; Netta 2 George's projection of himself on to Netta'.¹¹² The character of Netta 2 in particular articulates a fluid multiplicity of voices, sometimes speaking what are Bone's thoughts in the novel, sometimes the epigraphs (including the schizoid thesaural lists -- appropriately since she can be interpreted as an auditory hallucination); and sometimes she enunciates the narrator's strictures against Netta -- whether focalized in the novel through Bone, or not. For example, it is Netta 2 who articulates the critique of 'herself' as the 'Bad-tempered, haughty tyrannical little

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 150.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 156-60.

¹¹⁰ F. Morgan, The Independent on Sunday, 4 February 1990, 21.

¹¹¹ Played by Celia Immie and Anne Lambton in 'Cut and Thrust's' production at the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith, 1990. George Harvey Bone was rendered by the highly suitable Dudley Sutton.

¹¹² F. Morgan, 'Hangover Square, An Adaptation of the Novel by Patrick Hamilton', (acting script) London, 1990, 1.

girl'¹¹³ who 'can't act for nuts'¹¹⁴ to be found on pages 74 and 75 of the novel. It is by devices such as these that the 'Nettanness' of Hamilton's misogynist creation is attenuated.

Another 'weapon' in Morgan's 'arsenal'¹¹⁵ is the *tableau vivant* which serves as the prelude to the play and is invoked at the finish:

A woman (Netta) lies on a bed in her underwear. A sheet loosely covers her legs. A man (Bone) still in his overcoat comes through the strip curtain and stands at the end of the bed, back to the audience. He takes a knife from his pocket and holds it behind his back. The woman stirs. He gets down onto her as though to have sex. Then flails the knife. She struggles and is still. He calmly gets up and stands watching her from a distance. The sheet is now covered in blood.¹¹⁶

Rendered here is the bloody, and distressing, dream-image which dominates Bone's 'dead' moods: that of the ritual killing of Netta. The blood-stained sheet that causes Netta to groan on waking, and which is carried off-stage by her, is a sign of the menstrual creatureliness of flesh-and-blood women -- at once a symbol of oppression and a gesture against the iconization of 'Woman' as either angel or whore. When Bone slits his wrists at the end of the Morgan piece we are reminded of his consanguinity with his tormentor/victim (he gasses himself at the end of the novel, it will be remembered). As he dies it is Netta who 'kneels behind' him and lends solace, while Netta 2 'enters behind her and watches Bone sadly'.¹¹⁷

Almost three decades of feminism in the advanced

¹¹³ Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 22.

¹¹⁵ The inverted commas betoken an allusion to Netta's 'arsenal': Hamilton, 1974, 36.

¹¹⁶ Morgan, 1990, 1.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 48 (of Act Two).

capitalist countries makes it thankfully difficult to write a Netta figure into a novel which would (say) contend for the Booker. At first glance, that consummate tease Nicola Six, in Martin Amis' London Fields might seem to be a reincarnation of the nemesis of George Harvey Bone. Like Hangover Square, Amis' novel boasts a femme fatale murder victim (Nicola), a boor (Keith Talent), and -- the third point in the triangle -- a fall-guy (Guy Clinch). Moreover, the ultimate murderer turns out to be neither of the two latter but the American narrator -- just as Bone is 'someone else' when he finally kills Netta. Like her counterpart in Hangover Square, Nicola Six is a minor actress (who 'stars' in her own porn movies) and seems to be the last word in femmes fatales. However, Nicola is a rather more sophisticated character, self-reflexively aware of her own fictional status. Her struggle -- long before he realizes it -- is with the narrator, whom she at one point addresses thus:

"A Femme Fatale? I'm not a Femme Fatale. Listen, mister: Femmes Fatales are ten a penny compared to what I am."

"What are you then?"

"Christ, you still don't get it, do you."

I waited.

"I'm a murderee."¹¹⁸

Finally, the narrator is compelled to concede that 'his' character has outflanked him:

She outwrote me. Her story worked. And mine didn't. There's really nothing more to say. Always me: from the very first moment in the Black Cross she looked my way with eyes of recognition. She knew that she had found him: her murderer.¹¹⁹

With her injunction to (female) readers to 'be the bitch in the

¹¹⁸ M. Amis, London Fields, London, 1989, 260.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 466.

book',¹²⁰ Nicola opens up one possible way of reading Hangover Square against the grain. After all, as Fidelis Morgan puts it: 'why can't Netta say she doesn't want to go out with him? If we all got killed because we said, "I don't want to go out with you," there wouldn't be a woman alive on the planet.'¹²¹

Thus far it has been demonstrated how the portrayal of character bears the burden of connotation in Hangover Square. Social typicality of characterization does not, however, exhaust the means by which the book registers the public crisis which threatens to engulf the private world of the deracinated and irresponsible creatures who people it. A key metaphor which performs a similar function is provided by that typically English topic of the weather. For example, with his customary eye for the snake-in-the grass, Hamilton inserts a premonition of war into his description of an initially gladsome journey undertaken by Johnnie back to his office after lunching with Bone:

Johnnie strolled back through Leicester Square towards the office. His body basked in the warmth and brightness of the day, but this very warmth and brightness tinged his mind with a certain sadness, an apprehensiveness, which had taken to visiting him at this time of day and which he was unable to dispel. Now it had been warm and fine like this for three weeks without a break.¹²²

The implication is obvious to anyone familiar with the vagaries of the English weather; this day is what they would have called in Hamilton's day, a 'weather-breeder'. Consequently, the following snapshot of pre-war Leicester Square and newsreel-like montage are 'tinged' with the 'sadness' of hindsight:

¹²⁰ Ibid., 162.

¹²¹ Morgan, 4 February 1990, 21.

¹²² Hamilton, 1974, 101.

In the middle of the square the effigy of Shakespeare stared greyly out in the direction of the Empire Cinema with its bright advertisements of "Good-bye, Mr. Chips", with Robert Donat and Greer Garson.... Fine, fine, fine ... Blue and sunshine everywhere ...
 Fine for the King and Queen in Canada ...
 Fine for the salvaging of the Thetis ...
 Fine for the West Indian team ...
 Fine for the I.R.A. and their cloakrooms ...
 Fine for Hitler in Czechoslovakia ...
 Fine for Mr. Strang in Moscow ...
 Fine for Mr. Chamberlain, who believed it was peace in our time -- his umbrella a parasol! ...
 You couldn't believe it would ever break, that the bombs had to fall.¹²³

The constellation of the Shakespeare effigy and that popular Thirties zeitgeist film, 'Goodbye Mr. Chips'¹²⁴ with images culled from the cinema screen, but belonging to the public world of international politics, is significant in its conjunction of 'Englishness' with foreign threat.¹²⁵ When Hamilton was writing these words, the 'terrible rain' was falling night after night in London; by November 1940 the Ministry of Information's list of non-military buildings damaged by bombs 'included practically every building of historic importance in London'.¹²⁶

Intimations of war and its social consequences also pervade George Orwell's Coming up for Air (1939), a novel which, in the futile quest of its central protagonist, George Orwell, for 'Adolescence Lost', is reminiscent of Hangover Square. Bowling narrates Coming up for Air in the first person and does not convincingly relate to any other character

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Valentine Cunningham describes James Hilton's novel as 'one of the period's most popular fictions' in British Writers of the Thirties, Oxford, 124.

¹²⁵ It is obviously redolent of the closing passages of Homage to Catalonia: see G. Orwell, Homage to Catalonia (1938), London, 1966, 221.

¹²⁶ R. Hewison, Under Siege: Literary Life in London, 1939-45, London, 1977, 31.

in his focalized world. In search of his prewar childhood, George (curious how that name *will* crop up!) returns to his home village, Lower Binfield, just as Bone revisits Maidenhead. Bowling finds Lower Binfield tawdrified by postwar development and discovers that Upper Binfield has been transformed into that which its name denotes. On a visit to the old village church George finds out that he cannot 'connect' with his old vicar because, while he himself has changed in appearance, the parson has not.¹²⁷ Perversely, it is precisely the opposite condition which prevents him from revealing his true identity to his erstwhile lover.¹²⁸ Nor do these (rather bemusing) instances evince merely a failure on the narrator's part to communicate with shades from his past: for the novel ends with his taciturn acquiescence in the face of his wife's accusation of adultery¹²⁹ (which at least spares her the interminable reminiscences and ruminations to which the reader has been subjected throughout).

Structural to Coming up for Air is a tendency for the narrator, George Bowling, to collapse into the author, George Orwell. This results in the representation of a menopausal Southern English insurance salesman as the apotheosis of 'decency' (Orwell's favourite virtue). This gambit partly undermines itself through the wearing effect of the constant button-holing of the reader as a pub-table crony, implicated in a discourse of spurious universals. Witness the following extract, with its appeal to a 'shared' stock of attitudes towards wives, bolstered by the deployment of unagented verbal nouns and a surfeit of definite articles:

And Gosh! What I could see ahead of me! You know what it's like. The weeks on end of ghastly nagging and sulking, and the catty remarks after you think peace has been signed, and the meals always late, and the kids

¹²⁷ G. Orwell, Coming up for Air (1939), London, 1962, 190.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

wanting to know what its all about.¹³⁰

("Gosh! I know *just* what you mean, old boy!" is, outrageously, the expected response.) This irritatingly androcentric technique plays a deconstructive role in the text because what it signifies in fiction -- namely, the presence of a shared corpus of values typified by Bowling and deemed 'decent' (like bowling!) -- is constituted by suppressing its exiguous existence in the real world. The following passage begs questions all the way to Wigan Pier:

As I've said several times already [as indeed he has!] I'm not frightened by the war only the after-war. And even that isn't likely to affect me personally.... And yet it frightens me. The barbed wire! The slogans! The enormous faces! The cork-lined cellars where the executioner plugs you from behind! ... But why? Because it means goodbye to all this Special feeling inside you. Call it peace if you like.¹³¹

It is surely ironic that it has been precisely this kind of middle-class longing for humdrum social quietude that has typically helped fuel ultra-reactionary movements: such people would have been as little disturbed by Orwell's '1984' as they were by our own -- with helmeted riot police cracking open the skulls of miners in T-shirts and training shoes. Wilhelm Reich put it in a nutshell when he wrote: 'the mainstay of the Swastika was always the middle-class'.¹³²

By contrast, Hamilton does not seek to locate in his 'George' a source of value -- he is, after all, a murderer who has even less knowledge of his thoughts and actions than does the narrator or reader. Bone's 'dead' periods, in which an image of sunny Edwardian England rises up in all its becalming, salvific, splendour, are clearly indicated to be

¹³⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹³¹ Ibid., 165.

¹³² Reich, 1947, 34. For a rigorous anatomization of petty-bourgeois ideology that highlights its fascistic tendencies, see N. Poulantzas, Fascism and Dictatorship (1970), trans. J. White, London, 1974, 251-6.

bouts of mental illness. And whereas Bone gasses himself in Maidenhead, Bowling returns from his Odyssey to Lower Binfield content to swim with the tide. Bone, like Samson himself, pulls his little world down with him: Bowling's suburban enclave continues to vegetate. Moreover, Hamilton at no point stoops to rubbish anything potentially worthwhile -- as Orwell does with his derogatory depiction of a Left Book Club meeting which, absurdly but significantly, includes a Trotskyist as well as the usual (crypto-) Stalinists and liberals in its far from serried ranks.¹³³

Although Coming up for Air strives to face the imminence of war, it is largely bereft of any great publicly-engaged enthusiasm, and ultimately valorizes a semi-resigned ideology of privacy. A war-related book which seems to contrive to ignore it altogether is Henry Green's Loving (1946), written towards the end of the conflict and orientated toward the locus of the private. This piece, like Green's other wartime novel, Caught (and like Hamilton's wartime fiction too), manifests the author's fascination for the 'slack times, the lulls before, between and after the great convulsions'.¹³⁴ The opening phrase, 'Once upon a time',¹³⁵ seems to locate Loving outside the historical process, in the realm of fairy-tale, but in fact the story is set in that traditional Other of British society, Ireland, where there was no blackout; where, despite Britain's desperate wartime need for ports, the Second World War was kept at bay. The English inhabitants of the book's Anglo-Irish Kinalty Castle (its servants especially) therefore live in a peculiarly private, almost hermetically-sealed, environment, cut off from the public crisis that wracks the mainland Britain of their

¹³³ Orwell, 1962, 144-52.

¹³⁴ M. North, Henry Green and the Writing of his Generation, Charlottesville, 1974, 102.

¹³⁵ H. Green, Living, Loving and Party Going, London, 1978, 18.

relations. Collectively and rationally they endeavour to do what George Bone does singly and irrationally: ignore the war.

At the head of the servant's table at Kinalty stands the footman-turned-butler Charley Raunce -- a figure so wrought by this claustrophobic environment that the merest jaunt across the door exacerbates his dyspepsia unbearably. As an unhealthy man presiding over a household of women in the midst of an international war, he occupies a position similar to that of the bullying Mr. Thwaites in The Slaves of Solitude. The other servants each jealously guard their own 'place' in the household, to the extent of being 'more punctilious in routine, more observant of small social gradations, than Mrs. Tennent [the owner]';¹³⁶ moreover, 'maintenance of their own social niche has the same kind of defensive purpose that maintaining the whole social organization has for her'.¹³⁷

As with Vicki Kugelmann in The Slaves of Solitude, there hurtles into this finely balanced artificial community a hellion from the public world of the war, the cook's evacuated son Albert. Having no established 'place' (to the extent of sharing the same social play-space of Mrs. Tennent's grandchildren), Albert wreaks havoc. It is he who generates so much distress by secreting Mr. Tennent's 'missing' ring: an act which triggers the 'invasion' of the man from the 'IRA' (Irish Regina Assurance), and who sets in train that movement which issues in the elopement of Charley and the servant-girl, Edith.

The strange social situation depicted in Loving -- that of a sequestered servant's hall where a haphazardly gathered group of employees are forced to live together day and night - - is one which reiterates across the body of Green's work: for example, the Auxiliary Fire Service sub-station in Caught is a similar wartime environment. In this predilection Green

¹³⁶ North, 1974, 146.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

shares an affinity with Patrick Hamilton, who in The Slaves of Solitude depicts the venomous social card-play in the introversive setting of a wartime boarding-house. In their redolence of the discursive features of yet another artificial community, the Public School, both of these novels betray something of the schooling meted out to their respective authors (Green was at Eton, Hamilton at Westminster). Like inveterate 'copycat' schoolchildren, the Kinalty servants are patently hooked on the 'habit of quotation'¹³⁸ -- "Oh get on with your work," Raunce quoted from another context.¹³⁹ Michael North provides an abundance of examples of instances of this parroting in his book on Green, and shows, further, how this mimicry serves to bind the servants together against a perceived threat of invasion. Significantly, the Irish characters, who stand on the margins of the servants' hall, do not share this addiction. Michael never speaks, and Paddy utters a brogue so impenetrable that his words must needs be translated by Kate, his (English) sexual partner. The other Irishman of note, the insurance man, Mike Matheson, has a lisp -- a defect of speech which provides the English servants with their only brief moment of comradeship, when they all mimic it together, amid much mirthless cachinnation.

A similarly foul linguistic solidarity is evinced by the German ex-patriate, Vicki Kugelmann, and Thwaites in The Slaves of Solitude. The object of their mutual enmity is Miss Enid Roach, a spinster who works for a London-based publishing firm, but who resides in the riverside¹⁴⁰ town of Thames Lockdon (based on Henley-on-Thames) at the 'Rosamund Tea Rooms' in order to escape the ravages of the bombing of the capital. The petty animosities and sinister social games played out in this austere bolt-hole are

¹³⁸ Ibid., 151.

¹³⁹ Green, 1978, 151.

¹⁴⁰ 'Riverside' was the title of the American edition of The Slaves of Solitude [Random House, New York, 1947].

explicitly related to those of a school: 'It reminded her of her schooldays ... in which there would occur gradually and mysteriously emerging plots, spites, malicious alignments against an individual, sendings to Coventry, at last open hatred and torture'.¹⁴¹ At length, Miss Roach fights back against persecution (and, incidentally, sloughs off the insouciant sexual attentions of Lieutenant Pike, a bored American soldier), resolving to face squarely the war she has been avoiding. Having possibly caused Thwaites' death from peritonitis, and having finally triumphed over the evil Vicki, she returns to London, and the novel is drawn to a close by Hamilton with his customary Victorian omniscience.

The indwelling atmosphere of the Rosamund Tea Rooms, prior to the irruption of Lieutenant Pike and Vicki Kugelmann, is described in telling detail in the opening chapter. Having endured, with Miss Roach, the appalling conversation of Thwaites, the reader is led, with the somnolent residents, into the Lounge, where there takes place an orgy -- 'of *ennui*'.¹⁴²

Here, for two hours or more every evening, the guests of the Rosamund Tea Rooms sat in each other's company until they were giddy -- giddy with the heat, the stillness, the desultory conversation, the silent noises -- the rattling of re-read newspapers, the page-turning of the book-reader, the clicking of the knitter, the puffing of the pipe-smoker, the indefatigable scratching of the letter-writer, the sounds of breathing, of restless shifting, of yawning -- as the chromium-plated clock ticked out the tardy minutes. Finally they went to their bedrooms in a state of almost complete stupefaction, of gas-fire drunkenness -- reeling, as it were, after an orgy of *ennui*.¹⁴³

The fussiness of this description suggests the mannered petrification (or indeed putrefaction) of these 'slaves of solitude'. So accustomed have the guests become to this

¹⁴¹ P. Hamilton, The Slaves of Solitude (1947), Oxford, 1982, 179-80.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

after-dinner routine that they have come to assume the appearance of ill-favoured automatons -- those life-sized dolls for which some Victorians conceived such a fetish. Their various activities are rendered by a long list of verbal nouns attached to their cognate nouns rather than to named individuals: 'the page-turning of the book-reader, the clicking of the knitter, the puffing of the pipe-smoker', and so on. There is an excess of modification here which reflects the post-prandial bloatedness of the residents: the conversation is 'desultory', the letter-writer's 'scratching' is 'indefatigable', and the clock is 'chromium-plated', ticking out the 'tardy' minutes. This culture of 'death-in-life'¹⁴⁴ is regularly taken out of the Tea Rooms and into the municipal park by the more elderly denizens, such as the plucky Miss Steele and the hypochondriacal Mrs. Barratt. There they 'sit down [on separate benches] and stare ... out of the wind and forgotten by the world'.¹⁴⁵

The boring braggart who tyrannically lords it over this roost of adult evacuees, widows, and spinsters is freighted with all the characteristics of a Hamilton villain. He has a 'large, fat, moustached face'¹⁴⁶ (as do Peter and Ernest Ralph Gorse), and there is discernible in his manner of deportment and speech 'the steady, self-absorbed, dreamy, almost somnambulistic quality of the lifelong trampler through the emotions of others'.¹⁴⁷ Like his fellow-'sommambulist', Netta Longdon, he is precisely unfeeling, indifferent, insouciant -- features which Hamilton saw as enabling what his friend Claud Cockburn calls (in his introduction to the OUP reprint of The Slaves of Solitude) 'the terrible natural Naziness existing in all of us'.¹⁴⁸ And indeed, Thwaites is, it transpires, a

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 71-2.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 11-12.

secret 'hot disciple'¹⁴⁹ of Adolf Hitler and inveterate reader of the Daily Mail¹⁵⁰ who cannot even mention the Red Army 'save gloweringly, defensively, almost savagely'.¹⁵¹ The Russians, together with the largely apolitical Miss Roach, he associates with the threat of social topsy-turviness: "'My Lady's Maid", continued Mr. Thwaites, "will soon be giving orders to My Lady. And Milord will be polishing the Pot-boy's boots".'¹⁵² Ironically, this bully of 'timid old women'¹⁵³ in small hotels possesses only a modest independent income, and has precious little to lose from his nightmare scenario of social egalitarianism. The 'spiritual estate in the country'¹⁵⁴ which he evokes whenever he wishes to declare that such-and-such a thing is not good enough for his valet (or footman, or butler) is a typically 'Moribundian' fiction which bespeaks his petty-bourgeois servantlessness.

The odiousness of Thwaites is written into the very language he deploys. His linguistic discourse is composed of a variety of verbal weapons which link him with other middle-class monsters in Hamilton's fictional Chamber of Horrors. His spluttering 'Whats' enrol him in the same register as Mr. Eccles,¹⁵⁵ and his 'nasally' booming voice is consonant with that of Ernest Ralph Gorse. Similarly, his predilection for 'Trothing' puts him in the same club as both Gorse and the appalling Plumleigh-Bruce crowd in Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse. He is also endowed with his own syntactic peculiarity though: his 'ghastly I-with-the-third-person business'.¹⁵⁶ This turn of phrase he employs when

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., vii.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵² Ibid., 18.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, 148 and 188 for some splenetic examples of 'Whatting'.

trying to impart an aphoristic quality to some morsel of homespun philosophy. With regard to the implications of Russian military success he says: "Maybe I thinks more than I says. Maybe I has my private views I Keeps my Counsel Like the Wise Old Owl, I Sits and Keeps my Counsel."¹⁵⁷ This kind of trope also has a faintly aristocratic ring, being reminiscent of the parlance of the 'huntin' and shootin' brigade. Thwaites' most obnoxious linguistic habit is, however, his penchant for mimicking the accents of other people, badly. This is a vice which he shares with Mrs. Plumleigh-Bruce in the second 'Gorse' novel, and is prevalent among many speakers of (so-called) 'Standard English'. As anyone who has been on the receiving end of this species of arrogance will testify, such mangled imitation is profoundly patronizing and insulting. Invariably this practice serves to avoid the substance of what is said by ridiculing the way it is said. When Thwaites continues his prattle about the sinister nature of the victories of the Red Army by saying, "'I hay ma Doots, that's all as the Scotchman said -- of Yore'",¹⁵⁸ he is by no means executing an accurate rendition of any existing Scottish accent, but is mainly fanning the smoke around the emptiness of his argument. Alan Munton defines Thwaites' language as 'a strategy to dominate others, forcing them to interpret him on his own terms',¹⁵⁹ but, in doing so, he overstates the degree of subjective consciousness and objective status to be ascribed to this character. Thwaites is as much, if not more, determined by his vacuous clichés as they are determined by him.

All of Thwaites' linguistic devices are infused with an arch actorliness -- a characteristic which, of course, jostles with

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵⁹ A. Munton, English Fiction of the Second World War, London, 1989, 51.

inconsequence at the top of Hamilton's League of immoral qualities. Thwaites has, at his disposal, a repertoire of 'many ... roles'¹⁶⁰ and conceals his pro-Hitler sentiments beneath a mask. It became evident in our discussion of Hamilton's drama that such pseudo-theatricals inevitably come to a sticky end but the just deserts meted out to Thwaites in The Slaves of Solitude exemplify this retributionist penology in a manner comparatively unusual in his prose fiction. The punishment contrived for this execrable old fifth columnist who 'had hardly a day's illness in his life'¹⁶¹ is dramatically condign:

Thus suddenly -- having been given less than forty-eight hours' notice of any sort, and in the bloom of his carefree and powerful dotage -- this cruel, harsh, stupid, inconsiderate, unthinking man, this lifelong nagger and ragger of servants and old women, this confused yet confusing bully and braggart in small places, died. The boarding-house tempest had blown itself out, all at once magically subsided.¹⁶²

The pile-up of adjectives, the assonantal 'nagger and ragger', and the alliterative 'bully and braggart' are all nails in the coffin of Mr. Thwaites; and now that the stake has been driven through his bowels, the tempest subsides.

Thwaites' principal victim, Miss Enid Roach, is constructed as a typical middle-aged English spinster. She is given 'the complexion of a farmer's wife and the face of a bird';¹⁶³ her eyes betray an acute sense of vulnerability and, although she is thirty-nine, we are told that she might be taken for forty-five.¹⁶⁴ As the daughter of a dentist, she is allotted a patrimony reminiscent of Hamilton's mother, and her stint as a school-mistress at a boys' preparatory school on Hove

¹⁶⁰ Hamilton, 1982, 23.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 215.

¹⁶² Ibid., 216.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

places her more firmly in her author's social world. Her 'pink boudoir'¹⁶⁵ in the Tea Rooms -- with its 'squashed matchbox' holding in place the dressing-room mirror, and its wallpaper bearing the 'mottled pattern of a disease of the flesh'¹⁶⁶ -- is the site of a seedily genteel loneliness. Unlike Netta's private space, but like Ella Dawson's, this room is no site of copulation. Though she succumbs to the attentions of Lieutenant Pike, Miss Roach is depicted as largely asexual and gives him up without much regret.¹⁶⁷

To most readers of today the portrait offered of Miss Roach is almost bound to be slightly painful to behold. So straight-laced is she that she is unlikely to generate much in the way of positive sympathy -- as distinct from pity at her plight. Socially, she is everywhere a misfit. When she and Lieutenant Pike are joined, at the 'River Sun' pub, by two young women and another American officer, she feels awkward and ill-at-ease, realizing that the girls 'worked in shops, and were not, as one's mother would have said, "in her class", and the meeting was therefore, from this point of view, "embarrassing"'.¹⁶⁸ Drunkenly, she endeavours to leave, 'like a child anguishing to get down from table',¹⁶⁹ and eventually does so, realizing that she has made a fool of herself and is headed for the Tea Rooms, where she also has 'no place'.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, so little self-respect does she have that she is glad to spare accosting GIs the ordeal of actually having to speak to her in the blacked-out streets of Thames Lockdon.¹⁷¹

Like Ella in Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky, Miss

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 134-5.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Roach is continuously hemmed in by the narrator's rendition of her internal thoughts. In the case of Miss Roach, this authorial trammelling is intensified still further and, moreover, is not counterbalanced by the presentation of a hearty exterior, as is the case with Ella. Time and again, Enid Roach is depicted on the rack of mental self-flagellation:

She was, she saw, always having thoughts for which she rebuked herself. It then flashed across her mind that the thoughts for which she rebuked herself seldom turned out to be other than shrewd and fruitful thoughts: and she rebuked herself for this as well.¹⁷²

Her paranoid obsessiveness with Vicki Kugelmann's malevolence reaches the point where 'she was inventing conversations with Vicki, inventing Vicki's answers, and then getting white with anger at these invented answers'.¹⁷³ Such classically neurotic behaviour -- instantly recognizable by anyone of an introvertedly anxious disposition as disconcertingly accurate -- underscores Miss Roach's need to wrench herself free of this backwater environment and face up to the war.

The Slaves of Solitude narrates a reorientation of its principal character with regard to the war against Fascism. Like George Harvey Bone, Enid Roach's access to the public world of international geopolitics is mediated by the form of the cinema newsreel. Positioned as the textual subject of the semiotics of the wartime film screen, Miss Roach's face becomes a visage which signals the fear in her soul:

The "News" was on -- war pictures, naturally -- war, war, war The war shone on to the lurid, packed, smoke-hazed, rustling audience, the greater part of which was dressed for war. The familiar, steady voice of the announcer threaded its way through the pictures -- a curious menacing voice, threatening to the enemy, yet admonitory to the patriot, and on one

¹⁷² Ibid., 61.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 136.

tireless note.... Miss Roach stared at the screen with plain fear on her face -- fear of life, of herself, of Mr. Thwaites, of the times and things into which she had been born, and which booms about her and encircled her everywhere.¹⁷⁴

The image is an arresting one: the terrified private citizen staring at moving pictures of a public nightmare which is (literally) reflected onto her very face. The voice of the announcer is 'curiously menacing', vituperating the enemy without, but also stigmatizing the (witting or unwitting) enemy within, guiltifying the passive and the fear-stricken (like Miss Roach).

The attitude of Enid Roach to the war at this stage is similar to that expressed by Hamilton in a letter to his brother written in May 1941:

In these incredible days there is only one bird to emulate -- one wiser by far than the owl -- the ostrich. If you ceased for a moment to be ostrich-like, if one started to think about anything, one would go mad.¹⁷⁵

These sentiments are virtually identical with the following passage from The Slaves of Solitude:

About certain things, and the war in particular, Miss Roach was an ostrich, and purposely and determinedly so. In many respects she believed the ostrich to be a bird wiser than the owl. If you could do nothing to alleviate a situation, what sense was there in thinking about it, talking about it, taking any interest in it?¹⁷⁶

Hamilton altered his position with the entrance into the war of the USSR and hence, in The Slaves of Solitude, he tries to gradually turn his heroine around. The relationship of the narrative voice to Miss Roach is a chivalrously protective one, and the novel is unsurprisingly focalized from her point

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 26-7.

¹⁷⁵ Cited in PAT, 415.

¹⁷⁶ Hamilton, 1982, 164.

of view. Furthermore, the story often proceeds by way of a retrospective form of narration which positions the reader as the addressee of a 'Dear Diary' series of confidences. For example, the Christmas Eve episode in which Thwaites drunkenly intimates his knowledge of the enmity between Miss Roach and Vicki concerning Lieutenant Pike is rendered in this manner (chapters eighteen and nineteen). And so we find ourselves perched alongside Miss Roach, in her bedroom, while she fumes and seethes over what has taken place -- but has not yet been revealed to the reader, who is of course eager to hear the 'latest'.

The elucidation into the realm of the public of this authorially-swaddled character is, ultimately, problem-fraught. It is not that such a 'coming out' beggars belief. In reality, the very process of 'total war' fingered each and every citizen of the belligerent nation-states, and induced what Alan Munton has called a 'massive democratization of fear'¹⁷⁷ among the civilian population -- such that 'every threatened person could conceive his or her own life as a narrative not quite completed. Everyone became a potential subject for fiction',¹⁷⁸ -- just as each and every citizen was interpellated by the ideology of the 'People's War'.

Miss Roach's very own 'war to the death'¹⁷⁹ with the fifth columnists at the Rosamund Tea Rooms is, hence, infused with a more general significance. But how *like* a liberal realist novel to render the political by means of the developing animosity of a character in the dining-room of a Henley boarding-house! And indeed, the climactic showdown at the Tea Rooms is spiced -- verbal blow by verbal blow -- with the stuff of personalized animus. Against the insistence of Vicki and Thwaites that the war is 'complicated',¹⁸⁰ Miss

¹⁷⁷ Munton, 1989, 25.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Hamilton, 1982, 138.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

Roach gibes that it could only seem so to 'people with simple minds -- or people with distorted minds'.¹⁸¹ The 'two-against-one' nature of the argument riles and infuriates her to such an extent that Thwaites is able, recalling Mr. Eccles, to maddeningly dismiss her as being in 'quite a Pet'.¹⁸² He subsequently goes on to accuse Miss Roach of cradlesnatching the young RAF conscript whom she has so innocently befriended, and in consequence brings upon himself the Push which (possibly) precipitates his untimely death from peritonitis. A case of the 'political' being 'personal', rather than the other way around.

Following the death of Thwaites, and her final revenge over Vicki, Miss Roach abandons Thames Lockdon and undergoes purgation in the capital city. For there she goes to a pantomime to see perform another escapee from the Tea Rooms, Mr. Prest. The latter is depicted as a virtual reincarnation of George Harvey Bone. He is a boarding-house loner who reads Westerns or plays golf during the day, and drinks in the pubs of Thames Lockdon by night. Unlike Bone, though, he belongs to the sub-culture of the Theatre, and consequently makes periodic trips to London, where he can legitimately bask in the 'humour, humanity, spaciousness, and grandeur of that manner of life as opposed to the inhibited and petty provinciality of the riverside town'.¹⁸³

If Prest cuts rather a sentimental figure -- being a product of the middle-aged Hamilton's maudlin nostalgia for the theatrical life -- then the pantomime episode in which he takes centre stage is unbearably mawkish. Following a matinée performance (attended, in the main, by children), Miss Roach goes backstage to meet the old thespian, clad as a Wicked Uncle:

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 196.

¹⁸² Ibid., 197.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 79.

looking into Mr. Prest's excited eyes Miss Roach believed that she positively discerned tears of joy and triumph.... And if these were indeed tears, she fancied that they arose from something else besides mere joy and triumph. There was an extraordinary look of purification about the man -- a suggestion of reciprocal purification -- as if he had just at that moment with his humour purified the excited children, and they, all as one, had purified him.

And, observing the purification of Mr. Prest, Miss Roach herself felt purified.¹⁸⁴

Having been thus cleansed in this unguent bath of childlike innocence, Miss Enid Roach then accompanies Mr. Prest -- along with a (female) 'middle-aged fairy', and a 'plump, pretty chorus girl'¹⁸⁵ -- to a tea-and-coffee bar where the conversation simply drips with 'Dears' and 'Darlings', but is wholesomely cockles-warming nevertheless: 'If they could only see me at the Rosamund Tea Rooms now, thought Miss Roach, if they could only see me!'¹⁸⁶

The entire episode is redolent of that sentimental sequence in Hangover Square in which Bone is admitted to the theatrical party in Brighton. There is, of course, no misogyny in The Slaves of Solitude rendition of this Hamiltonian primal scene, but there is the same naive valorization of the practices of the 'real' Theatre as against everyday role-playing of the sort which Thwaites and Vicki have indulged in. With regard to this pantomime episode, Alan Munton is, I feel, insufficiently critical when he blandly asserts that, 'in the public gestures and collective language of the theatre, with its capacity for creating laughter and pleasure, the oppressive world of the Rosamund Tea Rooms is blown away'.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Munton, 1989, 53.

Purified, Miss Roach now feels empowered to 'square up to the war', which she realizes 'was not a war to be taken in a local-library way'.¹⁸⁸ However, this new attitude is partially embarrassed by the fact that the piquance of The Slaves of Solitude has largely resided in its precise evocation of the 'horror and despondence' of the Tea Rooms, its 'local-library' tonality: it is the detailed depiction of this listless cranny of the Home Front which makes the novel a Good Read. Indeed, its very form is not one which conduces to the rendition of those public events to which Miss Roach is enjoined to 'square up'. Writing of a period when the war still seemed to be interminable from the vantage point of Victory, Hamilton puts an omniscient end to the story of Enid Roach by invoking that which lies beyond the conspectus of his realist novel:

Then Miss Roach, knowing nothing of the future, knowing nothing of the February blitz shortly to descend on London, knowing nothing of flying bombs, knowing nothing of rockets, of Normandy, of Arnhem, of the Ardennes bulge, of Berlin, of the Atom Bomb, knowing nothing and caring very little, got into her bath and lingered in it a long while.¹⁸⁹

This authorial litany of these horrors to come almost serves to undo the declaration of war so recently announced on Miss Roach's behalf as she sinks into the luxury of her Claridges bath in a revalorization of the 'private': what could be further from Auschwitz (omitted from the list) than this?¹⁹⁰ The contrived nature of this 'tacked on' mode of direct authorial

¹⁸⁸ Hamilton, 1982, 237.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 241-2.

¹⁹⁰ One is here reminded that Hamilton himself remained somewhat ambivalent about the (end of the) war even after the involvement of the Soviet Union. In August 1944 we find him writing to Bruce Hamilton: 'I think this war is going to be over fairly soon, and curiously enough this makes it about ten times more difficult to bear It is a sort of nightmare within the nightmare'. (Cited in PAT, 416). No wonder the ending of The Slaves of Solitude seems so 'forced'!

discourse is compounded by the sentimental excess of the novel's final clause -- 'God help us, God help all of us, every one, all of us'.¹⁹¹ That Bruce Hamilton should maintain of this phrase that it 'must be one of the most startling -- and most moving -- ever to finish off a novel'¹⁹² is a reminder that his judgements on his brother's work are not always to be trusted.

Miss Roach's protégé-turned-tormentor, Vicki Kugelmann, is one of Hamilton's wicked women. His characterization of her enacts an appearance-to-essence movement appropriate for an orthodoxly Marxist novelist. She is introduced to the reader as rather 'arch, suggestive, and old-fashioned',¹⁹³ but at first betrays no substantial sign of villainy. Gradually, she is depicted as excessively mannered in social intercourse and revealed to be a manipulative coquette who winds both Thwaites and the Lieutenant around her little finger. The former is charmed by her stylized cigarette-smoking and raffish hair-tossing; the latter is treated to a range of flirtatious behaviour reminiscent of Nancy's flattery of Cole in To the Public Danger ("Oh -- good for you, big boy, good for you!" she enthuses at the pin-ball machine in the 'River Sun').¹⁹⁴

Essentially, Vicki Kugelmann is an actress manqué. Just as Netta Longdon is a 'street-walker without walking the streets',¹⁹⁵ so Vicki is endowed with all the foibles and faults which Hamilton seems to regard as typical of bad actresses, without herself treading the boards, or splaying herself on the casting-couch. Hamilton always stigmatizes such quotidian role-playing, but he is also highly skilled at rendering it, as is demonstrated in the following scene, in

¹⁹¹ Hamilton, 1982, 242

¹⁹² Ibid., 116.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 116.

¹⁹⁵ Hamilton, 1974, 104.

which Vicki is sitting back during a seemingly harmless verbal fencing-match with Miss Roach in the 'River Sun':

"And how do you know I was at the pictures?" asked Miss Roach.

"Ah. I know. I know everything," said Vicki, in the same mocking and suggestive way, and taking a puff at her cigarette she threw her head back and puffed the smoke out in a thin, premeditated stream, as though aiming at some precise target in the air. She then neatly tapped at her cigarette over an ash-tray -- doing this simply for the sake of neatly doing so, for there was as yet hardly any ash upon her cigarette.¹⁹⁶

Vicki is meant to be shown here as a vacuous poseur, but there is also discernible here an authorial relish in the depiction; Hamilton cannot resist, for example, the superfluous clause detailing the sheer artifice of Vicki's cigarette-tapping -- a description itself 'neatly' accomplished.

More so than her behaviour, though, it is the Kugelmann woman's language which attracts most vituperation in the text. Her discourse, we are told, 'bore that faintly grotesque stamp of 1925',¹⁹⁷ -- that is, that manner of speech in fashion when Hamilton was nineteen, and already a published novelist. Little by little, her characteristic phrases and inflexions begin to infect the already unbearable language of Mr. Thwaites. Drunk as a lord and lolling on Vicki's bed on Christmas Eve, he hails Miss Roach in terms clearly derived from the speech of the German woman: "'Enter Dame Roach! Dame Roach -- the English Miss! Miss Prim. Dame Roach -- the Prude the jealous Miss Roach'".¹⁹⁸

This linguistic infiltration of the insular Tea Rooms comes to irritate Miss Roach beyond measure. The acme of this invasion occurs on the evening to which Thwaites alludes above. Following a roistering excursion to a country club

¹⁹⁶ Hamilton, 1982, 52.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 176-7.

made one evening by Vicki, Miss Roach, Lieutenant Pike, and sundry others, the American proposes a threesome to the two women on a park bench. Having taken to her heels as a result of this improper request, Miss Roach broods abed:

Her words. Her expressions. Not her behaviour, so much as her vocabulary!
"Mr. Lieutenant!" ... *"Oh, boy!"* ... *"Uh-huh!"*... *"Wizard!"*
"Sporty!" *"Sporty play!"* *"Sporty shot!"* *"Wizard shot!"* ... *"Good for you, big boy!"* ... *"Hard lines!"* *"Hard lines, old fellow!"* *"Hard cheese!"*
"Skol!" *"Prosit!"* *"Santé!"* No, that was unfair. The filthy woman had a right, as a "foreigner", to Skol, Prosit and Salut. Or *had* she?
"Cheers, old chap!" *"Mud in your eye!"* *"Down the jolly old hatch!"* Oh, my God!¹⁹⁹

'My God', indeed! Why is Vicki's idiolect made to rankle so much? In part, I think, it constitutes a specific illustration of how, within any narrow and imposed circle of social intercourse, words habitually used by the same few interlocutors become inflected with an anxiogenic menace that they would not otherwise signify. Additionally, in this case, Vicki's habit of quotation subserves her coquettishness. More significant still, though, is her role as a German invader who estranges and ironizes Anglophone idioms. A parallel to this is to be found in Graham Greene's The Ministry of Fear, where the Austrian spy Rudolfe Hilfe manipulates tropes and phrases which bespeak 'Englishness' with a cultivated sense of archness evincing both a mastery of the language and a contempt for its mother-tongue speakers:

He must have known that everything was up including life, but he still retained the air of badinage, the dated colloquialisms which made his speech a light dance of inverted commas. "Admit", he said, "I have led you 'up the garden'. And now I am 'in the cart.'"²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 128.

²⁰⁰ Greene, 1975, 204 .

It is probable that both Vicki and Hilfe are intended to be satirized as stuck with an old-fashioned enunciation of English, but the other consequence is to ridicule the language itself as pock-marked by silly clichés of this ilk, and to poke fun at its native speakers.

As The Slaves of Solitude unfolds, the (linguistic) alterity of Vicki as an unEnglish personage foregrounds itself more and more as that which signifies her maleficence. The first intimation that she is not merely an affected coquette conspiring to steal the Lieutenant from Miss Roach but possibly a dangerous enemy alien, is given by her disparagement of the English as a race unable to 'make a proper cocktail'²⁰¹ -- an assertion which Miss Roach typically finds to be 'peculiarly ugly and suspect'.²⁰² As the hostility between the two women mounts, Vicki's German accent becomes more pronounced.²⁰³ Eventually, Miss Roach decides that -- contrary to her initial impressions -- the essential features of Vicki's personality can be readily mapped onto 'readily identifiable aspects of the German character'.²⁰⁴ Accordingly (with Hamilton heavily informing her thoughts), she is able to narrate her relationship with her ally-turned-foe by sub-textual analogy with the Soviet Union's relationship with Nazi Germany. The 'early Vicki' now appears, in retrospect, 'Ribbentroppish' in the 'ingratiating' nature of her manner.²⁰⁵ Once ensconced at the Tea Rooms she had allowed her 'Teutonic arrogance'²⁰⁶ to assert itself and became, slowly but surely, an avatar of German Nazism:

was not this woman one who would, geographically situated otherwise,

²⁰¹ Hamilton, 1982, 114

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid., 127, for example.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 132.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 133.

have been yelling orgiastically in stadiums, supporting S.S. men in their ambitions, presenting bouquets to her Fuehrer? My God -- couldn't you just see her!²⁰⁷

This arguably sexist portrayal of a febrile female sexuality as a maenadic fructifier of fascism is reminiscent of that of Netta, of course, but there is here also the added element of national chauvinism. Hamilton seems here to be suggesting that there is something genetic in the makeup of the 'German character' which conduces to Nazism. Why could not Vicki have been an English Mosleyite, and Miss Roach (say) a German-Jewish refugee? Any real-life Vicki Kugelmann is likely to have spent (at least some of) the war in an internment camp on the Isle of Man, or some such (along with German Communists and Jews, one might pertinently add). Furthermore, on several occasions, it is simply Vicki's non-Englishness which agitates Miss Roach: her attempts to speak French are reviled,²⁰⁸ and it is her playing of the 'cosmopolitan' card which goads the 'English Miss' into action 'beyond recall'²⁰⁹ at the dénouement of the piece. Consequently, I feel, Alan Munton is (once again) too kind when he comments that: 'By placing Vicki in the Rosamund Tea Rooms, Hamilton infiltrates into a characteristically English institution an example of the state of mind that the British were fighting.'²¹⁰ It seems rather a shame that The Slaves of Solitude should mobilize 'Englishness' so patly when, in the same year in which the novel is set, Hamilton had The Duke in Darkness published -- comparatively a much more internationalist piece of work. It would seem that the allegorical play was able to do what the realist novel was not -- since the latter is more enmeshed in the experiential stuff

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 145.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 197.

²¹⁰ Munton, 1989, 53

of the author's life, of the limited social world available to him.

The third point in the Tea Rooms triangle is the curiously 'inconsequent'²¹¹ figure of Lieutenant Dayton Pike -- who promises marriage to every woman he meets and drinks capaciously to stave off homesickness, boredom, and fear. Although the bearer of one of Hamilton's favourite pejorative adjectives, he is bereft of any active evil (rather like Jenny in Twenty Thousand Streets). Indeed, he is merely a manifestation of the most important of all the characters of The Slaves of Solitude -- the war itself.²¹² A penchant for the pathetic fallacy is evident throughout Hamilton's prose fiction -- one example, at random, is Edith the servant-girl's petulant alarm clock in Craven House²¹³ -- but nowhere is it so effectively exploited as in the personification of the War in The Slaves of Solitude. Claud Cockburn describes well how the war, in this novel, 'assumes a more active and malign role, something rather more than human, yet affecting human life like the devil in a morality play'.²¹⁴

On one level, the war is personified as an insidious 'petty pilferer', who was 'slowly, cleverly, month by month, week by week, day by day, emptying the shelves of shops'.²¹⁵ Like all other citizens on the Home Front, Miss Roach is subjected daily to 'the endless snubbing and nagging of war'²¹⁶ as

²¹¹ Hamilton, 1982, 35-6 (for a whole bunch of 'inconsequents').

²¹² Hamilton's own attitude to the GIs borne to England by the War is captured in the following half-resentful comment in a letter to Bruce written in May 1944; 'I am again in a train -- in a compartment with some American soldiers, who are screaming the place down. With all the good will in the world, I must say that these allies of ours are a dreadful nuisance socially -- they are absolutely everywhere -- like locusts -- and they are at last getting on everyone's nerves -- poor things.' (See PAT, 417).

²¹³ P. Hamilton, Craven House, 2nd edition, London, 1943, 29.

²¹⁴ In Hamilton, 1982, vi.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

ventriloquized through the agencies of governmental power. In the following extract, these admonitions are rendered via the combination of the patronizing discourses of the authorial voice and the voice of the Authorities as they impact on the subjected consciousness of Miss Roach:

She was not to waste bread, she was not to use unnecessary fuel, she was not to leave litter about, she was not to telephone otherwise than briefly, she was not to take the journey she was taking unless it was really necessary, she was not to keep the money she earned through taking such journeys where she could spend it, but to put it into savings, and to keep on putting it into savings. She was not even to talk carelessly, lest she endangered the lives of others.²¹⁷

This three-fold imbrication of these different registers creates a new voice -- that of the War in the guise of a scolding parent. The positioning of Miss Roach as the hapless, powerless, dependent of this custodian is emphasized by the back-shift in verb-tense characteristic of indirect discourse. Moreover, the repetition of the structure -- 'she was not' plus infinitive -- reflects an increasing sense of irritation. Furthermore, the imperative voice of these government notices receives an echo in the 'nasty, admonitory paper chase'²¹⁸ laid by the landlady of the Rosamund Tea Rooms, Mrs Payne (concerning the responsibility of each guest for their own black-out, and so on). Even the dawn is described as 'Bevin-conscripted'²¹⁹ and a difficult-to-dispel sense that 'the war would have no ending'²²⁰ is generally created. All of which takes us rather far from the obeisant Stalinist *nostra* concerning the Great Patriotic War against Fascism, and it is not, therefore, surprising that Hamilton's comrade and wartime drinking companion, Claud Cockburn, should be at

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 61.

²²⁰ Ibid., 119.

such great pains to assert that The Slaves of Solitude does not give voice to some kind of 'trivial pacifist propaganda'.²²¹ Yet it is surely in its honest and skilfully-wrought depiction of the miseries endured on the Home Front that the novel's achievement lies.

For example, The Slaves of Solitude is quite compelling in its representation of the strong centripetal pressures exerted by the war on the civilian population. It clearly demonstrates the process of the war's 'packing the public places tighter and tighter'²²² in the concrete form of the new presence of 'private' women such as Miss Roach in public houses. It underlines, further, how the war did more than just flush out these private individuals -- it also transformed them: 'The war seemed to have conjured into being from nowhere, magically, a huge population of its own.'²²³ Unfortunately, the presentation of this liberating phenomenon is rather warped by its snidely satirical mode -- as when the narrator speaks of

respectable middle-class girls and women, normally timid, home-going and home-staying, who had come to learn of the potency of this brief means of escape in the evening from war-thought and war-endeavour. Without any taste for drink, and originally half-scandalised by the notion of drinking in public or of drinking at all, these women would first imagine that the pleasure they obtained from this new habit lay in the company, the lights, the conversation, the novelty or humour of the experience: then gradually, they would perceive that there was something further than this, that the longer they stayed and the more they drank the more their pleasure in this pastime was augmented, reaching at moments, a point, almost of ecstasy. Finally ... the bolder spirits among them would ... [urge] their friends, with naive abandonment, to "have another", ... [speak] of having "had too much", finally of "being drunk" or of the danger of getting "drunk".²²⁴

²²¹ See *ibid.*, vii.

²²² *Ibid.*, 101.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 26.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47-8.

Here, a commendably sensitive portrayal of a particular caste of women is vitiated by such linguistic gestures as 'these women', the hyperbole of 'ecstasy', and such derogatory collocations as, 'bolder spirits', or 'naive abandonment'. Nevertheless, Hamilton's customary supercilious narrative voice -- dispensing sarcastic inverted commas *à la* Monday Morning and *tutti quanti* -- does manage to render a normally occluded aspect of social life of the Home Front.

More evocative still is the text's construction of the war as the seedy 'inventor and proprietor of some awful, low, cosmopolitan night-club',²²⁵ complete with its own sex-starved clientele. Novels like Henry Green's Caught thematize the war-induced increase in sexual activity in the dance-halls and pubs of the heaving metropolitan capital, where, as Andrew Sinclair puts it, 'social and sexual distinctions were swept away'.²²⁶ The Slaves of Solitude foregrounds the ubiquity of 'It' in a society gripped by a total war, by tracking it down in (of all places!) Henley-on-Thames. And so we find, on her way to a country club, Miss Roach musing distractedly:

No imaginable combination of peace-time circumstances could have brought about such a composition of characters as now filled the car and sat on each other's knees -- the ill-looking driver, the German woman, her lonely self, and the three Americans, of presumably different classes in civil life, and presumably going to their deaths when the second front began.... And if it wasn't Americans, it was Poles, or Norwegians, or Dutch, and if it wasn't sitting on each other's knees it was singing ... and whatever it was it was drinking and drinking and screaming and desperate.²²⁷

This is a fine description of the vortex-like manner in which the war stirred into its *mélange* a bewildering variety of

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

²²⁶ A. Sinclair, War Like a Wasp: the Lost Decade of the Forties, London, 1990, 75.

²²⁷ Hamilton, 1982, 119.

social types and nationalities, generating a sexualized culture of evanescence and pseudo-intimacy that was precisely 'desperate' (note the incongruity of the adjective, abruptly end-stopping a list of verbal nouns).

Miss Roach's very availability for nocturnal drunken jaunts such as this reminds should remind us of another aspect of the 'crisis of masculinity' engendered by the Great War and its aftermath, of which this thesis has spoken. For while Enid Roach may have the face of a 'farmer's wife',²²⁸ she does not have the farmer to go with it. While men who were too young to fight (and die senselessly) -- men like George Harvey Bone, for example -- tried guiltily to find some mode of manhood (Bone's is to cherish and crave the old, 'Bob Barton', days of post-public school male bonding),²²⁹ heterosexual women, like Miss Roach, tried to carve out independent lives without husbands, who were in decidedly short supply. Bone and Roach, like their creator, belong twice-over to an English Home Front generation, and the texts in which they 'exist' evince this condition.

Although a not inconsiderable battery of criticism has been levelled at Hangover Square and The Slaves of Solitude in the course of this chapter, the very real achievement represented by these novels ought not to be gainsaid. It should be borne in mind, for example, that at the time when Hangover Square was entering the bookshops, George Orwell was dyspeptically lamenting in Partisan Review that, 'nothing of consequence is being written, except in fragmentary form, diaries and short sketches, for instance'.²³⁰ If it does nothing else, Hamilton's first wartime novel gives the lie to that assertion. Moreover, the novel was -- by virtue of its huge commercial success -- a veritable beacon of radicalism in a contemporary sea of

²²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²²⁹ Hamilton, 1974, 56.

²³⁰ G. Orwell (writing in Partisan Review), cited in Hewison, 1977, 58

reactionary popular fiction, described thus by Andrew Sinclair:

One note ran through all these works. While before the war, they had a slant to the left, now they were right-wing ... The scapegoats of popular wartime literature were the reds, the intellectuals and the Jews; the heroes were the cockneys, usually taxi-drivers or char ladies, fighter pilots and war cripples.²³¹

Furthermore, both Hangover Square and The Slaves of Solitude articulate a subtle anti-fascism discordant with the dominant perception of the Second World War purveyed in post-war popular fiction. Ken Worpole has demonstrated how 'a popular cultural history of the war was ... constructed in popular literature during the Cold War'²³² which tended to depoliticize the conflict. As exceptions to this phenomenon he cites Alexander Baron's From the City, From the Plough (1948), Dan Billany's The Trap (1950), and Stuart Hood's Pebbles from My Skull (1963). To this catalogue one would wish to add at least Hamilton's The Slaves of Solitude, described as 'the outstanding novel of non-combatant experience'²³³ by Alan Munton in his recent survey of English fiction of the Second World War. One feels that the Home Front created a fraught socio-historical force-field within which Hamilton's remarkable talent for the minute dissection and observation of the sometimes menacing culture of affectation characteristic of insular middle-class discourse could flourish. Moreover, the innovative shifts in perspective and the intermittent retrospective modes of narration evident in both Hangover Square and The Slaves of Solitude are perhaps attributable to the psychology of the total war -- involving, as it does, disruptive elements which compel

²³¹ Sinclair, 1989, 103.

²³² K. Worpole, Dockers and Detectives, London, 1983, 52.

²³³ Munton, 1989, 54.

careful reflection and long, dull periods in which to do that reflecting. Some sense of the content of Hamilton's own recollection of the period which informs his two wartime novels can be gleaned from a letter to his brother written soon after VE Day:

The knowledge that one might be exterminated or burned alive at any given moment when one was in London had an indescribably grey and hideous effect upon the mind, though only very rarely was the sensation one of acute fear.²³⁴

As I write, other human beings, in Baghdad and Tel Aviv, are being beset by similar anxieties and one should not underestimate the difficulties posed by such conditions to creative and coherent intellectual endeavour.

In his compendiously anecdotal account of literary life in 'Fitzrovia' in the 1940s, War Like a Wasp, Sinclair underscores how

Victory in May 1945 was followed by the revelation of the atrocities in the death camps of Belsen and Dachau. The photographs and newsreels of the dead and dying survivors of the Nazi extermination policy appeared to demonstrate the abiding evil in Man, who now applied reason to massacre.²³⁵

Patrick Hamilton was one novelist among many who sought to render and criticize this unvizarded 'evil' in his post-war fiction. However, whereas other writers tried to thematize human evil in traditionally Christian terms, as something inherent in 'Man' and unrestrainable without God (one thinks immediately of William Golding's Lord of the Flies, for instance), Hamilton attempted to conjoin his investigation with his perennial dissection of middle-class Southern England between the wars. The figure he elected as the avatar of English fascistic evil was the notorious murderer

²³⁴ Cited in PAT, 418.

²³⁵ Sinclair, 1989, 180.

and confidence trickster, Neville Heath -- whom Sinclair describes as a man who 'seemed to represent the suppressed violence of the peace'.²³⁶ Heath was to be transmuted into the figure of Ernest Ralph Gorse, and it is to the third novel in Hamilton's unfinished 'Gorse' tetralogy that I shall first turn in my next, and final, chapter.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

Chapter Ten

Confessions of an English Bourgeois Communist

When one sees the slavish or boastful rubbish that is written about Stalin, the Red Army, etc., by fairly intelligent and sensitive people, one realizes that this is only possible because some kind of dislocation has taken place Transferred nationalism, like the use of scapegoats, is a way of attaining salvation without altering one's conduct.

George Orwell, 'Notes on Nationalism' (1945), in Decline and Fall of the English Murder and other Essays, London, 1965, 164.

The mind, deprived of faith, sinks back exhausted upon the well-sprung sophisms of the past.

E. P. Thompson, 'Outside the Whale' (1960), in The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays, London, 1978, 164.

Published in 1955, Unknown Assailant was intended to be the penultimate novel in the Gorse series, but it turned out to be the last. Alcohol had, by this point in Hamilton's career, all but destroyed his literary talent. The novel was the worst he had ever written and was issued with reluctance by Michael Sadleir who told Hamilton to his face that he 'disliked it a good deal'.¹ There was at least one other reason for the premature termination of the series, though, and it is given as follows by John Russell Taylor:

[Claud Cockburn] told me of Hamilton himself that after the accident he was so self-conscious about his face that he found in the main he could

¹ PAT, 529. The method of composition probably compounded the flaws of Unknown Assailant: according to Bruce Hamilton, the draft was dictated to a typist, 'with disastrous results' [Ibid., 552].

only make love with prostitutes, since they were paid not to worry about it, and in any case he could freely indulge with them his penchant for bondage (of them, by him) and vaguely sado-masochistic games Cockburn believed that he had been discouraged from continuing the Gorse saga to its prefigured conclusion by the alarm of his wife and family that in it he was letting too many personal cats out of the bag.²

An exemplary escaping feline can be seen scampering across the knowledgeably detailed description of a typical West End prostitute's apartment in Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse.³ In any case, the impulse to confess can be felt in the rendition of the sexual throughout Hamilton's work: *vide* The Midnight Bell's transmutation of Hamilton's affair with Lily Connolly, or Hangover Square's reworking of his pursuit of Geraldine Fitzgerald.

An interesting theoretical light can be shed on this novelistic confessionalization by an aspect of Jeremy Tambling's recent book, Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject (1990). Particularly illuminating is Tambling's suggestion (regarding the fairly conventional connection between Puritan spiritual autobiography and the 'rise of the novel') that the 'linkup of the private, bourgeois commodification, the demand to write and to confess produces a discourse saturated in the sexualizing of all experience':⁴ and so, 'the sexual is discursively produced as that which needs to be confessed'.⁵ But confessed in a particular, 'literary', manner -- as with (Tambling's example) Samuel Pepys' confession to his diary that he had been perusing a pornographic book.⁶ Such self-consciously literary acts of confession foreground, as Tambling puts it,

² J. R. Taylor, letter to N. Jones, 16 March 1990.

³ P. Hamilton, Mr Stimpson and Mr. Gorse (1953), London, 1987, 174.

⁴ J. Tambling, Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject, Manchester, 1990, 99-100.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 96-7.

the Protestant⁷ novelistic 'understanding that guilt should not be faced but given a smooth appearance'.⁸ This insight strikes a particular chord when one reads the following passage from Unknown Assailant:

Gorse, though normally rather sexless, had bouts of great physical passion, and when these came upon him he was mostly stimulated by what is (on the whole foolishly) known as a perversion.

He liked to tie women up in order to get the impression that they were at his mercy, and he also liked to be tied up by women and to feel that he was at theirs.

It is foolish to call this a perversion because, as every serious student of the general psychology of sex (who would be supported by any prostitute, or keeper or frequenter of brothels) knows, it is merely a rather emphasized form of the sadistic or masochistic element underlying every physical relationship between man and woman, or, if it comes to that, man and man, or woman and woman.

Gorse was, therefore, not to be blamed simply because of this so-called perversion. What made it objectionable in Gorse was the highly distasteful way in which he indulged in it. But then Gorse exhibited bad taste in almost everything he did.⁹

The note of special pleading which rings throughout this confessional disquisition on the dailiness of sexual bondage (true though it may be) is one that reverberates in other texts written by Hamilton in the late 1950s and early 1960s: namely, his unfinished final novel, 'The Happy Hunting Grounds' (c.1961), a testamentary letter to Bruce Hamilton (written in the fateful year of 1956), and two drafts of an autobiographical piece modelled on George Gissing's The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, entitled 'Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man' (1959).

Unknown Assailant sees Ernest Ralph Gorse (now aged thirty, in 1933) defraud a simple-minded barmaid, Ivy Barton,

⁷ Patrick Hamilton was, it will be recalled from chapter four, deliberately named after one of Scottish Protestantism's first martyrs.

⁸ Tambling, 1990, 97.

⁹ P. Hamilton, Unknown Assailant, London, 1955, 130-1.

and her execrable father, by inveigling them into a spot of financial speculation in the theatre -- a gambit described as one that 'Gorse had used a great deal in his life'.¹⁰ As should be obvious by now, Gorse's parasitism on the Theatre places him at the absolute bottom of the Hamiltonian moral scheme, which sets considerable sentimental store on the profession of acting (as opposed to the practice of real-life deceit). And indeed there occurs in Unknown Assailant an exponential leap in mawkishness which finds one outlet in the characterization of Mr. Kayne, the at once 'naive and astute'¹¹ Northern businessman who collaborates with Gorse because he is 'ravished by the charms of the theatre',¹² and in any case has money enough to indulge himself in the 'dream-land'¹³ which the West End is to him. However, the chief vessel for sentimentality in this book is young Stan Bullitt, the telegram boy who rescues Ivy after she is abandoned by Gorse. The portrait of this orphaned paragon of virtue is crowned with the news that he is fated to die in the Second World War:

Whom the gods love, it is said, die young. And Stan was peculiarly fitted to do this -- to die in all the glory of his boisterousness, cleverness and superb physical health. Stan, if he had lived, would probably never have been able to adjust to the harsh exigencies of maturity, and, later, of middle and old age. And, if only doing what he did for Ivy, if only enabling her to escape permanently from her father, he had not died in vain.¹⁴

One need not be indifferent to the poignancy of Hamilton's displaced lament for his own, immensely successful, youth to demur at his brother's ludicrous description of Stan Bullitt as 'one of his finer creations'.¹⁵

¹⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹¹ Ibid., 73.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 178.

If the depiction of the woman rescued by the redoubtable Bullitt is intended to re-enact Ella Dawson, then her characterization is a failure. Ivy Barøn is an extreme version of Hamilton's asexually good women characters, 'simple-minded, and therefore [sic] lovable'.¹⁶ She is shown to be, in essence, an imbecile and effectively generates readerly sympathy for Gorse, who demonstrates remarkable restraint in merely tying her up.

The book is flawed in other respects too. It is repetitious -- Mr. Barton is (snobbishly) described as like 'a gardener at a wedding' on three separate occasions¹⁷ -- and it contains extracts from books purportedly about Gorse which embody unknowable information (since his victims never report him to the police).¹⁸ However, the novel does contain such sententiously insightful features as the comparison drawn between Mr. Barton's unwelcome pub-table anecdotes about his 'involvement' in the theatre, and the public narration of vivid dreams in the mistaken belief that such dreams 'will also be vivid to other people'.¹⁹ Moreover, the TLS reviewer at least discerned some merit in the book, vaunting its 'gaminess' as reminiscent of 'the novels written by Henry James in the 1890s'.²⁰

The manuscript beginning of Hamilton's last stab at prose fiction, entitled 'The Happy Hunting Grounds', betrays a talent in terminal state of disintegration. Bruce Hamilton describes reading this fragment as 'a melancholy experience',²¹ and there is little point in dwelling too much on it here. The title derives from the suicide pact proposed by one of the two main

¹⁵ B. Hamilton, The Light Went Out, London, 1972, 138.

¹⁶ Hamilton, 1955, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31, 74, and 92.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-28, for example.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁰ The Times Literary Supplement, 16 December 1955, 757.

²¹ B. Hamilton, 1972, 185.

characters, Roderick Chance, to the other, Elizabeth Horner, as they lie in bed together in a Bayswater hotel. The male partner of this couple is an oddly sinister character who, for example, menacingly insists that Elizabeth be silent each time they approach their parting spot after a date.²² Interestingly, Roderick is endowed with almost all of Hamilton's own passions: his interest in rhyming slang,²³ Romantic poetry,²⁴ Dickens,²⁵ Marx,²⁶ and chess.²⁷ Perhaps this character was intended to be the ultimate vehicle for the confessional exorcism of the author's most ignoble fantasies.

The prospective victim of these fantasies, the female half of this ill-starred couple, is even more of a cretin than Ivy Barton. A servant in a house in (of all places) Hamilton Terrace in St. John's Wood, Elizabeth Horner is utterly nescient and has to have everything explained to her in laborious detail. In a sense, she is the final index of Hamilton's tendency to be unable to depict women as complex, sexually-alive human beings engaged in forms of wage-labour other than those of domestic service, prostitution, or bartending. It is rather difficult to imagine a male Marxist novelist of today getting away with Hamilton's variously sexist representations of women. Yet Marxist he was, and it is to a discussion of his political state of mind in the crucial year of 1956 that I shall now turn.

Kruschev's partial denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956

²² P. Hamilton, 'The Happy Hunting Grounds', MS [in AHA], 1961(?), 81.

²³ Ibid., 14. [See B. Hamilton, 1972, 18 for attestation of Hamilton's interest in this subject].

²⁴ Ibid., 16.

²⁵ Ibid., 20.

²⁶ Ibid., 53-5.

²⁷ Ibid., 74-8.

reduced Hamilton to a state of 'torment and uncertainty',²⁸ according to his brother. Unlike certain other bourgeois Leftists of the 1930s, Hamilton had rigorously assimilated classical Marxism, and had also come to 'love' Comrade Stalin.²⁹ Profoundly depressed and drinking heavily, he was referred by John Yerbury Dent (whose 'disease' theory of alcoholism he enthusiastically accepted)³⁰ to the Woodside Hospital psychiatric department at Harrow-on-the-Hill for ECT treatment.³¹ At length, this worked (temporarily), and in its aftermath Hamilton wrote a fifty-page letter to his brother in which (among other things) he set forth his then current political thinking. He informed Bruce that, though not abandoning his 'Marxist convictions',³² he had decided to 'vote Tory'³³ at the next election. Significantly, he reached for his cricket bat in order to provide a suitable analogy by way of justification: 'the game being played is no longer

²⁸ B. Hamilton, 1972, 156.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ In a letter to his brother Hamilton referred to Dent's hearty book, Anxiety and its Treatment -- With Special Reference to Alcoholism (second edition, Belfast, 1947), as 'a magnificent work. How a man, who is himself a normal drinker, could understand the emotions and habits of the abnormal one as well as he does absolutely astonishes me'. [PAT, 551]. Dent's approach was unremmitingly chemical and decidedly psychoanalytic: 'Psychologists have ceased to be concerned with the investigation of the anatomy and physiology of the brain and have irresponsibly postulated not only the soul and will, but have invented every kind of attribute for them -- complexes, fixations, repressions, libidos. Let us cut out all this.' [Dent, 1947, 14-15]. Accordingly, he recommended a course of apomorphine tablets and aversion therapy for the treatment of alcoholism. It did not work for Hamilton.

³¹ B. Hamilton, 1972, 160-1. [Bruce Hamilton locates this hospital at Muswell Hill; I have been guided here by the pencilled correction made in the hand of Hamilton's first wife, Lois Martin, in the Estate's copy of the biography.]

³² P. Hamilton, cited in B. Hamilton, PAT, 609. [The letter (in AHA) is dated 30 January 1957 and addressed from Kettle Hill, Blakeney, Norfolk.]

³³ Ibid.

Cricket, but, say, Lacrosse ... in this atomic, stratospheric, what-have-you era!³⁴ He now considered that 'the dream ... of the brotherhood of man' had 'become meaningless',³⁵ and that, therefore, he was justified in 'selfishly pursuing [his own] material and cultural interests',³⁶ which were identical with those of his 'own nation'³⁷ -- 'best served by the Tory Party'.³⁸ In other words, internationalism was off the agenda whilst nationalism was back on (and with a vengeance). Not that Hamilton had ever been very cosmopolitan: as early as May 1934 we can find him writing (of a disastrous holiday in Greece): 'I think that the real value of holidays of this nature must lie in the fact that they make you (like nothing else) content with your own land and your own people and your own way of living.'³⁹ No, he remained a bourgeois Englishman throughout his career: the 1950s merely witnessed an exacerbation of this unfortunate condition.

An especially virulent form taken by this amplified nationalism was a strident anti-Americanism: the Tories, he wrote, 'retain a streak of "patriotism" which has begun at last to show real signs of taking a stand against American domination'.⁴⁰ Even this pales into insignificance, however, when set alongside the disgraceful manner in which he expresses his support for the Conservative government over the Suez crisis:

I believe (as Marxists must) in the sacred right of majorities, and now that there is absolutely no thought anywhere of international revolution and consequent world-union, I do not see why pip-squeak, corrupt little

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, 'Le Petit Palais', Athens, May 1934 [AHA].

⁴⁰ Cited in PAT, 610.

nationalist messes should be permitted to be in a position absolutely to hamstring (and this is really happening over the Suez business) vast organisations and populations such as those of Great Britain and France. (This, surely, is the attitude Russia took when she had no nonsense with "poor little Finland".)⁴¹

A clearer example of vicarious and repugnant Big Power chauvinism it would be hard to find.

Subtending this crustily atavistic English nationalism is that which Hamilton avows as a throughgoing

contempt for ... the British Working Class, which has proved itself despicably incapable of what might have been its historic task, and, instead of the Red Flag, has hoisted a stout and defiant Television Mast against the evils of capitalist exploitation.⁴²

Previously, Hamilton had reserved this kind of haughty derision for the reformism of the Labour Party, for which he had long nurtured a 'pathological hatred'.⁴³ Revealed in these comments is the (fairly typical) way in which an essentially bourgeois disdain for working-class people (and their putatively debased culture) can permeate the middle-class socialist's irritation with the 'proles' for not being revolutionary enough. It must be stressed that Hamilton is not expressing a simple volte-face in these dyspeptic groublings. In 1960, for example, we still find him writing of the 'wonderful revolutionary parts'⁴⁴ played in the October Revolution by both Trotsky and Stalin [sic]. He thus remained a 'Marxist', albeit after his own fashion,

Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that Hamilton was not wildly out of step with the policy of the CPGB in the 1950s. John Coombes has written of the pathetic 'naive pride

⁴¹ Ibid., 611.

⁴² Ibid., 609.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, Sheringham, Norfolk, March-April 1960 [in AHA].

in imagined acceptability'⁴⁵ demonstrated by the European Communist Parties in the epoch of the Popular Front. 'Progressive' national lineages were everywhere fabricated and vaunted by Communists eager to wrest the mantle of the Nation from the bourgeoisie. In Britain in the 1950s this inherited problematic dove-tailed with Cold War anti-Americanism to produce an hysterical nationalist discourse. The Communist journal Arena (which was the custodian of the Left Review/Our Time tradition) published a special issue entitled The USA Threat to British Culture in the middle of 1951. This was a collection of papers delivered at a conference held under the auspices of the National Cultural Committee of the CPGB. In the keynote address, Sam Aaranovitch asserted that the 'American trusts aim to destroy ... the material independence of all peoples, British as well as Soviet',⁴⁶ and raised the spectre of 'a systematic, well-organized and financed attempt to impose coca-colonization on the British people'.⁴⁷ This demonization of American mass culture was characteristically undialectical. For what the English patriots among the CP's literary intelligentsia failed to register about the US-led post-war mediatization of the globe was that, as Iain Chambers puts it, 'other traces, accents and dialects would find voice and the opportunity to transmit it across [a] shared network'.⁴⁸ Hence such phenomena as the working-class Glaswegian tradition of valorizing the products of American popular culture -- made manifest in, for example, the television drama of John Byrne (Tutti Frutti being the *locus classicus*).

⁴⁵ J. E. Coombes, Writing from the Left: Socialism, Liberalism and the Popular Front, London, 1989, 112.

⁴⁶ S. Aaranovitch, 'The American Threat to British Culture', in Arena, vol. 2, no. 7, April-May 1951, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁸ I. Chambers, Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity, London and New York, 1990, 42.

Chambers is right, I think, to insist that:

In Britain by the 1950s, "America" and all it seemingly stood for -- consumerism, modernism, youth, the "new", the refusal of tradition -- could, and did, represent a more significant challenge to a native cultural hegemony than more local forms of opposition based on more traditional affiliations.⁴⁹

Vexed as he was by what he symptomatically referred to as 'the Teddy Boy menace',⁵⁰ Patrick Hamilton is unlikely to have concurred with this judgement.

Early in 1959 he drafted the beginnings of two versions of an autobiographical work entitled 'Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man' in which, among other things, he endeavoured to trace the roots of his alcoholism. The drafts are quite similar, but the fact that he should have commenced the project anew and then fail to complete it bespeaks the difficulties he experienced in squaring up to this most painful of subjects. The remembering voice in (the first version of) the 'Memoirs' homes in on a recollected childhood tendency towards a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder, construed as a 'malady of doubt' exacerbated by a fear of the dark and loneliness'.⁵¹ Clearly this invocation of childhood -- unlike that of George Harvey Bone in Hangover Square -- does not signify a becalming oasis of prelapsarian stability; elsewhere, Hamilton significantly stigmatizes the clamour of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁰ P. Hamilton, letter to B. Hamilton, Sheringham, 5 August 1959 [in AHA].

⁵¹ P. Hamilton, 'Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man' (version one), MS, undated but probably February 1959, 24-5 [in AHA]. Interestingly, there is some medical evidence of a greater incidence of obsessive-compulsive disorder among alcoholics: see, J. L. Eisen, and S. A. Ramussen, 'Coexisting Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Alcoholism', Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, vol. 50, no. 3, March 1989, 96-8. I am grateful to Dr. T. M. Rivinius of Butler Hospital, Providence, Rhode Island for drawing my attention to this article.

children at play as 'as ugly and unhappy as that made by adults at a cocktail party'.⁵² In other parts of the 'Memoirs', he narrates a farrago of anecdotes against his domineering father,⁵³ and describes his own ridiculous but tenacious childhood image of God.⁵⁴ Implicated thereby is a symptomatic lacuna programmed into his psychological formation -- a gap to be filled with alcohol, ink, and the liquid cement of Stalinism.

The 'Memoirs' also evidence a thoroughly bourgeois and masculinist conception of authorhood unscathed by a quarter-century of 'Marxism':

my thoughts recently have been dwelling a good deal upon the matter of noise and quietude in literature -- and I have been thinking of writers as I would of men talking in a public room -- particularly a room in a *comfortable man's club in London*. [My emphasis].⁵⁵

To be fair, Hamilton then proceeds to denounce Conrad as 'a snob'⁵⁶ (as against Dickens and Hardy, who, in his view, 'never consider themselves to be above the common people'),⁵⁷ and to commend the 'unyielding radicalism and feminism'⁵⁸ of Meredith. However, the original sense of an exclusive and elitist conception of the role of the writer remains, exemplifying one consequence of the failure of Popular Frontist cultural politics to transcend (as John Coombes puts it) 'the divided categories of "intellectual" and

⁵² P. Hamilton, 'Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man', (version two), MS, 2 February 1959, 44 [in AHA].

⁵³ Ibid., 29-36. These stories relate Bernard Hamilton's pretensions to an aristocratic Scottish genealogy, his habit of 'conducting' thunderstorms, and his gift to Mussolini of a copy of his appallingly bad historical novel about Danton, The Giant [London, 1926].

⁵⁴ Ibid., 46-7.

⁵⁵ Hamilton, 1959 (version one), 1.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 5.

"worker".⁵⁹

The implicitly authoritarian nature of this conception of authorship is elucidated and amplified in the ensuing remarks Hamilton makes in praise of Victor Hugo:

I adore the way he writes his stories in the form of essays -- in "Les Misérables" one might say lectures -- there is a certain air of sternness -- as if any boy (reader) were to answer him back or talk in class he would at once be sent out of the room!⁶⁰

Thomas Docherty, in his book Reading (Absent) Character (1983), argues convincingly that the realist novel tradition is one which is monologically dominated by the the godlike figure of the Author and is affiliated to a specifically Protestant, Cartesian, discursive formation.⁶¹ Against the monologiccity of classic realism he opposes a more democratic, communal fictional mode:

The Protestant Realist model for fiction posits an anterior original and unified source of meaning, and that meaning is the meaning of an individual. The alternative to this, as seen in the more catholic approach and in the Jewish mosaic model, posits a future-oriented creation of meaning, in a more democratic inter-subjective mode, among the equal voices of writer, reader, and character.⁶²

The discussion of Hamilton's prose fiction contained in this thesis should have made clear his allegiance to the tradition characterized as 'Protestant' by Docherty. Moreover, the essentialist conception of human evil to which the realist mode arguably conduces is one his work evinces again and again. As early as the 1520s, Patrick Hamilton was asseverating that: "If thou do evil, it is a sure argument that

⁵⁹ Coombes, 1989, 81.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, cited in B. Hamilton, PAT, 480.

⁶¹ T. Docherty, Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction, Oxford, 1983, 247-252.

⁶² Ibid., 269.

thou art evil and wantest faith; for a good tree beareth good fruit, and an evil tree evil fruit."⁶³

In his recently-published valorization of British socialist fiction of the 1930s, entitled Red Letter Days, Andy Croft tends to elide the sort of questions implicated by the ideology of realist forms. He tends to assume that what he calls 'the value of a good read'⁶⁴ is unproblematically given, and to ignore the recuperative dangers which await any conventionally realist novel at the hands of an arm-chaired, unpoliticized reader. For the very problem with 'a way of writing that constitute[s] a sustained yet implicit condemnation of social injustice'⁶⁵ is that its very implicitness renders it defusable and congenial to escapism. This is not to deny absolutely the value of escapist pleasure, nor, moreover, to gainsay the role that radical realist fiction can play in consoling those who desire an egalitarian and consistently democratic society.⁶⁶ This is where some of the work of Patrick Hamilton can come in, and Croft is surely right to vaunt, in particular, Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky⁶⁷ and Impromptu in Moribundia.⁶⁸ Moreover, in general, Red Letter Days is a useful contribution to the important task of re-reading the literary history of the 1930s in terms other than those dictated by the prevailing orthodoxy.

In his introduction to the 1986 reprint of Rex Warner's The

⁶³ P. Hamilton, cited in, P. Lorimer, Patrick Hamilton: the First Preacher and Martyr of the Scottish Reformation, Edinburgh, 1856, 116.

⁶⁴ A. Croft, Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s, London, 1990, 9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁶⁶ For a stimulating analysis of the inimicality of the novel form to any emancipatory politics, see L.J. Davis, Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction, New York and London, 1987, esp., 228-9 and 232. Davis tends, however, to underappreciate the importance of the moment of consolation, I think.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 144-7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 293-5.

Professor, Arnold Rattenbury extols Impromptu as a satire which 'pigmyfies Orwell'.⁶⁹ Of all the Hamilton novels currently out of print, it is that one which deserves, in my view, to be re-issued. Amid the clamour of the various criticisms levelled in this thesis at Hamilton's sexism, monologism, Stalinism, and so on, the substantial achievement of his work ought not to be drowned out. In particular, I think, the novels The Plains of Cement, Impromptu, Hangover Square (read against the grain, where necessary), The Slaves of Solitude, and Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse, together with the plays Gaslight, To the Public Danger, and (above all the drama) The Duke in Darkness have much to contribute to the literary culture of the (broadly-defined) Left. And certainly, the fact that this thesis is the first book-length critical study of the writings of Patrick Hamilton is little short of a scandal.

⁶⁹ A. Rattenbury, Introduction to R. Warner, The Professor (1938), London, 1986, 11.

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